



April 15, 2020

Substance Use Prevention

How parents and caregivers can support children and youth during the COVID-19 response

Due to all the sudden changes from the COVID-19 response, children and youth may feel stressed, anxious, frustrated, bored, depressed, isolated or lonely. Healthy coping options may no longer be available, which can lead to an increase in drug and alcohol use. Parents and caregivers can provide much-needed support to help to navigate this stressful time and restore or replace healthy coping skills.

Recognizing signs of increased substance use

Some common signs include:

- Odor on clothes
- Frequent use of eye drops
- Loss of interest
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Mood swings
- Reports or observation of being unusually tired
- Reports or observation of being energetic
- Change in weight
- Paranoid symptoms
- Reduced memory
- Change in appetite
- Reduced attention span
- Increased headaches

Share your observations in a compassionate and honest way. It can open up a dialogue about a student's experience.

Helpful tips when talking to children and youth about substance use

Create a non-judgmental space.

It is important to lead with curiosity instead of judgment so there can be a safe way to disclose. Acknowledge that this is a stressful time for everyone.

Identify current stressors and how it affects the person.

Use open-ended questions. For example:

- An open-ended question: "How has it been at home for you so far?"
- A closed question: "Are you stressed?"

Affirm healthy coping skills and strengths.

- [Five key ways to support mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak and beyond](#)
- [Just for Teens: A Personal Plan for Managing Stress](#) from American Academy of Pediatrics

If you suspect drug or alcohol use, address it early and be clear about expectations.

Use straightforward and honest communication when you ask about substance use. For example:

- I am concerned because I saw an empty liquor bottle in your room. I want to talk about how you are coping with having to stay home and if you are drinking.
- I've noticed a change in your behavior recently. You can't remember the conversations we had yesterday. You seem to be struggling to pay attention. I have also smelled marijuana on your clothes. I want to have an open conversation about your marijuana use.

Knowing the facts about drug and alcohol use

When talking with children and youth about alcohol and drugs, sharing facts can be a powerful tool. It is worthwhile to highlight the link between substance use and increased mental health symptoms such as depression and anxiety. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), youth who use substances, especially alcohol, have an increased risk for suicide as well as other high-risk behaviors.

There is ample research on the impact of different substances on the developing brain as well as unique signs and symptoms. Learning about the most commonly used drugs among teens in the United States (alcohol, marijuana, vaping products such as e-cigarettes, cigarettes and flavored cigars) can help inform a conversation with a student.

Resources to learn more:

- [Preventing Underage Marijuana and Vaping Use:](#) Parents' guide to talk with children
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\) for Teens:](#) Information for teens, teachers and parents about drug use
- [Partnership for Drug-Free Kids:](#) Support for parents, caregivers and young adults through education and resource sharing
- [Your Room:](#) Information about alcohol and drugs, their effects, withdrawal symptoms and how to get help.
- [Talk. They Hear You:](#) SAMHSA'S underage drinking prevention campaign helps parents and caregivers start talking to their children early about the dangers of alcohol.
- [What is Substance Abuse Treatment:](#) For family members of people living with substance use disorders

Oregon resources:

- [Oregon Substance Use and Disorders Services Directory](#): Resource guide to finding the right substance use disorder treatment services
- [Oregon Recovery High Schools](#): A safe, sober and supportive school environment for youth in recovery.
- [Youth ERA](#): Statewide youth peer support organization that currently provides virtual drop-in centers, virtual one-on-one meetings, virtual group meetups and peer support on [Twitch](#).
- [Lines for Life](#): A regional non-profit dedicated to preventing substance abuse and suicide.
 - 24/7 free, confidential and anonymous suicide lifeline: 800-273-8255
 - Alcohol and drug helpline: 800-923-4357
- [Youth Line](#): (a service of Lines for Life): A teen-to-teen crisis and helpline.
 - Call: 877-968-8491
 - Text: teen2teen to 839863

National resources:

- [SAMHSA's National Helpline](#): Free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental or substance use disorders.
 - Call: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
- [4D Recovery](#): Recovery community organization for young people age 18 to 35 that provides a range of recovery support services that are sensitive to race, culture and gender identity.
- [The Recovery Village](#): Provides comprehensive treatment services for substance abuse and co-occurring mental health disorders across the country.

Accessibility: Everyone has a right to know about and use Oregon Health Authority (OHA) programs and services. OHA provides free help. Some examples of the free help OHA can provide are sign language and spoken language interpreters, written materials in other languages, Braille, large print, audio and other formats. If you need help or have questions, please contact Mavel Morales at 1-844-882-7889, 711 TTY, OHA.ADAModifications@dhsoha.state.or.us.