

When it comes to substance use, it's never too early to start talking with young people about preventing high-risk choices. **ANY** use is high risk for youth because of important brain development. Most young people are **not** using, which means that not everyone is doing it, even if it seems that way to the young person in your life.

However, even if a young person you care about is using, substance use is not a moral failing. Substance use and addiction can be symptoms of a larger issue (i.e. – problems at home or school, physical and/or sexual abuse, physical or mental illness, etc.). Heavy use despite a desire to stop could indicate an addiction, which is a disease. Having a family history of addiction can influence an individual's biological risk for developing addiction, but ultimately, an individual's choices play a crucial role in preventing addiction.

As a mentor—you play a crucial role in helping youth prevent substance use and make low-risk choices! The tips below can be used to help you identify problems, have conversations, and get help for the young people in your life.

How to have a conversation to help prevent alcohol and other drug use:

- State and show you don't approve of underage alcohol and other drug use
- State and show you care about their happiness and well-being
- State and show you are a good source of information about alcohol and other drugs
- State and show you are paying attention and will notice and care if your mentee drinks and/or uses drugs
- Discuss and build skills and strategies to avoid underage alcohol and drug use—they have heard "Just say No"
- Practice role playing—practice HOW they could say "No" in a real-life situation
- Use information—not threats or instilling fear—to teach your youth about why using substances is high-risk

*You don't have to get everything across in one talk
Many small talks are better—Keep it low key*

Signs of substance use – Look for changes in...

- Schoolwork and grades
- Interest in hobbies or other activities
- Friends, groups, or behavior
- Sleep habits, health, or hygiene issues
- Personal appearance
- Relationships with family or friends
- Levels of openness or honesty

These are SIGNS of potential substance use, but could also be signs of other potential issues happening in the young person's life. If you notice something—say something!

What to do if you think your mentee may be using alcohol and other drugs:

- A strong relationship and building rapport are key for these conversations
- Meet youth where they are—don't overreact to what they are telling you
- Avoid power struggles—it is an attempt to distract from the issue
- Be supportive—but don't justify or judge their behavior
- Use their words—avoid using the word “addiction”
- Focus on the problematic behavior or core issue
- Engage youth with empathy, but be brief—the focus is on them
- Ask open-ended questions:
 - What are your goals?
 - How will you achieve them?
 - How will using alcohol and other drugs help you to reach your goals?
 - Will using alcohol and other drugs prevent you from reaching your goals?
- Focus on their positive skills and attributes
- Encourage positive relationships—remind them of the friends they have that choose not to use
- Let them know that they don't have to do this alone—there are many places to go for help
- Report to DHHS (Department of Health and Human Services) if a young person you know is endangering him/herself or has been subjected to child abuse or neglect (a report does not necessarily mean that something bad will happen, it may just start an investigation)
 - In Nebraska: 1-800-652-1999
 - In Iowa: 1-800-362-2178

When in doubt, call the hotline

Where to go for help:

- Talk with your mentoring organization staff for resources
- Boys Town National Hotline: 1-800-448-3000
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Hotline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
- Behavioral Health treatment locator: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>
- National Institute on Drug Abuse: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/>

For life threatening situations, call 911 immediately

Every kid is one caring adult away from being a success story. — John Shipp

The Heart of Mentoring: Getting the most out of life isn't about how much you keep for yourself, but how much you pour into others. — David Stoddard

A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could because someone else thought