

Stronger Connections, Safer Choices: Connecting with Our Youth

Presented by Challenge of Tarrant County

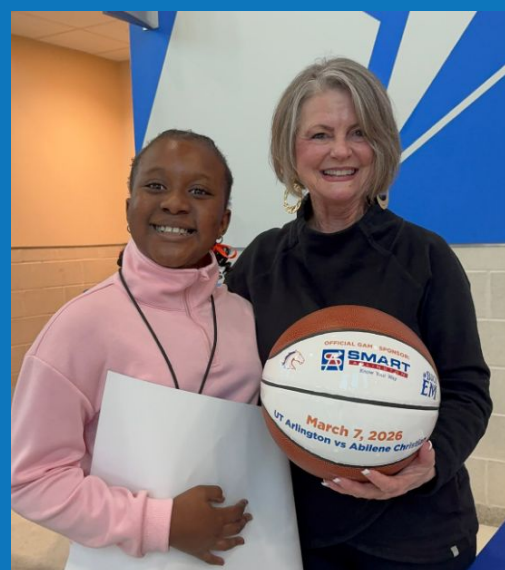


Who We are!

Challenge of Tarrant County was founded in 1984 and has always been dedicated to confronting substance misuse in our community

- identifying needs
- educating the community
- mobilizing resources
- promoting collaboration
- advocating for sound public policy

We do all of this through our five coalitions and through the Family Recovery Court program.





Presentation Overview

Today's Focus:

- Why communication matters
- What gets in the way of connection
- How to start conversations
- Skills that help navigate difficult topics
- Practicing real-life scenarios
- Presentation and accompanying resources created in collaboration with UTA School of Social Work and UNT Health Science





The Importance of Open Communication

Parents are the #1 influence on youth decisions about substances!

Youth who talk with parents are more likely to:

- Delay substance use
- Make safer choices
- Come to parents for help
- Better navigate peer influence





Where Might Youth Need Support

Difficult Topics for Adults to Address w/ Youth:

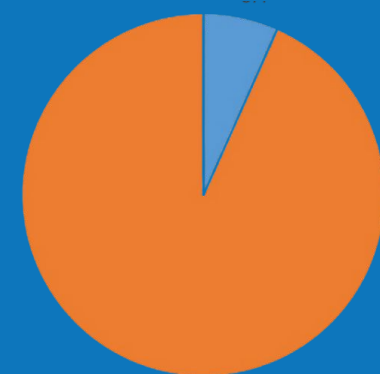
- Relationships and Dating
- Mental Health
- Social Media/Digital Life
- Sense of Self and Peer Influence
- Future Planning
- Substance Use





Common Substances Used by Teens

- Vaping Nicotine & Tobacco products
- THC & Marijuana products
- Prescription/Fake Prescription Drugs
- Alcohol
- Other illicit drugs



The Real Majority:

Roughly 3 out of 4 teens say they have been drug and substance free in the past year!





Check-in #1

Quick Reflection:

Think of a trusted adult from your childhood.

What made it easy (or difficult) to talk to them?



The Goal of Communication

Remember: The goal is NOT control.

- Listen actively
- Avoid judgment
- Ask open-ended questions
- Share your experiences
- Be patient

Think: CONNECTION before correction!





Check-in #2

Which of these is the main reason youth give for not talking openly with adults?

- A. Lack of time
- B. Fear of being judged or getting in trouble
- C. Not knowing enough about drugs
- D. Social media





Shifting the Approach

Instead of:

- Interrogating
- Lecturing
- Reacting emotionally

Try:

- Asking
- Listening
- Staying calm
- Being curious





One Big Talk vs. Many Small Talks

Effective communication is:

- ✓ Ongoing
- ✓ Casual
- ✓ Built into everyday life

Examples:

- Car rides
- Shared activities
- Doing everyday things around the house (walking the dog, cooking, etc.)

“Sixty 1-minute conversations are better for connecting and building trust than 1 sixty minute conversation.”





Check-in #3

True or False:

You only need to have one serious conversation about drugs.





Everyday Opportunities

Look for natural moments: Connection is best when it is natural. Remember to look for genuine connection in even the little, everyday moments and opportunities.

- Discussing a hobby, interest, and/or a current event story
- Social media
- School or extracurricular events
- Things happening in the home or community

These moments feel less forced and more natural!





Starting the Conversation

All conversations should begin by making the environment as safe and distraction free as possible. Conversations should all start with showing love, connection, and understanding.

Simple prompts for initiating topics like substance use:

- “What are kids your age hearing about vaping or drinking?”
- “Have you ever been in a situation where someone offered something?”
- “What do you think about what we just saw/heard?”



Open-Ended vs. Closed Questions



Closed questions (Interrogative):	Open-ended questions (Approachable):
"You're not vaping, are you?"	"What have you heard about vaping at school?"
"Do your friends do drugs?"	"I've heard that some kids got caught with marijuana at party, what do you and your friends think about that?"
"Don't you know drugs are bad?"	What do you know about how drugs affect the brain?"





Check-in #4

Which is the healthier way to engage with a hard subject?

- A. “You’re not using drugs, right?”
- B. “What situations do kids at your school run into with drugs or alcohol?”



The Power of Listening

Listening builds trust more than talking! The goal of every conversation and connection is to build and strengthen trust.

Key skills:

- Don't interrupt
- Reflect back what you hear
- Validate feelings (without agreeing)
- Stay calm

Example:

“I hear that you feel pressured in those situations.”





Responding Without Overreacting

When kids share something difficult:

Avoid:

- Immediate punishment
- Panic reactions
- Shutting down conversation

Instead:

- Pause
- Ask follow-up questions
- Provide Information and Resources
- Thank them for sharing
- Keep the door open

Kids are more likely to return to conversations when they feel safe talking.





Check-in #5

What is the best first response?

- A. “You’re grounded.”
- B. “Why would you do that?”
- C. “Thank you for telling me. Can you share more with me about how you are feeling?”
- D. “That’s not a big deal.”





Balancing Warmth and Boundaries

Effective parenting includes:

- ✓ Support + connection
- ✓ Clear boundaries

Too strict → fear

Too lenient → confusion

Balance builds trust and accountability.





Setting Clear Expectations



Youth need:

- Clear rules
- Consistent expectations
- Understanding of consequences
- Consequences related to the behavior

Examples:

“In our family, we don’t use substances because we value our healthy and safety and that of those around us.”

“If you ever feel unsafe in a situation or need a ride, you can call anytime–no punishment for asking for the help you need.”

“You were driving after curfew. Next time, you will lose your driving privileges for X days and will discuss this more before privileges are restored.”

“I want you to know that I am disappointed in the choice you made, but I love you. We are going to work through this together. We will follow through with the consequences and revisit the matter together in X days. I am always here to support you!”

Handling Peer Influence

Help kids prepare by asking:

- “What would you say if someone offered you something?”
- “What’s an easy way to get out of that situation?”

Teach:

- Exit and refusal strategies
- Saying no confidently
- Identifying safe people that they can trust to seek out for support or help in a crisis.



Conversation Didn't Go as Planned... Now What?



How to Reset the Conversation:

- **Pause the moment**
“I think we both got frustrated. Let’s take a break.”
- **Take ownership**
“I came in a little strong earlier—sorry about that.”
- **Reopen the door**
“Can we try that conversation again?”
- **Lead with connection**
“I care about you more than being right.”

Reset Example:

“Hey, I’ve been thinking about earlier. I don’t think I handled that the way I wanted to. Can we start over? I really want to understand your side.”

Repair builds more trust than getting it perfect the first time.



What If You Don't Know the Answer?

It's okay to say:

“I’m not sure—let’s find out together.”

This models:

- Honesty
- Problem-solving
- Lifelong learning





Check-in #6

Which is most effective?

- A. Strict rules only
- B. Friendship only
- C. Support + clear expectations
- D. Avoiding the topic

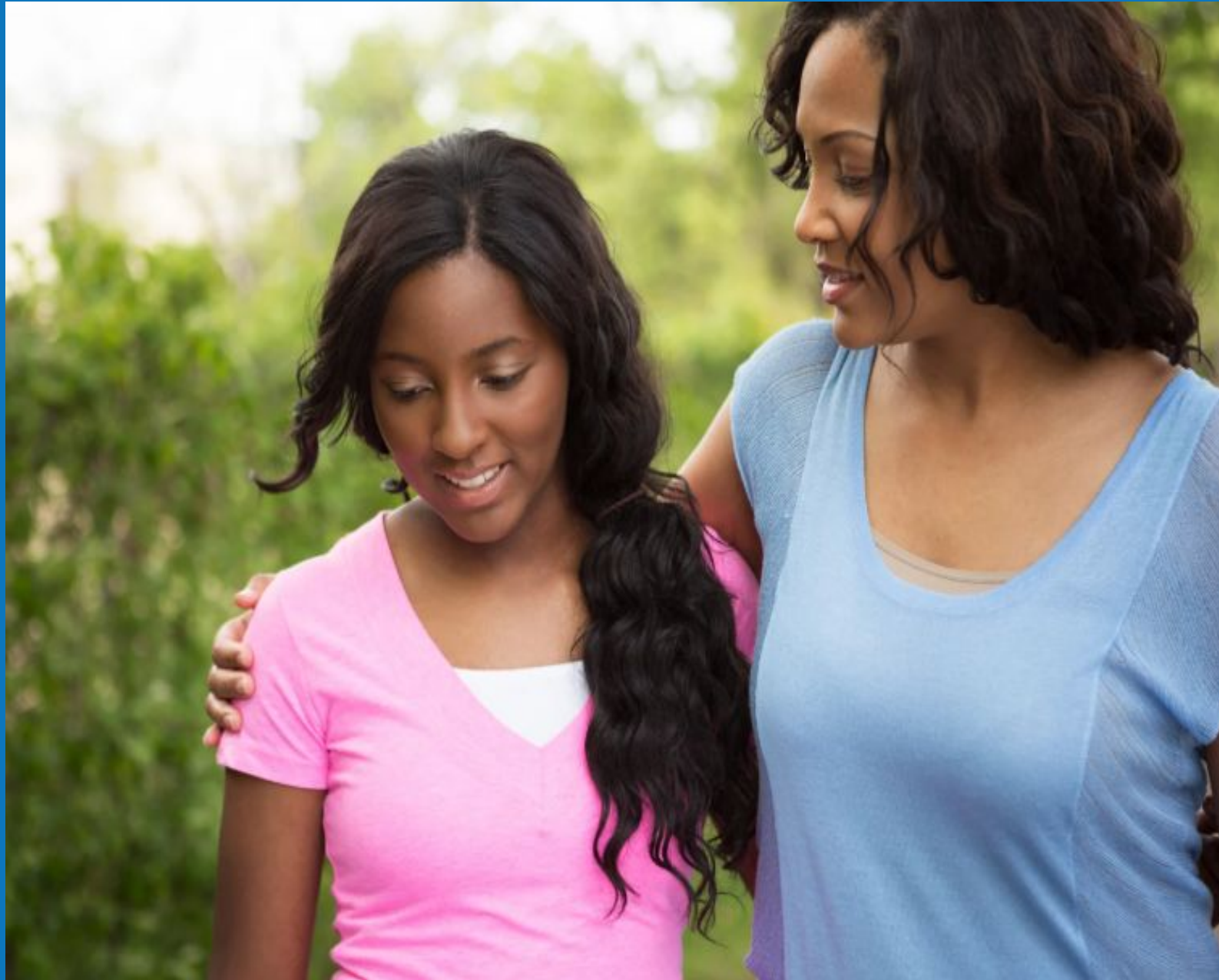


Safe Medication Practices at Home

Many young people who misuse prescription medication get it from their own home or a friend's home.

Parents can reduce risk by:

- Using medications only as directed
- Storing medications securely
- Monitoring quantities
- Disposing of unused medication properly





Check-in #7

Where do many teens report getting prescription medications for misuse?

- A. Drug dealers
- B. Online markets
- C. Friends or family homes
- D. Doctors





Understanding Opioid Overdose

Opioids can slow/stop breathing and cause other serious complications

Examples include:

- Prescription pain medications
- Illicit opioids such as fentanyl

Possible signs of overdose include:

- Slow or stopped breathing
- Unresponsiveness
- Blue or gray lips
- Gurgling sounds



Naloxone Saves Lives

Naloxone is a medication that can reverse an opioid overdose.

Important facts:

- Safe (Naloxone is safe and has minimal to no effect if opioids are not in a person's system.)
- Easy to use
- Works within minutes
- Can restore breathing
- Available in many communities without a prescription

Many states encourage community members to carry it or have it as part of their family first aid kit.



What To Do During a Suspected Overdose

EMERGENCY RESPONSE
FOR OPIOID OVERDOSE WITH NASAL NALOXONE

1 TRY TO WAKE THE PERSON UP

- Shake them and shout.
- If no response, grind your knuckles into their breast bone for 5 to 10 seconds.
- Tell them you will give them naloxone if they don't respond.

2 CALL 911

SOMEONE HAS OVERDOSED
SOMEONE ISN'T BREATHING

3 ADMINISTER NASAL NALOXONE

- Remove naloxone nasal spray from the package. Hold with your thumb on the bottom of the plunger and your first and middle fingers on either side of the nozzle.
- Tilt the person's head back and provide support under the neck with your hand. Gently insert the tip of the nozzle into either nostril, until your fingers touch the person's nose.
- Press the plunger firmly to release the dose.
- If still not conscious after 2-3 minutes, repeat in the other nostril with a new device.

4 CHECK FOR BREATHING

If they are not breathing, CPR or rescue breathing is optional but encouraged.

Give CPR if you have been trained or do rescue breathing:

- Tilt the head back, open the mouth, and pinch the nose.
- Start with 2 breaths into the mouth. Then 1 breath every 5 seconds.
- Continue until help arrives.

5 STAY WITH THE PERSON

- Naloxone wears off in 30 to 90 minutes.
- When the person wakes up, explain what happened.
- If you have to leave, move the person on their side to prevent choking.

Steps to take:

- Call 911 immediately
- Place the individual on their side
- Try to wake the person
- Administer Naloxone if available
- Administer CPR
- Re-administer Naloxone every 2-3, if available and there is no response
- Stay with them until help arrives

Quick action can save a life.





Check-in #8



True or False:

Naloxone can cause harm if used on someone who is not experiencing an opioid overdose.



Creating a Safer Home Environment



Parents can reduce risks by:

- Modeling healthy behaviors
- Keeping communication open
- Monitoring medications and alcohol
- Staying aware of youth trends
- Building strong family relationships

Small steps at home create big prevention impact.

Check-in #9



Name one action parents can take at home to reduce substance risks.





Practicing Conversations

Activity: Turn and Talk

Scenario:

Your child says:

“Everyone else is doing it—it’s not a big deal.”

Parents respond using:

- Open-ended questions
- Calm tone
- Curiosity





Check-in #10

What communication skill did you feel you used well? Where might you need to keep practicing?

- Open-ended questions
- Listening
- Staying calm
- Avoiding judgment





Building Long-Term Trust

Trust is built through:

- Consistency
- Follow-through
- Being present
- Respecting your child's voice

Communication is a long game!





Check-in #11

What builds trust the most?

- A. One serious talk
- B. Consistent small conversations
- C. Punishment
- D. Avoiding hard topics





Key Takeaways

Parents are the most powerful prevention influence.

Remember:

- Talk early and often
- Listen with curiosity
- Set clear expectations
- Secure medications
- Stay connected to your child

Stronger conversations lead to safer choices.





Final Reflection

Write or reflect:

What is one conversation you will start this week?

How will you prepare for this conversation?





Questions & Discussion

Thank You!!!

Visit the QR code below to download our communication guide along with other important resources.



**Piece by Piece:
Connecting with
Your Kids**

Stronger Relationships Lead to Healthier Futures

Challenge OF TARRANT COUNTY

UTA School of Social Work

Change is created by Challenge™

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**Stronger Connections,
Safer Choices:
Connecting with Our Youth**

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**Stronger Connections, Safer Choices:
A Guide to Meaningful Communication with Youth**

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