

Conversation Guide:

Talking to Teens about Substance Use

NextGen Counseling

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Introduction

Supporting a loved one struggling with substance use is challenging. This guide is intended to help family members approach these conversations with compassion, clarity, and confidence. Conversations around substance use can be delicate, so it's essential to set a positive tone and create a supportive environment.

Understanding Substance Use

Many teens experiment with substances for a variety of reasons, including stress, peer pressure, or curiosity. Recognizing this can help you approach the topic with empathy and without judgment.

Starting the Conversation

- **Set the Right Time and Place:** Choose a private, relaxed setting where you can talk without interruptions.
- **Be Direct Yet Compassionate:** Gently bring up specific concerns in a calm, non-judgmental way. For example, "I've noticed you seem stressed lately, and I want to support you."
- **Ask Open-Ended Questions:** Use questions that encourage sharing, like, "What has been on your mind lately?" rather than "Why are you doing this?"

Effective Communication Techniques

- **Use "I" Statements:** Instead of saying, "You're hurting yourself," try, "I feel worried when I see you upset or struggling."
- **Listen Actively:** Make eye contact, acknowledge their feelings, and avoid interrupting.
- **Avoid Blame:** Express concern, not criticism, to keep them from shutting down.

Do's and Don'ts

- **Do:** Be patient, acknowledge small steps, and show you're there for them.
- **Don't:** Threaten, criticize, or focus only on negative behavior.

After the Talk

Give them time to process the conversation. Be open to following up with additional discussions or offering to seek help together.