

Substance Misuse Discussion Guide

Discuss the topic of substance misuse with your child to make sure they feel comfortable to come to you with questions!

Why Substance Misuse?

In SMART Moves: Substance Use, youth are learning about substance misuse and how it relates to healthy decision-making. Young people are exposed to a variety of messages about substances. They hear about everyday substances like caffeine and medicines; legal recreational substances like alcohol and nicotine products; and illegal substances like cocaine, ecstasy and heroin. It's important for youth to understand that all substances can impact their bodies, minds and relationships. SMART Moves builds young people's ability to communicate effectively, make good decisions around health and demonstrate refusal skills.

You play an important role in supporting your child's learning – discussing decisions they're facing, leading them through the process of making choices, and explaining your own decisions in a way they can understand. Have conversations about substance use early to establish clear rules around expectations.

Family Activity: Discussing Substance Misuse

- Find a comfortable place to sit down without distractions. Consider the following times: during or after dinner, while you're traveling on a long trip together or before bedtime.
- Ask your child to tell you what they learned in the SMART Moves: Substance Use program. If they need a little guidance or a reminder, prompt them with the following topics:
 - › Using medicines safely and appropriately
 - › Substance misuse and goals
- Ask your child the following questions:
 - › What are some examples of substances?
 - › What is substance misuse?
 - › How can misusing substances impact your body and mind?
 - › What can you say or do when someone asks you to use a substance that you don't feel is safe or appropriate for you?
 - › Who can you go to for accurate information about substance misuse if you have questions?
- Thank your child for talking about substance misuse with you, and remind them they can always come to you if they have questions.

SMART Moves Family and Caregiver Resource

Providing Continued Support

Use these helpful strategies to have frequent conversations with your child about substance misuse.

- 1. Keep it age appropriate.** Have conversations early and make sure you talk about substance misuse in a way that children understand. For younger children, this may include emphasizing the importance of properly using medicines. For older children, you may also discuss the use of recreational and illegal substances.
- 2. Ask them what they know.** Encourage open and honest dialogue by asking them what they already know or have heard about drugs and substance misuse. Make sure to thank them when they come to you with questions, and let them know they can come to you if they need help or support.
- 3. Discuss addiction.** Be honest about negative consequences, but avoid scare tactics. Invite realistic discussions about addiction and how difficult it can be to stop misusing substances once they've started.
- 4. Discuss examples from media.** While watching TV, movies or social media, point out situations involving substances and misuse. Ask how they think the people involved feel and what they would personally do in that situation.
- 5. Talk about coping strategies.** Take note of any changes in your child's behavior along with how they are responding to tough situations. Encourage youth to reflect on how they are using their coping strategies when they experience challenges, especially related to stress or peer pressure.