

## Tips for talking about Substance Use

There are many reasons why someone may use substances. Not everyone experiences harms from substance use. Addictions and Substance Use Disorders are treatable medical conditions, not a choice.



### Tip 1: Check in with yourself.

Think about your own feelings, worries and experiences. Put yourself in the other person's shoes. How would you feel receiving this information? This might help you decide the best approach (i.e. speaking face to face, writing a letter, talking by phone, or sending a text message or email).

*"How ready am I to have this talk? How can I prepare myself?  
What is the best way, place and time?"*



[Learn More](#)



### Tip 2: Pick a calm time and place where both people can feel safe and comfortable.

Avoid times or places where you might feel stress or not have privacy.

*"I was wondering if I could talk to you about something that means a lot to me.  
Is now a good time?"*



### Tip 3: Speak kindly.

Sometimes our words can shame people and can make them feel like they do not deserve to receive help. Use language that respects people's worth and dignity like [Person First Language](#).



### Tip 4: Say what you notice without judgment.

*"I know that things haven't been easy lately, I have noticed...  
(say what you have seen or noticed).*



### Tip 5: Show that you care.

*"I care about you. I was wondering if you wanted to talk about where you are at?  
And how I can support you?"*



### Tip 6: Listen.

No one wants more problems in their life. Remember that you may not agree with or like what they say. Be non-confrontational and empathetic. Pay attention to your tone, volume, and body language. Hear their reasons, feelings and what they have gone through, and try to stay in the moment.



### Tip 7: Remind them how strong they are.

*"It's ok not to be ok. Challenges with substance use are not a choice. This does not make you a bad person. You are resilient and (list their strengths). Remember that time you (examples of moments of strength)? We all deserve to receive and accept help when we need it."*



### Tip 8: Offer help.

Offer to connect them with support: [AccessMHA](#) is for anyone 16 years of age and older who is looking for mental health and/or substance use/addiction services. [1Call1Click.ca](#) is available to assist infants, children, and youth from birth to 21 years of age, and connects them and their families with the right mental health and addiction services. Visit [Mental Health and Substance Use resource list for additional supports and services](#). If you notice the person has been feeling stressed or the person shares that they are using substances to cope with stress, offer to help them think about other ways to relax.

*"There are supports in our community that can help. We could call them together, if you want?"*

*"I've noticed you've been feeling stressed lately and was wondering if you wanted to brainstorm some ways to help you relax?"*



### Tip 9: Be open to talk more...

It is not realistic to expect one talk to resolve anything. Let them know you are there for them.

*"I am here for you. I want to support you. Know that you can talk to me anytime ..."*



### Tip 10: Be kind and take care of yourself.

Talk to someone you trust or reach out for help yourself if you need it. The person may not be ready to talk or seek help. They may become angry or defensive. While this may feel hard, don't take it personally. Don't force it. There is no "perfect way" to do this. Small steps are still steps. This talk could be a step towards increasing their wellness.

### Resources:

Visit [Families for Addiction Recovery](#) for more tips on supporting a loved one.

Visit The Community Addictions Peer Support Association ([CAPSA.ca](#)) to learn more about how stigma affects people and for stigma related resources.