

Discussing Substance Use

This playbook outlines steps for approaching discussions about substance use with teenagers in a manner that is informed, non-confrontational, and promotes open communication.

Step 1: **Self-Education**

Prior to engaging in the conversation with the teen, educate yourself on the various aspects of substance use. This includes understanding the different types of drugs and their effects, legal implications, potential risks, and signs of abuse.

Step 2: **Create Comfort**

Set up a comfortable environment for the conversation. Choose a private and quiet place without distractions, and a time when neither you nor the teenager is in a rush.

Step 3: **Open Dialogue**

Begin the conversation with open-ended questions to encourage dialogue. Ensure you are actively listening, making eye contact, and acknowledging their feelings and thoughts without immediate judgment or interruption.

Step 4: **Provide Information**

Share factual information about substance use, including the risks and consequences, but avoid using scare tactics. Present the information in a conversational manner, not as a lecture.

Step 5: **Encourage Questions**

Allow the teenager to ask questions throughout the conversation. Be honest with your responses, and if you do not know the answer, offer to find out together.

Step 6: **Discuss Expectations**

Clearly communicate your expectations regarding substance use, but also discuss societal and legal expectations. It's crucial to explain the 'why' behind these expectations.

Step 7: **Offer Support**

Make it clear that your primary concern is their well-being and safety. Offer your support and assure them that they can come to you with their problems or if they need help.

Step 8: **Plan Follow-ups**

Express that this conversation is not a one-time event but an ongoing dialogue. Schedule future check-ins to talk about the subject without pressure.

General Notes

Nonjudgmental Posture

Throughout the conversation, maintain a nonjudgmental and supportive stance. This encourages teens to be open and honest without fear of immediate repercussions or shame.

Privacy Respect

Respect the teen's privacy by keeping the details of the conversation confidential, unless there's an immediate concern for their safety.

Professional Help

Recognize your limitations and know when it might be necessary to seek out or recommend professional help for the teen, such as counselors or support groups.