



## REMEMBER

- Addiction is more than simply 'wanting' something; It is better described with words like craving or compulsion. There's an inability to stop despite the consequences. An addiction means that something has become more important than everything else that formerly held importance in the person's life.
- Often, teen substance use is covering up larger hurts and stresses in their lives. Make your relationship a safe place for them to share these without judgement and without telling them what they need to do or stop doing.
- Making inaccurate or misinformed statements will cause a loss in credibility. Take time to learn factual and relevant information but avoid using it as a weapon.
- Positive attachments and supportive relationships are essential for stopping substance misuse. Let them know you recognize the courage and strength it would take to stop and that you are proud of them for even considering it.
- Romans 7:18-19 says that God understands how hard this is. Their Creator hasn't abandoned them.



## RECOGNIZE

- Alcohol and cannabis continue to be the addictive substances used most by youth and are often the starting point of exploration. Substance use may start with boredom, curiosity, stress/depression, or a desire to fit in, seem older or impress peers.
- Cannabis is highly habit forming and, contrary to common belief, can be addictive. 1 in 3 who use cannabis will develop a problem with their usage including symptoms like irritability, difficulty sleeping, decreased appetite, anxiety and restlessness when not using.
- A sign of dependence on cannabis is believing that you need to use before you can truly relax, be creative, or deal with tough things in life. If a teen decides which events to attend/whom to hang out with based on whether or not they can use or be high there, they have likely moved from use to dependency.
- One common indicator of substance use being a problem is change:
  - ▶ *in habits (appetite, friends, grades);*
  - ▶ *in appearance (bloodshot eyes, tremors, strange bruises, unusual smell);*
  - ▶ *in behaviour (being secretive: avoiding eye contact, disappearing for periods of time, going out at odd times);*
  - ▶ *in the home: (the presence of drug paraphernalia/strange containers, missing prescription drugs).*



## RESPOND

- If you suspect substance abuse, start a collaborative conversation that is full of:
  - ▶ **Open-ended questions.** *These can't be easily answered with 'yes' or 'no'. They make space for a teen to share more than information (eg. "What's the best and worst part about your substance use?"). Approach the conversation with curiosity rather than accusation.*
  - ▶ **Reflective listening.** *No guilt, convincing or demanding. We want to help the teen hear themselves by listening and then feeding back what we hear them say.*
  - ▶ **Affirmation.** *Watch for and speak out what is good and loved by God in them - whether you agree with their choices or not. If you want to stand with them they need to know you see beyond their behaviour.*
  - ▶ **Exploration.** *Ask them what has changed since their substance use (i.e. their family relationships, their values/goals, their friendships, their moods or where they spend their time, thoughts, and money...). Is there a difference in how they see their drug use and its impact vs the impact others seem to see? Expect some resistance and let it roll by while you push back the urge to talk them into change.*
- ▶ **Motivation.** *Help them think about why they use drugs and what it would take for them to consider stopping. What are the benefits on either side? Are there any losses if they continue? Help them discover and speak out any motivation for change within.*
- **Support their home.** Don't forget to walk alongside parents on this journey; they will need support. When addiction has taken hold, it's often a long road home.



# DRUGS

lifeteams  
resources



## RESOURCES

- **axis.org** - Search "addictions" for excellent resources including this video-based conversation kit to open the door for talking about this topic with teens.
- **www.teenagewhisperer.co.uk** - Search "motivational interviewing" to learn about having conversations that open the door to change.
- **https://www.camh.ca** - A helpful resource for parents and youth workers, helping to focus our care.