

**A conversation about common substance use
and mental health concerns**

REAL TALK

PRACTICE TALKS WITH YOUR TEEN

There's a link between substance use and mental health.

Real Talk is a tool to help parents prepare for an open and honest conversation.



Choose a Topic

Select one of three common scenarios.



Navigate the Talk

See a potential teen reaction and select your response.



Learn & Grow

Get feedback and build confidence for your conversation.



SUBSTANCE USE  

How do you respond?
Choose your approach carefully.



A I want you to know the risks. **SEE PG. 8**

B OK. Let me know if you want to talk **SEE PG. 9**

 PREVIOUS CONTINUE 

SUBSTANCE USE  

 **Supportive Response**

You've replied with a patient and fact-based response that opens the door to more conversation. Keep taking the lead by starting more talks like this in the future.¹






YOU

I'm asking because I want you to know the risks. How would you respond if someone offered it to you?

 PREVIOUS  CONTINUE 


SEE PG. 10

SUBSTANCE USE  

 **Room for Improvement**

This response puts the responsibility on your teen to bring up the conversation.

TRY AGAIN



YOU

Okay, well let me know if you want to talk about it more some time.

← PREVIOUS **CONTINUE →**

SEE PG. 7

SEE PG. 10

SUBSTANCE USE  

 **Key Takeaway**

Use open-ended questions to engage your teen. Keep taking the lead on initiating conversations.



 PREVIOUS CONTINUE 

SUBSTANCE USE ✕

Continue the Experience

Try another response and see where the conversation goes!



SEE PG. 12

DENIAL



SEE PG. 18

ANGER

← PREVIOUSCONTINUE →

SUBSTANCE USE  

An attempt to end or shift the conversation.



DENIAL

TEEN

Chill. I don't do that.

← PREVIOUS CONTINUE →

SUBSTANCE USE  

How do you respond?
Choose your approach carefully.




A If you do encounter [vaping], you need to know the risks.


B I'm sure you have friends who are [vaping].

← PREVIOUS CONTINUE →


SEE PG. 14

SEE PG. 15

SUBSTANCE USE  


 **Supportive Response**

You've replied with a nonjudgmental tone that lets them know you aren't trying to get anyone in trouble.






YOU

If you do see someone your age [vaping], I want you to know the risks. I'm sure your friends would never pressure you, but if you ever find yourself in that situation, it's helpful to know what to say.

 PREVIOUS  CONTINUE 


SEE PG. 16

SUBSTANCE USE  

 **Room for Improvement**

Although you were honest with your concerns, your response might make your teen less willing to be open and honest because you've implied you don't trust their friends.

TRY AGAIN



YOU

I'm sure you have friends who are [vaping]. We need to talk about the risks so that they don't talk you into trying it.

← PREVIOUS **CONTINUE →**

SEE PG. 13

SEE PG. 16

SUBSTANCE USE  

 **Key Takeaway**

Share facts about substance use² to help your teen understand why you're concerned. Being nonjudgmental also opens the door to a conversation about peer pressure.



 PREVIOUS CONTINUE 

SUBSTANCE USE  

Continue the Experience
Try another response and see where the conversation goes!



ANGER

 PREVIOUS  CONTINUE 

SUBSTANCE USE  

Anger can be genuine or an attempt to end a conversation through emotion.



ANGER

TEEN

You always ask such annoying questions. You're so embarrassing!

← PREVIOUS CONTINUE →

SUBSTANCE USE  

How do you respond?
Choose your approach carefully.



A I can tell now isn't the time. We can try later.

B I wanted to talk about the dangers of [vaping].



C Why are you mad?


 PREVIOUS CONTINUE 

SEE PG. 20


SEE PG. 21

SEE PG. 22

SUBSTANCE USE  


 **Supportive Response**

With this response, you've stayed calm and set a boundary. If your teen is not in the right headspace to talk, let them know that you can talk about it another time.



YOU

I wanted to talk about this with you because it's a serious issue, but I can tell that now is not the time. We can try again later.


 PREVIOUS CONTINUE 

SEE PG. 23

SUBSTANCE USE  



 **Supportive Response**

Your response shows that you're trying to understand their anger. Assure them that you are asking out of concern and care, but don't press it if they're still angry.






YOU

I know [vaping] is a big issue these days, so I wanted to talk about the dangers of [vaping].¹ Can we talk about why this makes you so upset?

 PREVIOUS CONTINUE 


SEE PG. 23

SUBSTANCE USE  

 **Room for Improvement**

You've tried to tell your teen that you care. However, your response might come across as blaming or unsupportive. Instead, try to understand their feelings.

TRY AGAIN



YOU

When I was your age, my parents never talked to me about this stuff. Why are you so mad?

← PREVIOUS **CONTINUE →**

SEE PG. 19

SEE PG. 23

SUBSTANCE USE  

 **Key Takeaway**

Share the facts about the consequences and help your teen understand that you want them to learn from your experiences.



 PREVIOUS CONTINUE 

Ready to have a conversation?

Use these tips to talk to your teen.

Takeaway points for a real conversation

Be you

Customize the prompt so it's authentic to you and your teen. That goes for conversation styles too.

Be available

Find a moment when the prompt feels right. It doesn't need to be formal talk, either. A more casual setting can often lead to a better connection.

Be consistent

Starting conversations about substance use and mental health can feel awkward. The more you show up with care and consistency, the easier it becomes. Remember, it's about presence, not perfection.

We've compiled a list of resources to help you prepare for a conversation about substance use and mental health.

[See Resources](#) →

CONTINUE

MENTAL HEALTH



Flip the card and reveal your teen's answer.

Your teen may respond with denial, anger, or indifference.



MENTAL HEALTH  

An attempt to end or shift the conversation.





DENIAL


YOU

I don't know what you're talking about.
Everything's good.

 PREVIOUS CONTINUE 

MENTAL HEALTH  

How do you respond?
Choose your approach carefully.



A Feeling stressed is normal. Would talking help?

B You seem stressed. Just don't turn to drugs

← PREVIOUS CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 29

SEE PG. 30

MENTAL HEALTH



Supportive Response

You've acknowledged that it's normal to feel stressed, which may help them recognize or accept their own emotions. Check in often, even if they say everything is good.



YOU

There are so many social pressures, it's normal to feel anxious or stressed. Do you think it would be helpful to talk about some of the things you're feeling?

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 31

MENTAL HEALTH



Room for Improvement

Your response may make your teen feel accused or misunderstood. Instead, try using a nonjudgmental and curious tone by asking your teen how they're feeling.

TRY AGAIN

SEE PG. 28



YOU

You seem like you're feeling stressed and anxious. Just make sure you don't turn to using drugs because that will make your mental health even worse.

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 31

MENTAL HEALTH



Key Takeaway

Be nonjudgmental in acknowledging what your teen may be experiencing. Check in frequently and be proactive in suggesting healthy coping options, including formal care like therapy and substance use treatment.⁴



← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

MENTAL HEALTH

Continue the Experience

Try another response and see where the conversation goes!

SEE PG. 33



SEE PG. 39



← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

MENTAL HEALTH  

A lack of interest or enthusiasm about the topic at hand.





INDIFFERENCE

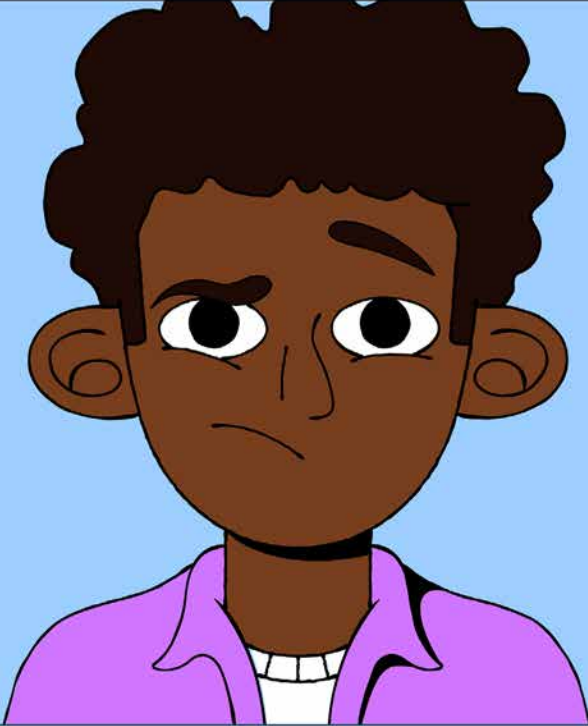
TEEN

I'm fine.

← PREVIOUS CONTINUE →



MENTAL HEALTH  

How do you respond?
Choose your approach carefully.



A Feeling stressed is normal. Would talking help? **SEE PG. 35**

B Well, let me know if you ever want to talk. **SEE PG. 36**

 PREVIOUS CONTINUE 

MENTAL HEALTH



Supportive Response

You've helped your teen understand their feelings are normal and introduced a healthy coping strategy. Invite them to share more with open-ended questions, and keep checking in. ¹



YOU

It's normal to feel stressed or anxious. Sometimes it can be helpful to talk about how you're feeling. Who do you trust to talk with about these things?

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 37

MENTAL HEALTH



Room for Improvement

Your response puts the burden on your teen to bring up the conversation. Instead, acknowledge that these feelings are normal, introduce ways to cope, and check in later.

TRY AGAIN

SEE PG. 34



YOU

Well, let me know if you ever want to talk about something.

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 37

MENTAL HEALTH



Key Takeaway

Help your teen understand that these feelings are normal, and be proactive in suggesting healthy ways to cope. Continue to check in with open-ended questions. ¹



← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

MENTAL HEALTH



Continue the Experience

Try another response and see where the conversation goes!



← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

MENTAL HEALTH  

This is your moment!
Make it count.




INTEREST

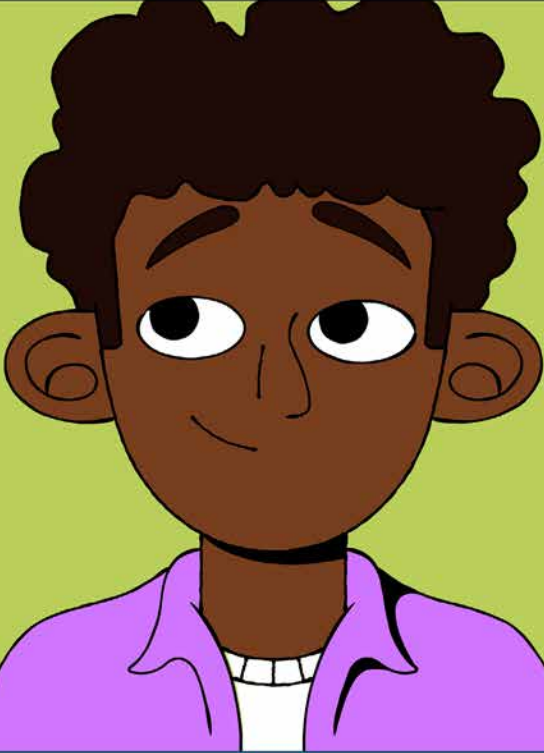
TEEN

I've been kind of overwhelmed by some stuff at school. I think it would be helpful to talk about it sometime.

← PREVIOUS CONTINUE →



MENTAL HEALTH  

How do you respond?
Choose your approach carefully.



A It's been a lot. How are you handling the stress? **SEE PG. 41**

B I'm sure this will blow over soon. **SEE PG. 42**

 PREVIOUS CONTINUE 

MENTAL HEALTH



Supportive Response

You've acknowledged their feelings and invited them to share more. Talk with your teen about both healthy and unhealthy coping strategies and check in regularly.



YOU

You've had a lot of responsibilities at school lately. How do you feel like you're coping with the stress?

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 43

MENTAL HEALTH



Room for Improvement

Your teen may not feel fully supported by this response. If your teen has expressed interest in talking about their mental health, it's important to act immediately.

TRY AGAIN

SEE PG. 40



YOU

It's normal to feel overwhelmed. I'm sure this will blow over soon.

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 43

MENTAL HEALTH



Key Takeaway

If your teen expresses an interest in talking about their mental health, be proactive by asking open-ended questions and helping them find healthy ways to cope⁵ or get support, such as therapy.



← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

Ready to have a conversation?

Use these tips to talk to your teen.

Takeaway points for a real conversation

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Customize the prompt so it's authentic to you and your teen. That goes for conversation styles too.

Be available

Find a moment when the prompt feels right. It doesn't need to be formal talk, either. A more casual setting can often lead to a better connection.

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CONTINUE



CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE

Flip the card and reveal your teen's answer.

Your teen may respond with denial, anger, or indifference.



CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE

How do you respond?

Choose your approach carefully.



A I trust you and want you to know the facts.

SEE PG. 49

B You haven't been yourself lately.

SEE PG. 50

C You're never allowed to see them again.

SEE PG. 51

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE



Supportive Response

You've responded in a calm but straightforward way. Be honest with your teen about the risks to their physical and mental health. Talk with them about peer pressure and check in regularly.



YOU

I hope that's true. You can tell them that I got rid of it. I trust you and want you to know the facts,² so you're prepared to say no if someone offers you something.

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 52

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE



Supportive Response

You've responded in a calm but straightforward way. If you are unsure whether the drugs belong to your teen, start by asking open-ended questions to help identify the root cause of their potential drug use and discuss the risks.



YOU

You haven't been yourself lately and I'm concerned. Since I found [drugs], we need to talk about what's going on. I want to help.

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 52

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE



Room for Improvement

You've set a boundary to protect them from peer pressure, but this response may make them feel angry or misunderstood. Instead, ask open-ended questions and talk about the risks of drug use.

TRY AGAIN

SEE PG. 48



YOU

If it really is your friend's drugs, then you're never allowed to see them again.

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 52

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE



Key Takeaway

Keep calm and talk to them about the risks of drug use. Help them prepare for peer pressure, communicate boundaries with frequent check-ins, and consider establishing care with a reliable therapist to support them.



← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE

Continue the Experience

Try another response and see where the conversation goes!

SEE PG. 60



SEE PG. 54



← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE

Anger can be genuine or an attempt to end a conversation through emotion.



ANGER

TEEN

I thought you trusted me! Why were you going through my room?

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE

How do you respond?

Choose your approach carefully.



I'm sorry you feel betrayed. We need to talk.

SEE PG. 56



It doesn't matter. You need to know the risks.

SEE PG. 57



I thought I raised you better than this. Remember, 'Just Say No.'

SEE PG. 58

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE



Supportive Response

I'm sorry that you feel betrayed. I've been worried about you. We need to talk about the risks of using drugs. You've acknowledged their feelings while still establishing a boundary. Talk about the risks of drugs, both on their physical and mental health. Encourage honesty and trust with open-ended questions and a calm, nonjudgmental tone.¹ Check in regularly and consider establishing care with a therapist.⁴



YOU

I'm sorry that you feel betrayed. I've been worried about you. We need to talk about the risks of using drugs.

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 59

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE



Room for Improvement

Your teen may still feel upset that you looked through their belongings. Acknowledge that it's OK to feel betrayed and explain that you are coming from a place of care. Establish expectations and boundaries for the future. Use a calm and nonjudgmental tone and check in regularly with your teen.

TRY AGAIN

SEE PG. 55



YOU

It doesn't matter how I found it. If you're going to experiment with drugs, then you need to be aware of the risks.

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 59

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE



Room for Improvement

You haven't acknowledged their feelings, and you risk alienating your teen by leading with shame and matching their emotion. Acknowledge that you both feel angry and calmly explain that you are coming from a place of care.

TRY AGAIN

SEE PG. 55



YOU

I thought I raised you better than this.
Remember, 'Just Say No.'

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 59

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE  

 **Key Takeaway**

Acknowledge their feelings and remind them that you are coming from a place of care. Talk about the risks of drug use, communicate boundaries with frequent check-ins, and consider establishing care with a reliable therapist to support them.



 PREVIOUS CONTINUE 

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE



Continue the Experience

Try another response and see where the conversation goes!



← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE [Progress Bar] [Close]

A lack of interest or enthusiasm about the topic at hand.



INDIFFERENCE

TEEN

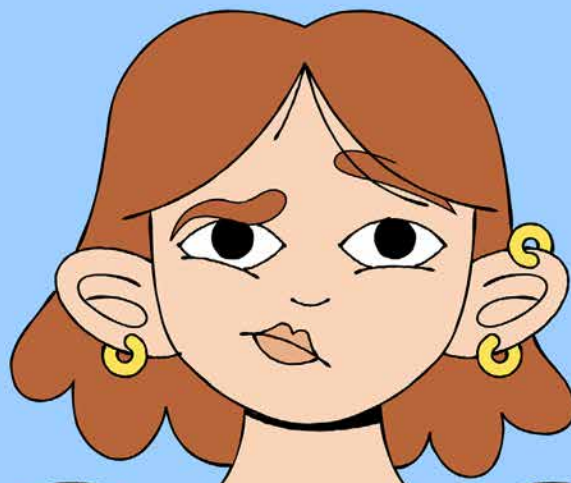
You need to chill. Everything is fine.

← PREVIOUS CONTINUE →

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE

How do you respond?

Choose your approach carefully.



A I want to talk through the facts and risks.

SEE PG. 63

B This is a big deal! Don't pretend it's fine.

SEE PG. 64

C Are you trying to ruin your life?!

SEE PG. 65

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE



Supportive Response

You've replied with a calm tone and brought up the risks of drugs. Follow up with the facts and use open-ended questions to invite your teen's input.



YOU

Using drugs can be very harmful to your physical and mental health.² I want to talk through the facts and risks about using drugs.

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 66

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE



Room for Improvement

Although you're coming from a place of concern, you've responded with anger or frustration. Use a calm but firm tone to help them understand the risks and your expectations.

TRY AGAIN

SEE PG. 62



YOU

This is a really big deal! Don't try to pretend it's fine.

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

SEE PG. 66

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE



Room for Improvement

By asking accusatory questions, you risk ending the conversation before you can help your teen understand the danger. Be calm and lead with the facts.

TRY AGAIN

SEE PG. 62



YOU

Are you trying to ruin your life?! Don't you care about your future?

← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

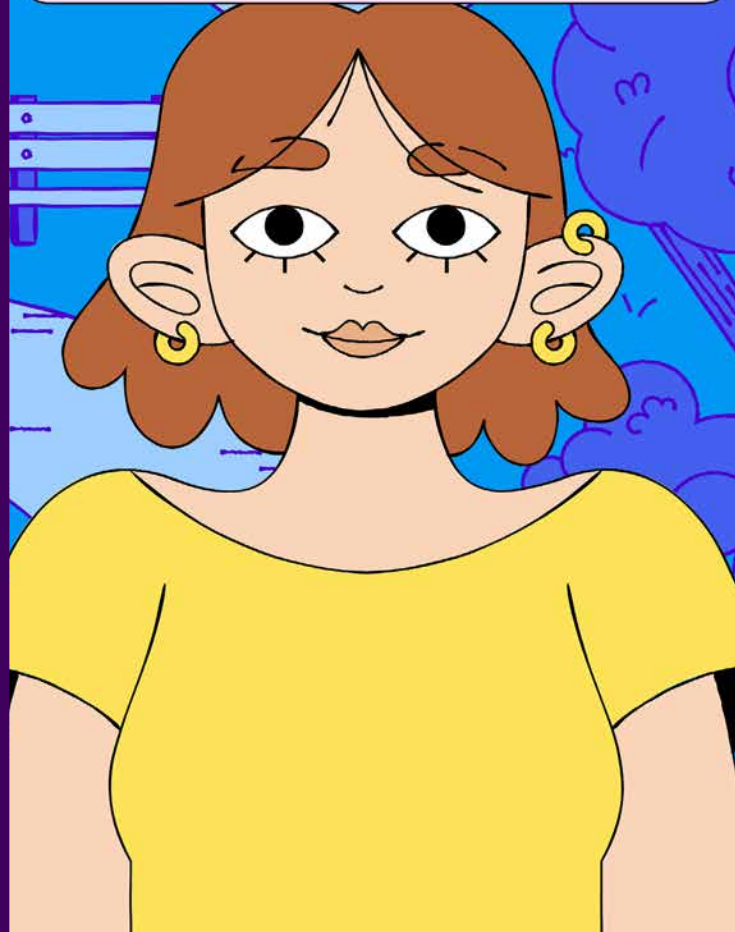
SEE PG. 66

CONCERNS ABOUT DRUG USE



Key Takeaway

Be calm and lead with the facts. Check in again with your teen regularly and consider establishing care with a reliable therapist to support them.⁴



← PREVIOUS

CONTINUE →

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CONTINUE

CITATIONS

- ¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Talk. They Hear You. Parent Resources. Retrieved January 22, 2026. <https://www.samhsa.gov/substance-use/prevention/talk-they-hear-you/parent-resources/small-conversations>
- ² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Facts About Substances. Accessed February 25, 2026. <https://www.cdc.gov/free-mind/about-substances/>
- ³ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2023, April 4). Mental health and substance use disorders. Retrieved January 22, 2026, from <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/what-is-mental-health/conditions/co-occurring-disorders>
- ⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). FindTreatment.gov. Retrieved January 22, 2026, from <https://findtreatment.gov/>
- ⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Free Mind Formula. Accessed February 25, 2026. <https://www.cdc.gov/free-mind/tips-for-youth-formula.html>