

# CONVERSATION STARTER



## Real connection can make a real difference.

You and your teen grew up in different times. But the struggles and daily stresses still feel the same. There's a link between substance use, overdose, and your teen's mental health. Showing your teen that you're there for them can make all the difference for their mental well-being and the choices they make related to substance use.

Get tips on how to create a connection below and flip the page to find conversation starters about substance use and mental health.

## CONVERSATION TIPS

### A Little Prep Goes a Long Way

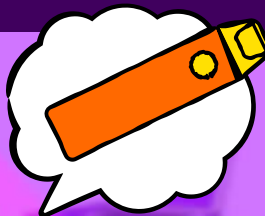
It's important to understand how teens can be affected by substance use and mental health challenges — and how these two issues may be connected. Visit [CDC.gov/FreeMind](https://www.cdc.gov/FreeMind) to learn about the current drug landscape.

### Create a Safe Space

Be sure to create a safe space for both adults and teens and lead with compassion. Instead of a pointed or leading question, be evenhanded and nonjudgmental with your approach. Try having the conversation while doing a shared activity or sitting side by side.

### It's About Presence, Not Perfection

Showing that you care can make a difference even if the conversation doesn't go as planned. Be sure to remind your teen that the door is always open if they want to talk.



**FLIP TO BACK  
FOR CONVERSATION  
STARTERS**



# CONVERSATION STARTERS

## Mental Health:

I don't know what it's like to be a teen today, but I'm sure it's tough. Who do you trust to talk to when you're struggling with something?

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How are you handling the stress? Is there anything I can do to help you handle it better?

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You haven't seemed like yourself lately. If you want to talk, I'm happy to listen.

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I know social media can be a major source of stress and anxiety for teens. Do you ever feel like it affects your mental health?

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If you were worried about a friend, who would you tell? What would your friends do if they were worried about you?



## Substance Use/Overdose:

Did you know there's a link between mental health challenges and your risk for drug use and overdose? This can include alcohol and prescription drug misuse. Why do you think that is?

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Fentanyl is 50 times stronger than heroin<sup>1</sup> and is added to drugs to make them more potent. Have you heard of fentanyl?

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Unless you have a prescription, there's no way to know if a pill is real. How do you know what is actually in a fake pill?

I know teens may [vape/use substances/drink]. Do you think anyone at your school is [vaping/using substances/drinking]? What do you think about that?



## Addressing Concerns About Drug Use:

I found some drugs in your room today. Drugs can be very harmful to your physical and mental health. I want to talk through the facts and risks about using drugs.

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There's a drug overdose on average every 7 minutes. Do you ever worry about an overdose happening to someone you know?



If you are experimenting with drugs, it's important that you understand the risks involved.

## Are you worried about your teen's reaction when having a difficult conversation about substance use or mental health?

Several interactive digital resources are available. Visit [cdc.gov/FreeMind](https://www.cdc.gov/FreeMind) to find:

### Real Talk

An interactive tool to help parents and caregivers prepare for a conversation about drugs or mental health.

### Facts & Feels

A digital card game for adults to play with teens to spark a conversation about mental health and substance use.

FREE MIND



<sup>1</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Facts About Fentanyl. Published May 2024. Accessed January 7, 2025. [https://www.cdc.gov/stop-overdose/media/pdfs/2024/05/CDC\\_Fentanyl-Fact-Sheet\\_General\\_508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/stop-overdose/media/pdfs/2024/05/CDC_Fentanyl-Fact-Sheet_General_508.pdf).