

talk about it

If You Suspect Misuse

Starting conversations with your teen when you believe they've already begun using drugs can be one of the most difficult things to do as a parent. It can be challenging to acknowledge the issue is happening, and it can be even harder to break the silence about it. As tough as it is to start these conversations, they have the potential to be life-saving. The goals of this discussion are to address the unhealthy behavior, express your concern, and, if necessary, suggest professional help.

Suggested Conversation Steps

- 1 Begin by telling your teen what they mean to you and how important your relationship with them is to you.
- 2 Give examples of specific behaviors that are concerning you (e.g., "When you take pills, you aren't yourself. Last week, you went from being happy to being extremely crabby without any warning.")
- 3 Discuss how this problem is affecting your relationship (e.g., "I feel extremely concerned and anxious when you use those things. Our relationship has changed because of it. I feel like I can't trust you anymore, and I'm afraid to leave you at home by yourself.")
- 4 Tell your teen what you would like them to do about the issue or what changes you need for them to make (e.g., "I want you to stop taking pills," or "I want you to start seeing a counselor to get help.")

Talking Tips

Do's

- Wait until they're sober or not in a crisis. Timing is important.
- Remember that addiction is a brain disease that may affect your child's ability to be rational.
- Before you start talking:
 - Take the time to get your thoughts together and think objectively.
 - Decide what you want the outcome of the conversation to be, then work towards it.
- Stick to the facts and remain calm.
- Use "I care" messages and "I" statements.
- Focus on their behavior, not them as a person.
- Be persistent and patient.
- Know your limits. Recognize when you need to refer your loved one to professional resources, like NCADA.
- See if they're open to getting another opinion about what's going on from a professional.

Don't's

- Don't confront your teen when they are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
- Don't confront when your teen is angry—or when you're angry.
- Don't preach, give advice, or label with words like "addict."
- Don't be personally offended by their comments.
- Don't let your teen turn the problem on you.
- Don't give up, but don't argue or debate with your teen.
- Don't feel guilty. Know you are a good parent. You did not cause this.

REMEMBER: just because your teen has used drugs or alcohol doesn't mean that you are a "bad parent" or that they are a "bad kid." It is possible to intervene and get them back on a healthy path. NCADA has dedicated professional counselors that are available to help your family.