

# A Communication Pathway for Providers

Revised February 2023

The pathway is intended to help youth-serving providers communicate with middle and high school age youth about substance use prevention. It is a companion to [Getting Candid: Framing the Conversation Around Youth Substance Use Prevention Message Guide for Providers](#).

The pathway begins with **establish trust** and **gather insights**, providing a relational foundation that should be revisited throughout. Then, providers can build on this

foundation to **frame the communication, make the case** by sharing compelling information, and **suggest actions** youth can take consistent with substance use prevention.

For a more detailed description of the pathway and how it was informed by insights from youth and youth-serving providers, please refer to the [Message Guide](#).



## ESTABLISH TRUST

**Build rapport and establish trust.**

1. Create a safe space.
2. Be authentic.
3. Approach the conversation informally.
4. Do more listening than talking.
5. Be transparent and trustworthy.
6. Pay attention to body language.



## GATHER INSIGHTS

**Seek guidance and input from youth about what matters to them.**

1. What matters most to you in your life? And why?
2. What do you look forward to most in the coming year (or after you graduate, or beyond)? And why?
3. When you're faced with making a tough choice or decision, what do you consider or think about most?



## FRAME THE COMMUNICATION



## MAKE THE CASE



## SUGGEST ACTION

For more detail on these steps in the pathway, please see the next page.



## ESTABLISH TRUST



## GATHER INSIGHTS



## FRAME THE COMMUNICATION

Choose the frame for communication based on insights from youth.

### The Future

Don't let drug and alcohol use change or control your plans for the future.

### Risk of Addiction

Drug and alcohol use change parts of your brain that impact how you think and act. The more you use them, the harder it can be to stop, even if you want to.

### Relationships

(for middle school) There are people in your life who matter to you. And you try hard not to let them down.

(for high school) There are people in your life who matter to you. And you try hard to make them proud.

### Activities

Participating in sports, music, hobbies or other activities can help you build friendships, stay in shape, get into and receive scholarships for college and have fun.

### Self-affirmation

You respect yourself and want to make decisions that are best for you. Trust yourself and your choice not to use drugs or alcohol.



## MAKE THE CASE: General Substance Use

Select evidence to provide compelling reasons not to use drugs or alcohol.

### General Impact

Purchasing drugs and alcohol is illegal for people your age and costs money.

People in recovery from addiction often say one of the things they regret most about their addiction was the trust they lost from people who care about them. They fear some broken relationships will never heal, and others will take a long time to repair.

People in recovery from addiction say substance use can change your priorities and fog your judgment in ways that can lead to problems at school or work. Don't let substance use take away your opportunities.

### Physical Health Impact

Drug and alcohol use can change parts of your brain that impact how you think and act.

The younger you are when you start using drugs or alcohol, the more likely you are to become addicted. The more you use them the harder it can be to stop even if you want to.

Being healthy means something different to everyone. Don't let drug and alcohol use get in the way of being as healthy as you want to be.

### Mental Health Impact

Life can be really hard. Sometimes people think that using drugs will make the problems go away, but it only adds another problem to the pile.

Using drugs and alcohol may seem like a quick and easy way to relieve stress, but there are healthy ways to take care of yourself.



## SUGGEST ACTION

Select one or more actions to suggest.

Explore alternative ways of dealing with stress.

Make your own personal commitment or pledge to avoid alcohol and drugs.

Talk to your friends and encourage them not to use drugs and alcohol.

Educate yourself about drugs and alcohol.

Talk to someone if you feel tempted or pressured to use drugs or alcohol.



## MAKE THE CASE: Specific Substance Use

The messages on this page are intended for communicating with youth about specific substances and can be used in conjunction with the **frame the communication** and **suggest action** messages shown on the previous page.

### Alcohol

#### General Impact

Drinking alcohol can impact your memory and the way you think and act. You could end up fighting with friends, not remembering what you said or did, or passing out.

#### Physical Health Impact

Excessive drinking contributes to more than 3,500 deaths of people below the age of 21 in the U.S. each year.

People your age who drink alcohol can get sick from use and have hangovers or put themselves at risk of harm from alcohol poisoning, car crashes from driving after drinking alcohol, and injuries such as falling or drowning.

#### Mental Health Impact

Alcohol can have a major impact on your mental health because of the way it impacts your brain. It can alter your mood, energy, memory, and increase anxiety and depression.

### Delta-8 THC

#### General Impact

Delta-8 THC products may be marketed as a milder form of marijuana, but their strength and contents are variable, and their harmful effects are unknown.

#### Physical Health Impact

Delta-8 THC is not regulated so you don't really know what is in it. Some people end up having a medical emergency because the concentration was too high or they didn't realize Delta-8 THC was psychoactive until it was too late.

#### Mental Health Impact

Delta-8 THC affects brain function, and can cause vomiting, anxiety and dizziness if used in high concentrations.

### Vaping

#### General Impact

Vape companies regularly change up their chemical formulas to get around regulations and safety testing of their products.

Vape companies have a stronger motive to sell products than to care about the long-term health of their consumers.

#### Physical Health Impact

Even if your vape is labeled as nicotine-free, this could be an untrue marketing strategy. Ninety-nine percent of vapes tested by the CDC had nicotine in them, including ones that were labeled as nicotine-free.

#### Mental Health Impact

Some people think vaping is harmless, but it is associated with serious mental health effects, like anxiety, suicidal ideation and depression.

### Fentanyl

#### General Impact

To build a reputation for selling strong drugs, dealers sometimes mix especially dangerous drugs like fentanyl with other drugs like prescription pills.

Drugs, including prescription pills not prescribed by a doctor, do not come with an ingredients list. Many contain deadly doses of fentanyl.

#### Physical Health Impact

Teen overdose deaths have tripled over the last few years due to a dangerous substance called fentanyl. Fentanyl is often found in fake prescription pills.

It only takes a pinprick-sized amount of fentanyl to be a deadly dose. And it's sometimes hidden in fake prescription pills.

## Marijuana

### Physical Health Impact

Since your brain is still developing, using marijuana during your teenage years can alter your brain chemistry. This affects your ability to pay attention and remember things, which can result in lower test scores and academic success.

### Mental Health Impact

You might have heard people say marijuana use is fun. But, for some people, it leads to extreme paranoia and fear, scary hallucinations and dependency.

## Polysubstance use

### Physical Health Impact

Most overdose deaths happen when mixing drugs like prescription opioids or heroin with other drugs like antidepressants and/or alcohol.

Using more than one substance or drug at a time is never safe. That's because the effect of mixing drugs is even stronger and less predictable than one drug alone. That makes it even easier to overdose or die.

### Mental Health Impact

Using substances can increase the risk of mental health challenges, including depression, extreme paranoia and fear, scary hallucinations or even suicide. The risk of those is higher when using more than one substance at the same time.

## Prescription drugs not prescribed by a doctor

(OxyContin, Vicodin, Percoset)

### Physical Health Impact

Use of prescription pain medicine without a doctor's prescription or differently than how a doctor told you to use it can be addictive and dangerous. More than 30 people die from overdoses involving prescription pain medications every day.

Even people who are prescribed pain medications by a doctor can become addicted. Signs of addiction can include feeling nauseous when you stop taking the drug or needing to take more medication than before to feel better.

### Mental Health Impact

Using prescription pills not as prescribed by a doctor can cause brain changes that increase feelings of depression and anxiety over time.