



Talking to Youth About Vaping and Substance Use: Tips for Parents & Caregivers



1. Start With Yourself First

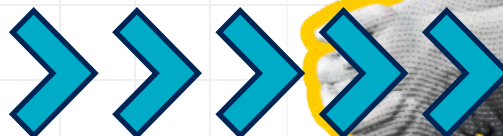
Before approaching the conversation, check in with your own emotions, assumptions, and goals. Youth can pick up on judgment or anxiety quickly, especially around sensitive topics such as vaping and substance use.

Ask yourself:

- *Am I calm and ready to listen?*
- *What do I hope comes out of this conversation?*
- *How would I feel if someone brought this up with me?*
- *How can I ask questions in a way that doesn't feel alarming, judgemental or overwhelming?*



This resource is created in collaboration with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.





2. When Possible, Choose the Right Moment

Pick a time when your teen feels safe—not rushed, not in trouble, and not in front of others such as peers.

Try

- Choose a time such as during a car ride, a walk, or a relaxed moment at home together.
- Asking permission:
“Hey, can we talk about something important? Is now a good time?”

3. Lead With Care and Compassion, Not Control

Youth are more likely to open up when they feel heard and respected—not judged, stigmatized or lectured.

Instead of:

- *“Why are you doing this?”*

Try

- *“I care about you and wanted to check in on you.”*

4. Share What You’ve Noticed (Without Accusing)

Stick to observations, not labels, judgements or assumptions.

- *“I’ve noticed you’ve seemed really stressed lately and going out more...”* Or,
- *“Look, I know things are changing and so I just wanted to take a moment to connect with you.”*
- Avoid absolutes such as: *“You’re making bad choices.”*

5. Keep the Door Open and Reassure

Make it clear the conversation is about support, not punishment.

Try

- *“You don’t have to figure everything out alone. I am always here for you.”* Or,
- *“I’m here to listen, not judge.”*





6. Use Active Listening

Let your teen speak—even if it's hard to hear.

- Avoid interrupting or jumping to solutions right away.
- Be aware of your response tone and posture/body language.
- Be okay with moments of silence as some youth may need more time to articulate how they feel.

7. Normalize Struggles While Reducing Stigma

Help youth understand that vaping and substance use can be connected to stress, curiosity, or coping—not “bad behavior.”

Try

- *‘A lot of people go through tough stuff and try different ways to cope.’*
- *‘This doesn’t change how I see you. I care about you.’*
- *‘Are there other things you feel you can do to help you reduce your stress?’*
- *‘How can I help?’*

8. Focus on Strengths and Resilience

Remind youth who they are beyond this moment.

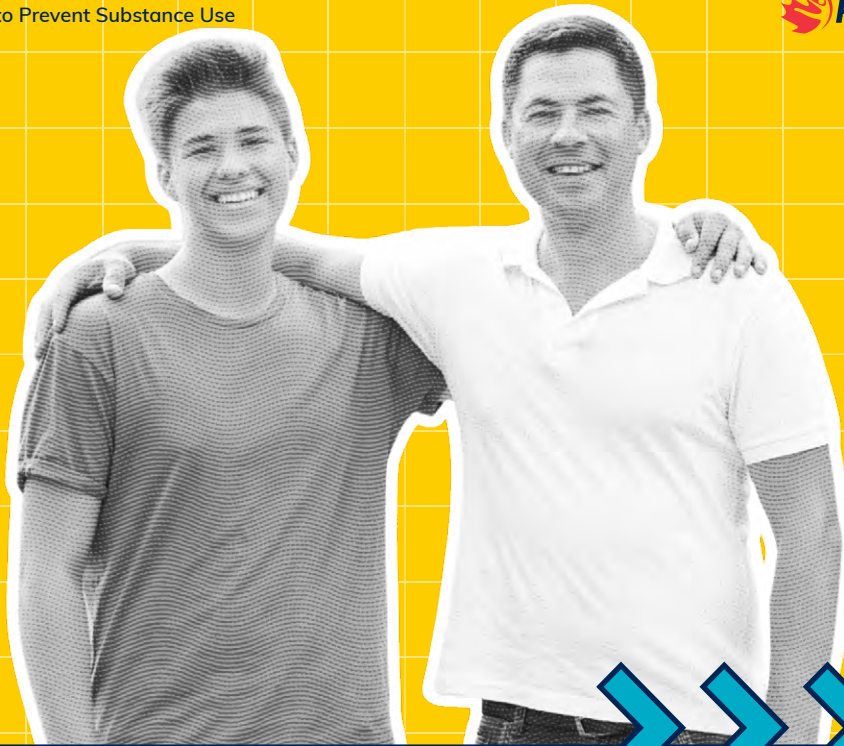
- *‘You’ve handled tough things before.’*
- *‘I’ve seen how strong you are when...’*
- *‘This is a tough season that is making you stronger and I can see that.’*

9. Offer Support and Avoid Ultimatums

Work together on next steps.

- *‘Would you be open to talking to someone professionally?’*
- *‘We can figure this out together but I will let you guide the way.’*
- Explore healthier coping strategies if stress is involved such as a recreation center pass, investing or exploring a new hobby, etc.





10. Keep Conversations Constructive

One talk with youth about vaping and substance use isn't enough. Keep showing up and creating space for them to open up and share.

- “We can keep talking about this whenever you want.”
- Check in regularly, even briefly and preferably during relaxed moments in the home.

11. Take Care of Yourself Too

Supporting a young person can be emotional as you navigate challenges such as addiction, separation, emotional distancing and change.

- Reach out to other trusted adults, friends, family or professionals.
- Remember: you can't force readiness and you also need to protect your emotional health.
- Remember that small conversations still matter and that your presence matters even if youth don't open up as much as you'd like.

A Key Message to Remember

- Vaping and substance use is often about underlying needs (stress, anxiety, belonging, coping).
- Your relationship is the most powerful protective factor and should be preserved at all costs.
- Connection is greater than correction, despite our drive as parents and caregivers to course correct.