

# Conversations about substance use are easier than you think.

**RealTalks**  
**Wisconsin**

It takes all of us to help prevent and reduce substance use.

It is easy to think that people won't listen. But they do! Open conversations about substance use help build supportive communities where prevention works, treatment is available, and recovery is possible. Nervous? Don't be. Check out these simple tips to start having real talks with confidence.

## Choose the place and time

Find a comfortable setting where you can both talk openly without distractions. It helps when they aren't under the influence of substances.

## Let them know you care

Begin the conversation by expressing your genuine concern for their well-being. Use "I" statements to state your feelings, such as:

- "I want to understand..."
- "I'm worried about..."
- "I'm always here to..."



## Be non-judgmental

The goal is to create an environment of empathy, trust, and understanding. Don't make assumptions. When talking, be sure to avoid:

- Lecturing
- Blaming or accusing
- Criticizing

## Ask open-ended questions

Asking questions that can't be answered with a simple yes or no is a great way to get people to open up. You'll learn more about their beliefs and behaviors when it comes to substance use with questions like:

- "I haven't seen you lately. What have you been up to?"
- "Things are stressful. How have you been dealing with it?"
- "What do you and your friends like to do for fun?"

## Use active, empathetic listening

When a person feels understood and knows you're listening, it's easier for them to talk openly. Give them your full attention. Show you're listening by:

- Making eye contact
- Nodding
- Giving verbal cues, such as "I see," or "I understand."

## Offer your help

Let them know you're there to support them in any way they need. Offer your help by:

- Sharing reliable information about substance use
- Being available when they're feeling stressed and need to talk
- Suggesting they call 211 to connect with local resources and the Wisconsin Addiction Recovery Helpline



## Find support

Conversations about substance use can be difficult. Just remember, you're not alone. There are many different resources available for people who live with or are affected by substance use. Just talking to someone who understands can help.

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