

Talking to Teens about Substance Abuse

Joint Project between NYSAFP and Center of Substance Abuse Prevention

Substance abuse, including alcohol, is the number one cause of death of teens and young adults and underlies many other problems, including accidents, violence, and unplanned, unprotected sex with all of its consequences.

Teenagers may not listen to most adults, but many will listen to their physician, especially if their physician shows interest, is non judgmental, promises confidentiality, and provides factual information.

USE FREE MATERIALS AND SAVE TIME

The Center of Substance Abuse Prevention has many informational pamphlets which can be ordered free and given to selected patients. The pamphlets are not a substitute for talking with teens, but add to the visit and can save much time for the physicians.

ASK: Use a standard screening instrument (GAPS) www.ama-assn.org - search for adolescent clinical preventive services or download from this NYSAFP website.

Have them fill it out away from their parents. Let teens know that all their answers are confidential unless their life is in imminent danger

or ask:

- Do you or any of your friends use tobacco?
- Do you or any of your friends ever smoke pot?
- Do you or any of your friends get high with alcohol or drugs?
- Have you ever been in a car when the driver had been drinking or had used drugs?
- Is there anyone in your family whose use of alcohol or drugs worries you?

IF THEY ARE NOT USING

Reinforce their nonuse, and offer materials.

IF THEY INDICATE THEIR FRIENDS USE BUT SAY THEY DO NOT PERSONALLY USE:

Consider asking: (these are only ideas, go with the flow)

- Why don't you use?
- Do you think using this could become a problem for some teens?
- Have you every tried using it?
- What was it like?
- Do you think you might use it again?
- WOULD YOU LIKE SOME INFORMATION ON ----- FOR YOURSELF OR YOUR FRIENDS?

HOW TO USE INFORMATION

1. To reinforce nonuse. Ask non using teens if they would like a pamphlet
2. For those who are not sure, offer them a pamphlet and ask them to read it and let you know what they think about it at their next visit.
3. Leave selected pamphlets in the waiting room area.
4. Let teens know that you are concerned about patients who are hurt by drugs and alcohol. Let them know that you are available if they have questions, want information in the future, or want to talk with you or your staff.

FOR THOSE WHO FREELY ADMIT THEY USE

They may need more than material.

DETERMINE:

- How often and how much do they use
- How do they feel about their usage
- Have the substances caused any problems for them
- Are their underlying problems that might contribute

Often teens use drugs and alcohol because of depression, anxiety, or post traumatic stress syndrome due to physical or sexual abuse. These teens are crying for help and will often respond to mental health referral.

IS THE PROBLEM: LACK OF INFORMATION, THEIR FRIENDS, UNDERLYING MENTAL ILLNESS, A DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY, PAST PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL TRAUMA OR PLAIN ACTING OUT?

Are they experimenting? using? abusing? addicted?

Let them know you care. Offer information and referral if needed. If they are not ready, offer to see them back and continue the conversation.