



Care Conversations Around Substance Use For Community Healthcare Workers

Talking about Substance Use as part of your role as a Community Healthcare Worker can be an important part of helping participants with their overall health and wellbeing and is a form of prevention. The use of Alcohol, Marijuana, Opioids, Stimulants and other substances can have a profound impact on someone's health. Here are some important steps to having these conversations.

1 Ensure that you feel comfortable talking about substance use with participants. This might include examining your own bias or taking additional training to become more familiar with the basics of how substance use might impact someone's health.

2 CHECKING IN WITH THE PARTICIPANTS ABOUT THEIR USE OF SUBSTANCES

This can be done through formal service provision such as the inclusion of SBIRT or other screening protocols.

3 YOU CAN USE THE EXAMPLES BELOW TO HELP WITH THIS CONVERSATION

"Thanks for taking a little time to talk today. I like to start by just checking in—how have things been going for you lately?"

"I appreciate you sharing that. One thing I like to ask everyone I work with is how they take care of themselves—what helps you get through stress or tough moments?"

"Sometimes people use different things—like substances, routines, or habits—to cope or to feel okay. Would you be open to telling me a little about what that looks like for you?"

If someone reports use, you might say:

"Thank you for being open. There's no judgment here. My role is simply to understand what's working for you and to make sure you have the information and support you want."

"If using substances plays a part in how you manage stress or stay safe, I'd love to talk about that together—only in ways you're comfortable with."

"What feels important for you around your use right now?"

"What do you feel you get from using? What does it help with most?"

"Are there times when using feels safer or riskier for you?"

"Has anything changed recently in how or why you're using?"

"What kind of support would feel helpful for you around this—if any?"

4 Once you have brought up the conversation, you can give the SPI General handout card, Substance Awareness Tools, or any other resources that you might have on any substance that the person is using.

You can also talk with the person about any appropriate community resources or interventions that you might help or support the person.

Every time you open these conversations, there is the opportunity to impact someone's health in a positive way!

