



Care Conversations Around Substance Use For those Working In Criminal Justice

Talking about Substance Use as part of your role as someone working in criminal justice can be an important part of helping participants with their overall health and status in the legal system 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 and legal standing. 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, mental wellbeing, or legal status.

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.
- It is important to cover confidentiality and what you are required to report and to whom before exploring this topic further. If people are facing punitive actions if they disclose use, it makes sense that they may be hesitant to talk to you about this.

3

YOU CAN USE THE EXAMPLES BELOW TO HELP WITH THIS CONVERSATION

"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 upfront. My goal isn't to judge you, it's to make sure you have the information and support you need to be successful. If substance use plays a role in your stress or safety, we can explore that together, at a pace that works for you."

You could go on to ask:

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

"What don't you like about using?"

"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 Care, Substance Awareness Tools handout, 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 might help the person.

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



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