

How to Talk to a Friend or Family Member about Drugs

Source: [Government of Canada](#)

It can be hard to start a conversation with someone you love about their drug use but it's important. Drug use can have negative effects on someone's life. Friends and family are an important support system for someone who is looking for help.

Signs to look for

It can be hard to tell if someone's drug use is problematic. There are, however, some key signs to look for. Watch to see if your friend or family member is:

- Using drugs first thing in the morning, or while at school or work
- Missing work or school
- Getting lower grades or marks at school
- Losing interest in activities they used to enjoy
- Spending money on drugs
- Finding it takes more drugs to get high
- Trying new types of drugs, or mixing drugs together, to get a more intense high
- Taking risks to get and use drugs, like using alone

You may also notice that your friend or family member's personality changes when they use drugs. They might:

- Isolate themselves from friends and family members
- Have extreme changes in behaviours and mood, such as:
 - Argue and fight more with family and friends
 - Seem sad, angry or anxious whenever they are not using drugs
- Turn to drugs to deal with all their problems
- Have trouble remembering things or staying alert
- Have trouble with concentration, memory and the ability to think and make decisions
- Stop hanging out with friends who do not use drugs
- Choose new activities and friends based on using drugs

How to talk to someone about drug use

Sometimes people may not realize how harmful their drug use has become. Recognizing that they have a problem is the first step to dealing with it. It is much easier to deal with problematic drug use if you handle it early. The longer people wait, the harder the problem may be to address.

Start the conversation with your friend or family member

Starting the conversation can be tough, but there are constructive ways you can show you care. Be aware that the conversation might bring out some strong emotions and may not go as you expect. Know that it is okay and it will still show your friend or family member that you care.

Before you start a conversation, [know the facts about drugs](#) and their effects. This can help you frame the conversation and relate to the person.

When talking:

- **Show concern.** Tell them you are worried because you love them, and want the best for them.
- **Listen.** There may be some underlying reasons for why they're using drugs, like mental health problems such as depression, or to cope with previous or ongoing trauma or violence. Listen for these potential issues and validate and acknowledge their experiences without probing them. It may help inform the type of help you encourage your friend or family member to seek.
- **Be patient.** A tough conversation like drug use can make someone angry or defensive. Don't rush the conversation. If you need to come back to it another day, do so.
- **Keep an open dialogue.** Tell them you are there for them, and that they can talk to you anytime.
- **Don't stigmatize.** Be aware of the [language you use](#) when talking to someone about drugs. Be compassionate and open in the way you talk about it so that the person feels understood and accepted. If someone feels they are being treated unkindly, or judged, they are less likely to seek help.
- **Make a list of the good things in their life.** Sometimes people can lose sight of the things they do have in their life and their personal strengths. Remind them that there are friends, family members, groups, activities and other things that make getting help worthwhile. Recognize their strengths and their ability to overcome this.

How to guide someone to get help

Substance use disorder is a medical condition that requires help from health professionals.

In addition to you being a supportive friend or family member, there are [resources in your community](#) that can help.

Encourage your friend to call, visit or read information online from [national or local organizations](#). You can even offer to go with them as support if they are nervous to go alone. Don't feel the need to take on all of your friend's or family member's problems. It's important to protect your mental and emotional wellbeing when dealing with serious issues.

Resources for family and friends

Before you can help someone else, you need to take care of yourself. Helping someone can be mentally, physically and emotionally draining. Be hopeful, don't give up. Seek help and support.

There are online resources available, as well as [national and local organizations](#) that can help you help a friend or family member in need.

The [Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction](#) has up-to-date information about drugs in Canada that can help inform conversations you may have.