

Talking to a Friend about their Substance Use

Signs and Symptoms of Substance Misuse

- Uncharacteristic self-isolation
- Loss of interest in activities
- Become loud, angry, and violent OR silent and reclusive
- Really sad or tired
- Often in a bad mood
- Irregular sleep schedule
- Missing work, appointments, class, or meetings
- Talking very quickly and/or saying things that don't make sense
- Quick changes in mood
- More secretive than normal

Remember:

- Speaking up when you notice dangerous behavior means you care for your friend and their wellbeing
- While this can be daunting to bring up, ultimately it is just a conversation between friends
- Many individuals who have recovered from substance use say conversations with friends led them to get help
- You are not alone



RESOURCES

For mental & physical health, visit: habif.wustl.edu

For Alcohol and Other Drug specific help or to set up a meeting, email: riskreduction@wustl.edu

For WashU Recovery Group questions, email: recovery@wustl.edu

To dispose of prescription drugs safely: Use the drop box located in WUPD

For peer counseling, visit: unclejoe.wustl.edu

For more resources, visit: students.wustl.edu/alcohol-other-drug-resources/

When talking to your friend...

Do

- Remind them how much they mean to you
- Have specific examples of their behaviors that concern you
- Share how these behaviors affect you and the friendship and how you are feeling
- Use "I" statements
- Focus on their behaviors and actions, not their character or them as a person
- Be patient; change may not come from just one conversation
- Take care of yourself
- Recognize your own limits

Dont

- Engage in risky behaviors with them
- Blame or lecture
- Have the conversation when either of you are emotional or very activated (e.g. under the influence or especially stressed)
- Preach or give advice
- Label them with words like "addict" or "alcoholic"
- Argue if they are not receptive to the conversation
- Give up on them

What if...

They get mad at me? Try not to take it personally. Just as it is hard to tell a friend you're worried, it is hard to hear that a friend is worried about you.

They threaten not to be my friend anymore? Someone who is dealing with substance use may lash out at those who try to help. Try to remember that you are doing the right thing for your friend.

They assure me they don't have a problem? Try sharing how your friend's substance use affects you. Ultimately, recognize your friend's autonomy and capability to know what is best for them.

They tell me they are just having fun? Suggest doing something new as a means to have fun, and discuss why your friend thinks they need to use substances in order to have fun.

I can't take their behaviors anymore? Take care of yourself and seek resources to stay healthy! Use mental health services or meet with a risk reduction counselor to discuss how the situation affects you.