

# 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](http://habif.wustl.edu)

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

For WashU Recovery Group questions, email: [recovery@wustl.edu](mailto:recovery@wustl.edu)

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

For peer counseling, visit: [unclejoe.wustl.edu](http://unclejoe.wustl.edu)

For more resources, visit: [students.wustl.edu/alcohol-other-drug-resources/](http://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.