

# How to Talk About Substance Use

## What the Research Says:

- TALKING ABOUT SUBSTANCES DOES NOT INCREASE USE – WHEN FRAMED SUPPORTIVELY, IT ACTUALLY DELAYS ONSET.
- AVOIDING THE TOPIC CAN LEAVE STUDENTS VULNERABLE TO MISINFORMATION, PEER MYTHS, OR UNSAFE EXPERIMENTATION.
- STUDENTS ALREADY KNOW MORE THAN WE THINK. YOUR VOICE BRINGS CLARITY AND SAFETY.

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## Self-Check Before You Talk

- AM I OPEN TO LISTENING, NOT JUST INFORMING?
- CAN I SPEAK WITHOUT JUDGMENT, EVEN IF THE STUDENT DISCLOSES USE?
- DO I UNDERSTAND THIS STUDENT'S DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE AND RISKS?

*If any are a “no,” pause – and seek support or resources before diving in.*

The logo for 'Underrated Superhero' features the word 'Underrated' in a black, sans-serif font with a small orange flame icon to its right. Below it, the word 'Superhero' is written in a black, sans-serif font with a small red flame icon to its left. The entire logo is set against a yellow-to-orange gradient background.

Scan the QR code for more resources pertaining to prevention, interventions, and treatment.



## Age-Appropriate Entry Points

AGE/GRADE	OPENING PHRASE	WHY IT WORKS
ELEMENTARY	“SOME THINGS WE PUT IN OUR BODIES HELP US FEEL GOOD – BUT OTHERS CAN BE HARMFUL. DO YOU KNOW ANY EXAMPLES?”	INVITES A CURIOSITY-BASED CONVO
MIDDLE SCHOOL	“YOU MAY HEAR STUFF AT SCHOOL OR ONLINE ABOUT VAPING OR PILLS. WANT TO CHECK WHAT’S TRUE?”	OPENS THE DOOR TO MYTH-BUSTING
HIGH SCHOOL	“IF A FRIEND WAS USING SOMETHING RISKY, WHAT WOULD YOU DO? WANT TO TALK THROUGH IT?”	CENTERS PEER INFLUENCE AND SAFETY

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### Tips to Keep It Safe

- AVOID SCARE TACTICS. THEY BACKFIRE. FOCUS ON HONEST INFO AND SAFETY STRATEGIES.
- VALIDATE CURIOSITY. IT’S NORMAL. TURN IT INTO A LEARNING MOMENT.
- LEAVE ROOM FOR SILENCE. DON’T RUSH DISCLOSURES OR EXPECT AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE.
- KEEP THE DOOR OPEN. SAY: “IF YOU EVER WANT TO TALK ABOUT THIS AGAIN, I’M HERE.”

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### Remember:

BRINGING IT UP ISN’T THE DANGER.  
NOT BRINGING IT UP MIGHT BE.