

BUILDING CONNECTIONS: TIPS FOR CARING ADULTS

CONNECTION: STRONG RELATIONSHIPS PREVENT SUBSTANCE MISUSE

We all want the best for the young people in our lives. We want them to be safe, healthy, and equipped to be all they want to be. We worry that substance use and mental health challenges might get in the way of those successes. Thankfully, there are steps we can take to support adolescents, promote mental health, and help them avoid the risks of substance use. Taking the time to really connect with young people at home, school, and in the community makes all the difference.

CONNECTION AT HOME

Love unconditionally. Children who feel loved, understood, recognized and supported *for who they are* (not who we want them to be) report high levels of family connectedness.

Keep positive communication open. By listening and being present and open we can encourage connectedness. Ask open ended questions, listen to their response, avoid reaction and judgement to make a connection. See Tips for Talking.

Validate their feelings. You don't have to agree and you may feel the urge to "correct" their thinking or feeling. Instead, try to listen to understand how they are feeling and offer hope.

Communicate clear, fair and consistent expectations for their behavior, so they know where they stand. Let them know you are proud of them when they meet the expectations.

Use age appropriate supervision and monitoring of who they are with, what they are doing, where they are, and when they will be back, delivered in a warm and supportive way. Be involved in their life and also give them space to develop their identity and independence.

Connect them with experiences that will build life skills and social competencies and support them as they learn. Help them pursue their interest in acting, car mechanics, or video game design. Help them figure out how to apologize to a friend for something they did. Or ask a teacher for help. They are learning to communicate, resolve conflicts, regulate their emotions, and manage their time and schedules.

Talk about substance use and healthy relationships, informed with accurate information and let them know what your expectations are.

Teach them how to resist negative peer pressure. It isn't enough to think that they can just "say no". Role playing scenarios, practicing ways to say "no thanks" to a good friend's offer of a substance without worrying about damaging that relationship is important. And difficult. Talking with young people about these potentially difficult situations, with open nonjudgmental conversations, will help them feel safe and confident to resist peer pressure.

Visit The Partnership @drugfreeNH to:

- Explore engaging and evidence-based prevention resources on the Partnership @drugfreeNH.org where you'll discover ways to prevent an overdose emergency and learn tips, tools and talking points for starting conversations with your adolescent.
- Listen to how local experts across NH are making a difference in the podcast series Power of Prevention. These experts share what they are doing to help young people and others avoid problematic substance use, promote resilience and wellbeing and connect to local resources.
- Browse the Spotlight Factsheets series that address the concerns, trends and issues on various substances, understand how they impact NH and learn how to talk to young people about avoiding them.
- Watch our video series designed to raise awareness about prevention and show you how to get involved. Use the watch guides to further the conversation in your community about prevention and wellness.
- Connect with a community of prevention minded people on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or YouTube. Stay up-to-date on the latest events, campaigns and resources.
- Inform yourself on the latest prevention topics through our virtual and in-person learning events.
- Join [The Partnership @drugfreeNH](#) where you can influence the prevention priorities that are addressed in NH! Together we collaborate, communicate and coordinate with partners working in community coalitions, family support and strengthening services, schools, court diversion, health care and mental health services.

CONNECTION AT SCHOOL AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Build positive connections with other adults.

It is important that young people have other caring adults in their lives. The support and caring that youth receive from adults outside their family - teachers, coaches, friends' parents- not only provides a safe and trusted adult to go to in times of need, but also provides the mentoring, recognition, and positive sense of self that helps boost a young person's wellbeing.

Encourage positive peer role models and illustrate healthy community norms

It is important for young people to have positive peer role models and live in a community with healthy norms. As adults, we can frame this by helping young people understand the reality that most young people do not engage in substance use. As adults, it is also important to remember this. For example, 73% of NH high schools students **did not** currently drink alcohol, according to the [2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#). 61% of NH high school students had **never** tried marijuana and 73.9% **did not** currently smoke marijuana. Most young people are not using alcohol or marijuana and it is important to support our young people to continue not to use.

Facilitate participation in extracurricular activities. Being part of an activity that increases connection (with peers, school, community, or family) is an important protective factor. It opens up opportunities, introduces young people to other caring adults, keeps them supervised and occupied, and increases self-efficacy and self-esteem. Ultimately, we want to help young people find their "sparks"- interests and passions that light a fire in their lives and express the essence of who they are and what they offer the world.¹ When caring adults support and encourage young people to try different activities and learn new things during adolescence, we help them thrive.

Build connections to school and a caring school climate. Whether youth feel that their school has a caring, supportive, and encouraging environment impacts many things in their lives - attendance, delinquency, substance use, and mental health. School connectedness is impacted by the school climate: feeling safe and "part of" school, finding belonging (clubs and activities), being treated fairly by teachers, and feeling close to students and adults at school.

Use a trauma-informed classroom approach. Provide positive experiences for all kids. Offer a variety of extracurricular activities so that all students can be part of the school community.

Boost Connection to Community. Feeling safe, supported, and connected to one's community adds to the scaffolding of all the other protective factors. We nurture these feelings by creating traditions and organizing healthy community events.

1 Scales, P.C., Benson, P.L. & Roehlkepartain, E.C. Adolescent Thriving: The Role of Sparks, Relationships, and Empowerment. *J Youth Adolescence* 40, 263-277 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9578-6>



Extension



THE
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