



## You, your teen, and **Substance Use**

A guide to help you talk to your teen about alcohol, cannabis, and prescription pain medications.



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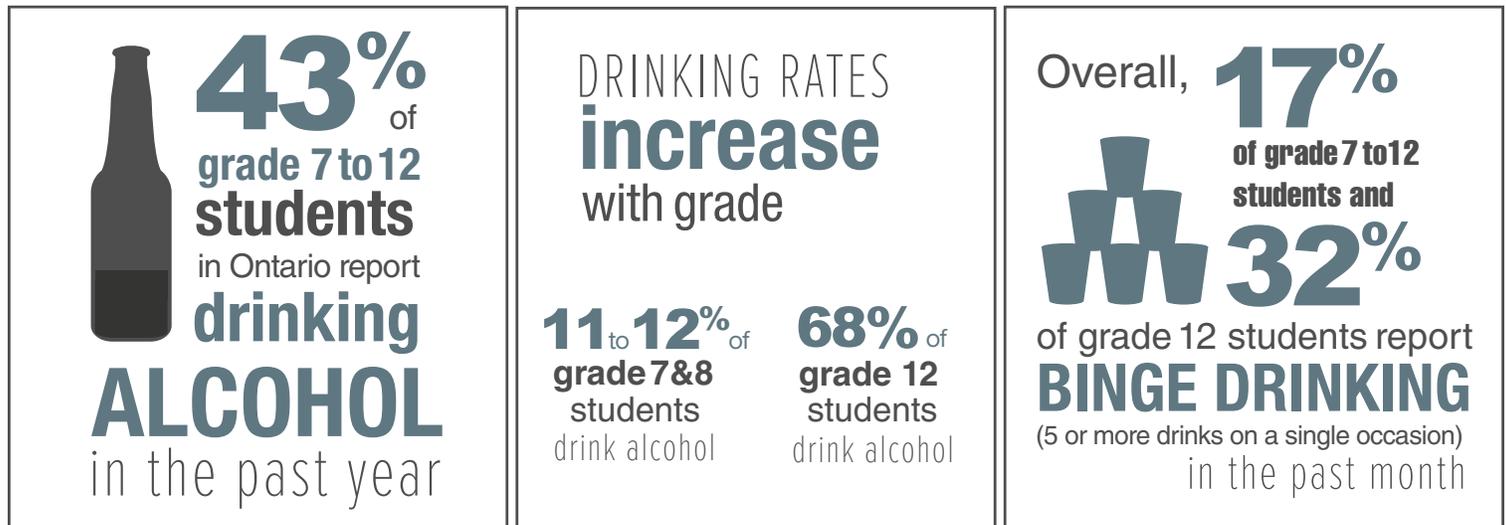
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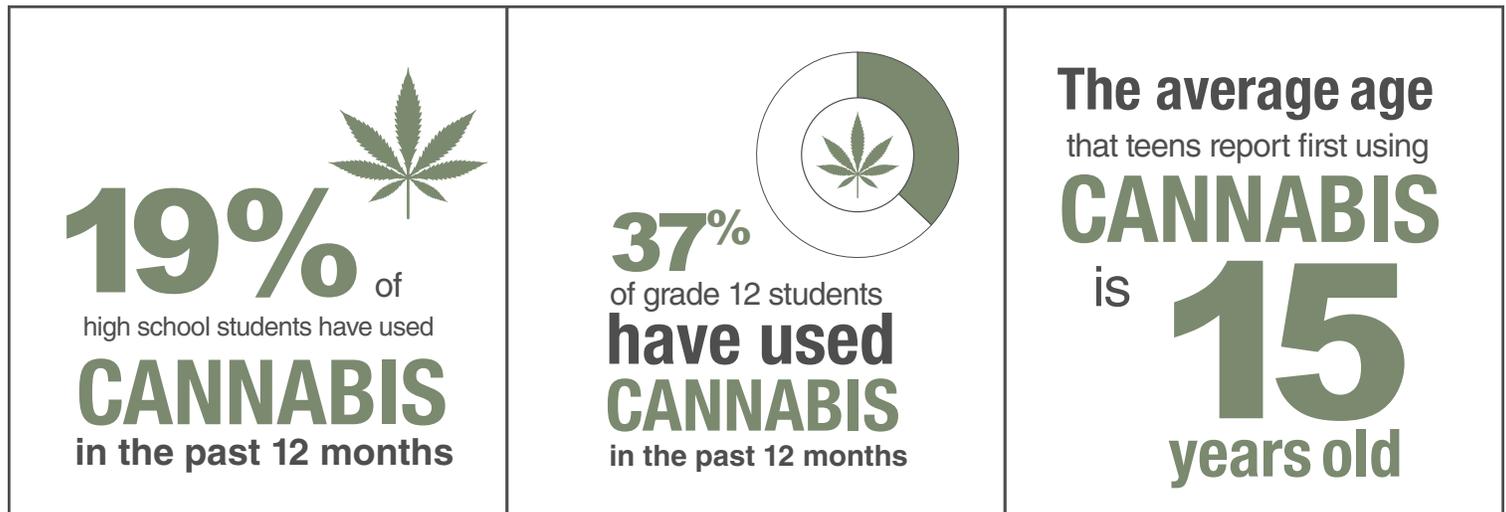
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## Three commonly used substances by teens

### Alcohol



### Cannabis



### Non-medical use of prescription pain medication



Male and female students are equally likely to use alcohol, cannabis, or non-medical prescription pain medications.



## Reasons why teens use substances

Teens are at a stage in their life where they are finding out who they are and what they value. They want to do things on their own and they may take risks. Here are a few reasons why teens may use substances:

**Thrill seeking**

**Having a positive view of a substance**

**To have fun in social settings**

**Social influences from peers and media**

**Having access to substances**

Teens report that the number one place they access alcohol and prescription pain medications is from their home or family.

**To cope with stress or bad feelings**



## Health risks and other consequences of substance use

**Problems in school** (e.g., lower grades, skipping class)

**Social and legal problems** (e.g., fighting, arrest for impaired driving)

**Injuries** (e.g., burns, falls, drowning, car crashes)

**Higher risk-taking** (e.g., unwanted, unplanned, and unprotected sexual activity)

**Mental health problems**

**Addiction or dependence**

**Overdose**

**Higher risk of cancer**



## Common misconceptions about substances

### Alcohol:

**Myth:** Everyone is drinking.

**Fact:** About 57% of grade 7 to 12 students in Ontario report not drinking at all in the past year.

### Cannabis:

**Myth:** It's natural and so it is harmless.

**Fact:** Early and regular cannabis use can affect the developing brain and it is related to mental health problems.

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**Myth:** Everyone is using it.

**Fact:** Approximately 81% of youth (grade 7 to 12) report not using cannabis.

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**Myth:** Cannabis helps you focus.

**Fact:** Regular cannabis use impairs thinking, attention, and memory.

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**Myth:** Cannabis makes you a better driver; it's safer than driving after drinking alcohol.

**Fact:** Cannabis use impairs driving skills and is associated with an increased risk of collisions.

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**Myth:** Cannabis is not addictive.

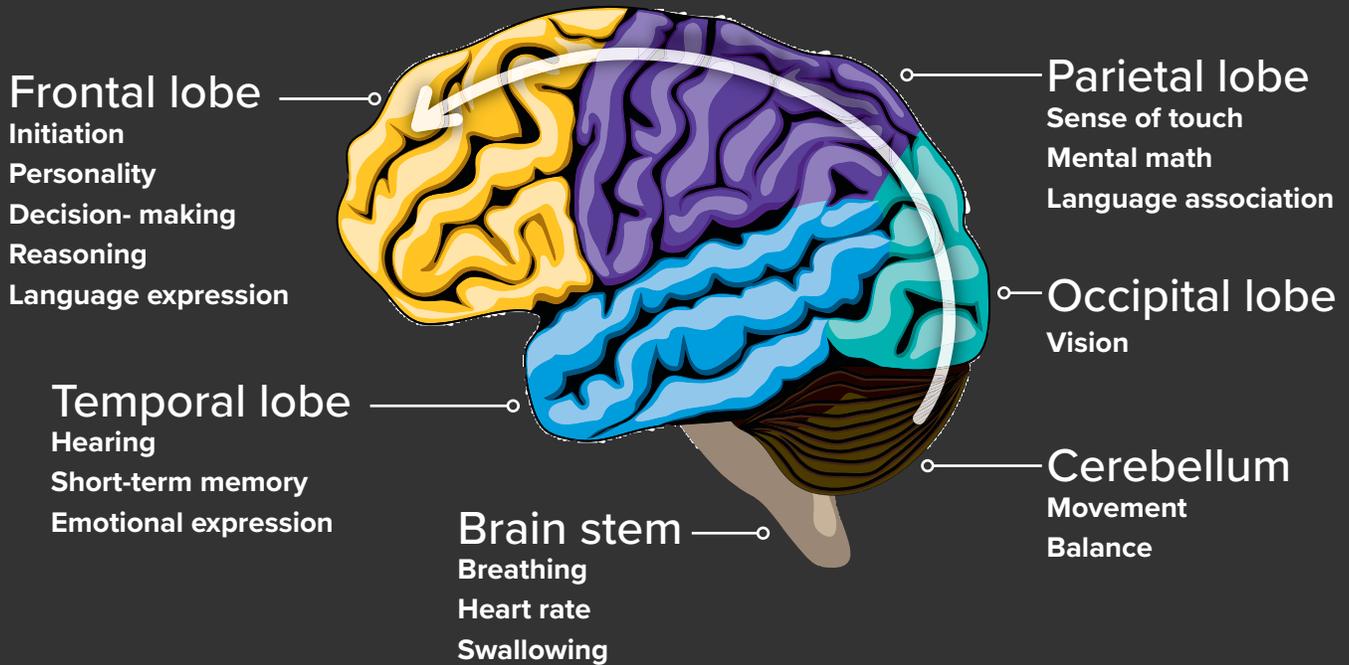
**Fact:** One in six adolescents who use cannabis will develop a cannabis use disorder.

### Non-medical use of prescription pain medications:

**Myth:** They are safer than street drugs because they are prescribed by a doctor.

**Fact:** A doctor prescribes these medications to people for a specific purpose; it can harm your health if you take any medications that are not prescribed to you. It is also illegal.

## Direction the brain matures



## How substances harm the developing brain

A person's brain continues to develop until about age 25. The part of the brain that is the last to develop is the frontal lobe; this part of the brain deals with emotions, concentration, impulse control, planning, and decision making. Use of substances during the teen years and early 20's can cause long-term damage to the frontal lobe of the brain. This can cause problems in adulthood with:

- ✓ decision making,
- ✓ problem solving,
- ✓ dealing with emotions, and
- ✓ memory.



## Trends and media influence

### Mixing substances:

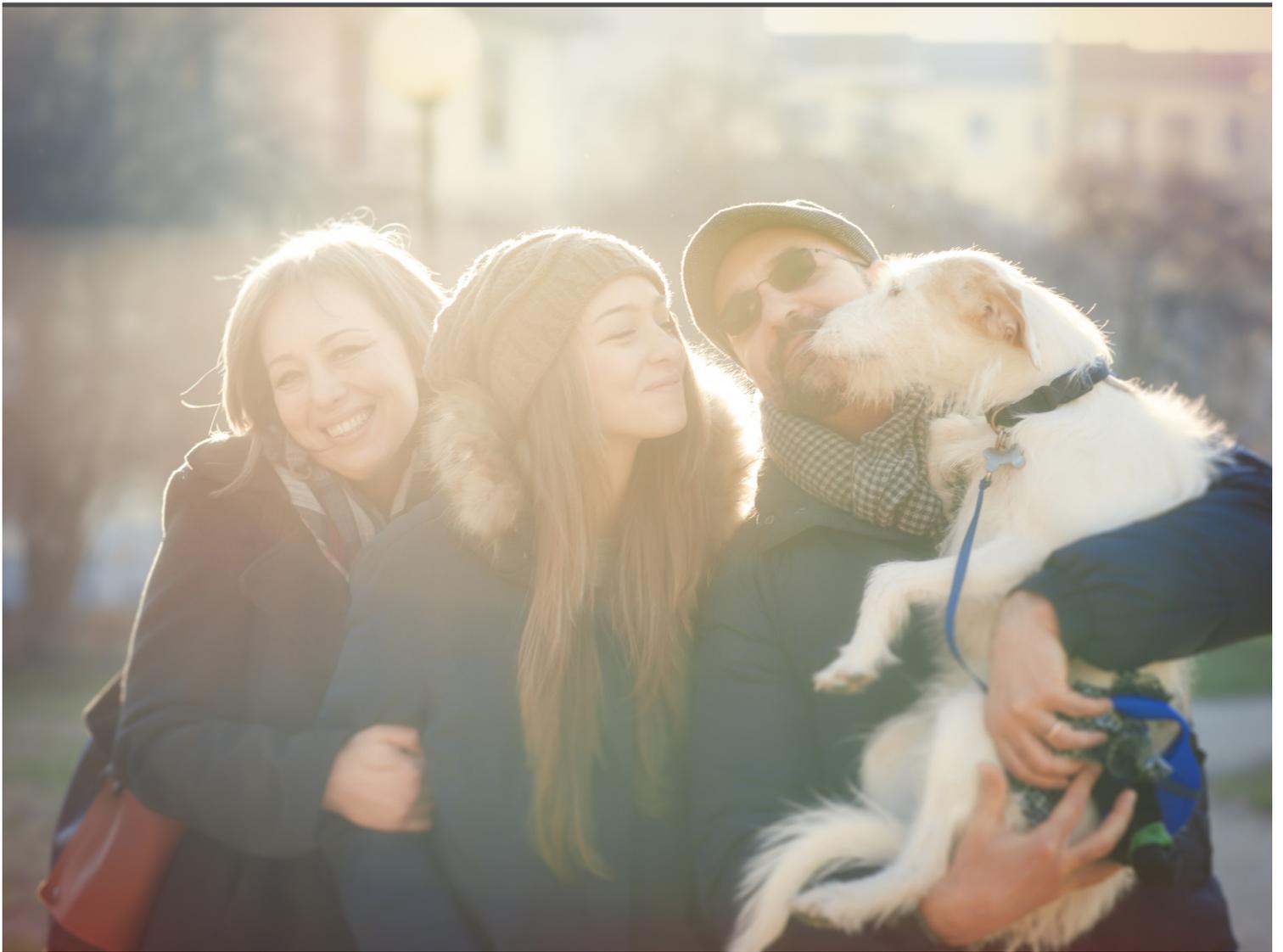
There are times when teens mix energy drinks with alcohol. This is dangerous because the stimulating effects of the caffeine mask the effects of alcohol and may cause someone to drink more alcohol. This puts them at risk for alcohol poisoning.

Mixing prescription pain medications or illicit opioids with alcohol or other drugs greatly increases the risk of an overdose.

### Media and availability:

The alcohol industry has a big impact on a teen's perceptions towards alcohol. Research shows that the more alcohol advertisements youth are exposed to, the younger they are when they start drinking. For those who are already drinking alcohol, advertising leads them to drink more.

There is also evidence that making alcohol more available leads to increased levels of drinking. Alcohol is now available in grocery stores, which may lead to increases in alcohol use over time.





## What parents can do

As a parent, you play a key role in shaping your teen's attitudes regarding substances. Although it may not always seem like it, you affect the decisions your teen makes. Teens say their parents influence their decisions. Try to be open, supportive, and involved.

There are six key strategies you can use to help delay or prevent your teen's use of substances:

**Be in the know**

**Communicate with your child**

**Set clear expectations**

**Be a positive role model**

**Be engaged**

**Know the law**



## Be in the know

If teens are going to use substances, they tend to do it when adults are not around. Know who your teen is with, what they are doing, and where they are.

### Try to avoid:

**Being overly strict;** this can cause your teen to ignore the rules.

**Snooping** through your teen's room and belongings.

## Try these tips:

**Agree on a curfew.**

**Ask** whether an adult will be home when your teen is going to a friend's house.

**Have your teen check-in** throughout the night.

**Know** how your teen is getting home.

**Get to know** your teen's friends and their parents.

**Educate** your teen on the responsible use of social media.

**Balance** your teen's need for privacy with monitoring and adjust as needed.

**Talk to your teen** about what qualities to look for in a friend (e.g., honesty, kindness, and respect).

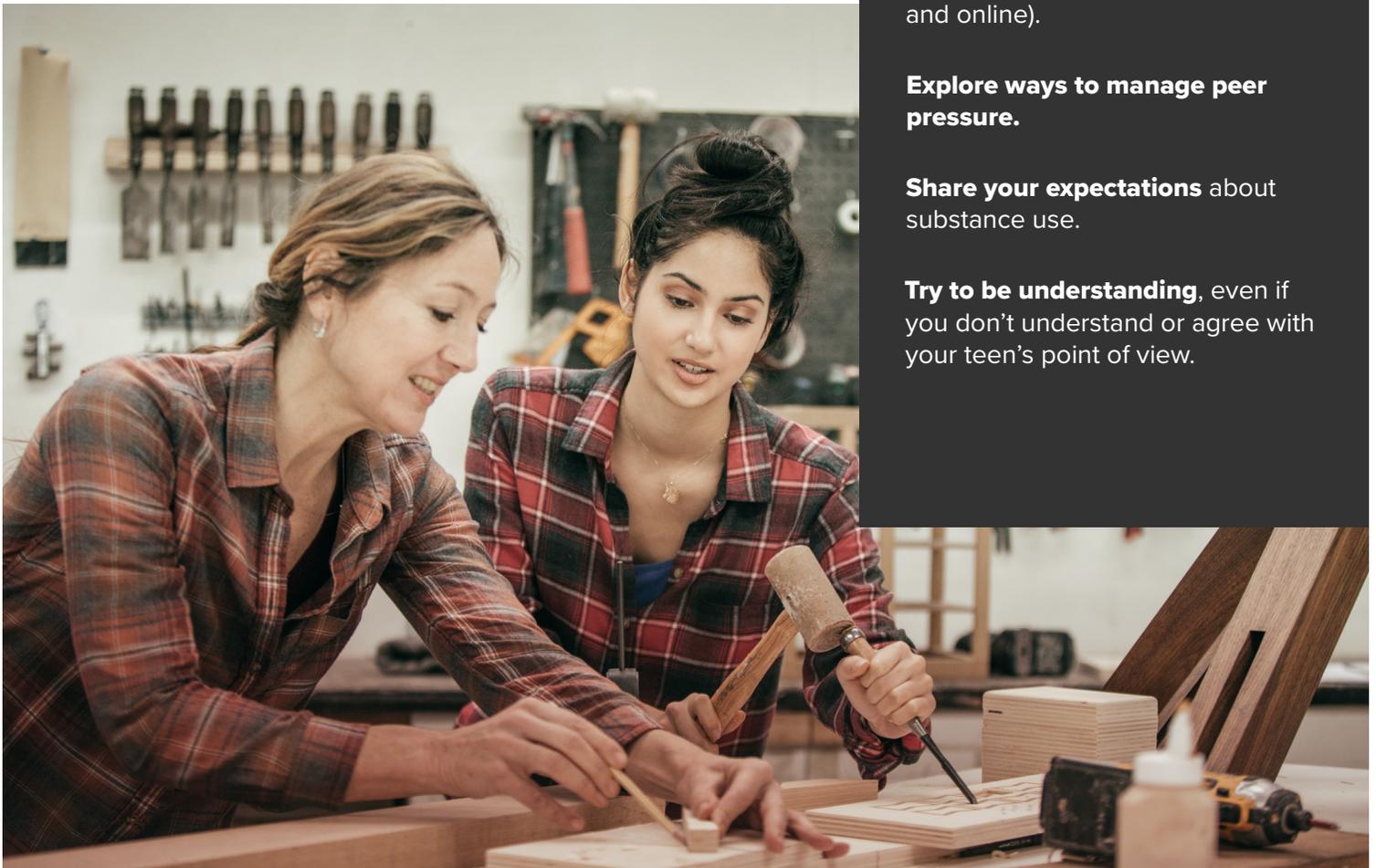
## Communicate with your child

Ongoing communication with your teen allows them to share their interests and areas of concern with you. Research suggests regular communication with your teen is linked to delayed substance use.

### Try to avoid:

**Being confrontational;** take emotion out of the conversation.

**Interrupting;** listen to what your teen has to say.



### Try these tips:

**Talk early and often with your teen.**

**Talk with your teen about substances;** ask open ended questions and be aware of your body language and tone of voice.

**Emphasize short-term risks** associated with substance misuse; these are of greater concern to youth.

**Discuss perceptions of substances;** encourage your teen to talk about their thoughts on substances and let them know not all teens are using them.

**Talk about how substances** are portrayed and often glamorized in the media (e.g., movies, television, and online).

**Explore ways to manage peer pressure.**

**Share your expectations** about substance use.

**Try to be understanding,** even if you don't understand or agree with your teen's point of view.

## Set clear expectations

Setting clear expectations helps create an environment where rules are respected.

## Try these tips:

**Set rules** around substance use before a teen is exposed to a situation potentially involving substances.

**Work together** in the development of rules and consequences. Base rules and consequences on the age and maturity of your teen.

**Create a list** of appropriate consequences with your teen (e.g., less screen time on a TV, tablet, or phone, no friends over for a specific amount of time).

**Ensure** you and your teen have a clear understanding of what is expected.

**Remain calm** when enforcing consequences, if rules are broken.

**Be consistent** and follow through right away with consequences.

**Get help** if your teen consistently breaks the rules. Seek support from a trusted friend, family member, counsellor, or family physician.





## Be a positive role model

Teens are watching what you do as a parent and are influenced by your behaviours. Think about your own opinions on the use of substances and what messages they are sending your teen.

### Try to avoid:

**Getting drunk or high** in front of your teen.

**Using substances** to cope with stress.

**Making statements** after a stressful day such as “I need a drink”.

### Try these tips:

**Show your teen** that you and others can have a good time without substances.

**When hosting** a gathering, provide non-alcoholic drink options.

**Let your family** and close friends know about the values you are teaching your teen and ask them to model responsible substance use.

**Model healthy stress management** strategies such as going for a walk after a busy day.

**Limit your use** of alcohol and avoid illicit drugs.

## Be engaged

A supportive parent-teen relationship characterized by closeness and caring can help delay when youth first try substances.



## Try these tips:

**Support your teen** to find their passions and interests.

**Be involved.** Participate in activities that interest your teen.

**Make time for your teen.** Spend quality one-on-one time together when possible.

**Remind your teen often that you love them.** Praise them for making good choices and for their efforts and achievements.

**Encourage your teen** to discuss problems and concerns with you.



## Know the law

In Ontario, it is illegal to drink alcohol under the age of 19.

It is also illegal to possess prescription pain medications that are not prescribed for you. Once cannabis is legalized, there will be restrictions on its use and access, including age.

## Try these tips:

**Establish consistent rules** and messages about underage drinking of alcohol in your home, as well as use of other illegal substances.

**Discuss with your teen your responsibility as a parent** to protect them from alcohol-related harm and to follow the law about alcohol and other substances.

**Share with your teen that parents are legally responsible** for what goes on in the home, even if they don't know about it, and even if they are not home.

**Inform your teen** that people under 19 years of age can be charged for possessing, having used or attempting to buy alcohol.

**Inform your teen** that it is illegal to possess prescription pain medication that is not prescribed for him or her.

**Inform your teen** that once cannabis is legalized, there will be restrictions on its use and access, including age.

**Keep your medications in a locked cupboard** and return any expired medications to a pharmacy for safe disposal.



## **Need more information or support?**

### Helpful websites:

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse [www.ccsa.ca](http://www.ccsa.ca)  
Parent Action on Drugs [www.parentactionondrugs.org](http://www.parentactionondrugs.org)  
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health [www.camh.ca](http://www.camh.ca)  
KFL&A Public Health [www.kflaph.ca](http://www.kflaph.ca)

### Community supports:

Addiction and Mental Health Services KFL&A 613-544-4229  
Youth Diversion 613-548-4535  
Street Health Centre 613-549-1440  
Family and Children Services 1-855-445-3227  
Pathways for Children and Youth 613-546-8535  
Kingston Youth Services 613-531-3779

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