

How to Talk About Substance Use with Clients During COVID-19

Talking with your clients about substance use right now is important. This is because you might be the only one to ask them about what is happening around their substance use. We as caring health and helping professionals can create an opportunity for clients to talk if they have concerns about their substance use, help them explore how it helps and impedes their life, and if they are concerned, what might be helpful to them. The purpose is not to attempt to provide the services of a substance use specialist, but instead to help your client talk about things they have been thinking about and make sure they have support if they need it.

You can use the following steps and questions to have this conversation:

Check in With Yourself

Before engaging with the client, check in with yourself. You can ask yourself:

1. How am I feeling?
2. What am I telling myself about this?

Step 1: Introduce

Introduce the concern of increased substance use.

- *“There have been reports of increased substance use.”*
- *“In what ways might using substances be helpful?”*
- *“In what ways might using substances be unhelpful?”*

Step 2: Explore

Ask the client about their substance use and concerns with their ability to function.

- *“Tell me about your use.”*
- *“Have you noticed a change?”*
- *“How does the increase in substance use impact your daily functioning?”*
- *“What are your concerns about this?”*

Step 3: Next Steps

Have the client identify one or two things they can do to help themselves.

- *“Who might you be able to speak to about this?”*
- *“Let’s make a list of some things that might be helpful.”*
- *“What are one or two things that you could do from this list?”*

