



4 - COMMUNICATING ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE/MISUSE

Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To state the core communication skills To explore how communication skills can be transferred to communicate with young people and/or their parents/carers in relation to substance misuse
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Preparation:	Prepare flipchart with questions to consider Photocopy handouts for participants
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Can be used with	√ Staff
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Total Time	65 mins
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METHOD	TIME	TOOLS
<p>1. Introduction Introduce participants to the outcomes, approach and methods of the exercise.</p>	3 mins	
<p>2. Word Storm Ask participants to imagine what it would be like for a young person or parent/carer to talk to them about substances. Then generate answers to the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What might make it difficult for them to talk to you? What can you do to make it easier for them to talk to you? 	15 mins	Prepared flipchart paper/pens Blue tack
<p>3. Group Exercise Divide the participants into two groups. Ask participants to think about communicating with young people and their parents/carers about substance use/misuse.</p> <p>Ask one group to generate a list of do's and the other to generate a list of don'ts on flipchart.</p> <p>Group feedback by a nominated person.</p>	15 mins 10 mins	



Distribute handout and ask participants to discuss similarities/differences with their responses.	10 mins 2 mins	Prepared handouts
4 Round Robin Ask participants to identify and then list three things that they need to change in order to improve the quality of the communication skills they use with young people, parents/carers in conveying information about substance use/misuse.	10 mins	



Communicating about substance use/misuse Handout

Do's

1. Develop an agreed set of boundaries with the young person/people.
2. Be clear about what you are trying to achieve by talking.
3. Be aware of the differences between interviewing, assessing, giving advice and counselling.
4. Listen carefully to what the person has to say.
5. Keep your focus on the young person rather than the substance use/misuse.
6. Ask open ended rather than closed questions and encourage the young person to talk.
7. Be positive. Warnings are counterproductive.
8. Spend time highlighting positive images of health, alleviating anxiety and promoting self-esteem.
9. Check your facts are correct and that any information given is accurate. The media often exaggerate the risks involved. Ask if you do not understand any of the terms being presented.
10. Keep things in perspective and identify any potential risks. Remember there is no logical or inevitable progression of use from experimentation to dependence or from substance to substance.
11. Watch your language. Using 'right on' language is much less important than being clear about what you mean.
12. Remember that many young people will not give up using substance whatever you say or do. Encouraging less harmful use may be more effective in such situations.
13. Use a comfortable relaxed setting and set time limits for the talking session.
14. Understand that a series of meetings rather than just a one-off session may be required.
15. Keep track of the outcome of your work and refer back to your original aims.

Don'ts

1. Overreact or panic - don't assume that anything drastic has to be said or done.
2. Try to talk in depth to a young person if they are intoxicated.
3. Lose sight of your aims.
4. Be judgmental. Attitudes and values about substance use vary.
5. Expect young people or their parents/carers to share your attitudes or values about substance use/misuse.
6. Use 'right on' street language if you are not completely familiar and comfortable with it.
7. Make blanket generalizations or moralize.
8. Sensationalise or add to anxieties by exaggerating.

(Adapted from James Kay & Julian Cohen)