



— Adolescent Interview Guidelines —

The Setting

A part of any overall interview with an adolescent patient or client involves talking about alcohol and other drugs. This interview should be held in a private setting and without parents present. It is helpful to have related pamphlets prominently displayed, with multiple copies to give away. Pamphlets should include information about alcohol and drug use and other health related behaviors.

Confidentiality

_____ Reassure the patient that your discussion is confidential and that you will not disclose the details of your conversation with parents without the patient's permission unless a serious health risk exists.

Assessing Risk

- _____ Family relationships.
Relationships with parents/step-parents and siblings.
- _____ School performance.
Academic performance, attendance, relationship with teachers, and personal goals.
- _____ Leisure activities.
“What are the things that you like to do when you're not in school?”
- _____ Self-esteem.
“Describe yourself.” “What are your strengths?”
- _____ Other health risk behaviors.
For example, smoking, sexual activity, nicotine, diet.

Bringing up the Topic of Drugs and Alcohol

- _____ Introduce the topic in a nonjudgmental way.
“I know that some kids your age use alcohol, or smoke, or use other drugs.”
- _____ Health context.
Introduce the topic of substance use in the context of concern for the patient's health. “I'd like to know a little bit of what you do in this regard and how you feel about it, because its important to your health.”

Screening for Substance Use Problems (CRAFFT)

- _____ Have you ever ridden in a *C*ar driven by someone (including yourself) who was high or had been using alcohol or drugs?
- _____ Do you drink or use drugs to *R*elax, feel better about yourself, or to fit in?
- _____ Do you ever drink alcohol or use drugs when you are *A*lone?
- _____ Do you or any of your closest *F*riends drink or use drugs?
- _____ Does a close *F*amily member have a problem with alcohol or drug use?
- _____ Have you ever gotten into *T*rouble from drinking or drug use? (e.g. skipping school, bad grades, trouble with the law or parents)
- _____ Does your alcohol or drug use ever make you do something that you would not normally do, like — breaking rules, missing curfew, breaking the law, or having sex with someone?

Two or more positive responses suggests the need for a more extensive evaluation.

For Identified Substance Use Problems. Assess Problem Severity

- _____ Drinking frequency.
“Do you drink regularly: About how often? Everyday? Once or twice a week?”
- _____ Drinking quantity.
“How much did you drink the last time you got drunk? How much do you usually drink? Do you ever drink to pass out? How often do you get drunk.” [Risk of acute problems is related to the frequency of intoxication and activities when intoxicated.]
- _____ Drug use frequency.
“About how often do you use drugs? Every day? Once or twice a week?” Get specifics.
- _____ Setting of use.
“Where do you drink/take drugs?”
Parties only? With friends in cars? Home? School? By yourself at home? At school?
- _____ Dependence.
“Do your social activities usually involve alcohol/drugs? What would happen if you couldn't have any alcohol/drugs?”
- _____ Social consequences.
“What kinds of trouble have you gotten into because of alcohol/drugs? Do your parents suspect that you drink or take drugs?”

For Identified Substance Use Problems. Negotiate Follow-up

- _____ Allow the patient to describe his/her understanding of his/her alcohol and drug use.
“How would you describe your alcohol or drug use?”

“Do you think it has become a problem for you or dangerous to your health?”

- _____ State clearly that the patient has a problem with substance use. Provide concrete health-related and psychosocial evidence.
- _____ Stress the importance of involving others to address the problem.
This includes working with the patient's parents. “I'd like to have your permission to talk to your folks about this. It is important that we involve them because for us to provide the best treatment for this, we need their support.”
- _____ Negotiate for a follow-up appointment.
Ideally with the parents present.
- _____ Assume responsibility for acting as intermediary between the patient and his or her parents.
“At one of our next visits, I can meet with you and your parents and explain this to your folks in a way that they can understand. Then we can all work together to help you.”
- _____ Solicit the patient's verbal agreement to involve parents.
- _____ Solicit patient's agreement to come for follow-up.
- _____ Schedule a follow-up appointment.

For those who have not used alcohol or other drugs. Prevention and Anticipatory Guidance

- _____ Assess exposure.
“Have you ever been in a situation in which you were tempted to try drugs or alcohol?” “Has this happened to your friends?”
- _____ Express concern about health problems and safety related to alcohol and drug use.
- _____ Allow the patient to describe his or her understandings of the problems of alcohol and drug use.
Correct misunderstandings.
- _____ Provide factual information and about alcohol and drug use.
Offer pamphlets.
- _____ Reinforce positive attitudes expressed by the patient regarding avoidance of alcohol and drug use.
- _____ Suggest strategies for avoiding alcohol or drugs, and situations in which the opportunity for use may arise.

For those who do use alcohol and other drugs. Harm Reduction

When there is a history of occasional use or experimentation, as well as more regular use, it is important to address the notion of harm reduction.

A few basic facts about a drug's acute effects can help convey this, e.g., effects on judgment and motor response/reaction time. Addiction potential is another useful piece of information, the line

between "experimentation" and regular and increasing use can be very fine. Tobacco being a prime example.

_____ Education: Danger due to acute effects

Example: "Those who do use alcohol or other drugs, whatever their age or however infrequently, need to recognize that because of these drugs' effects that there are some situations in which use is dangerous or that problems result because the drug effects judgment." Driving, outdoor/leisure activities (such as skiing, or boating), or sexual behavior.

_____ Education: Abuse potential.

Example: "From a medical perspective, drugs can cause problems in different ways. For example, with some drugs, one can very quickly become 'hooked' for example, cigarettes. In other cases the dangers are the result of the drug's immediate effects, the way it changes judgment and behavior. Alcohol is a good example of that."

_____ Recognizing alcohol/substance use emergencies.

Example: "Being the non-drinker or one who is straight in a situation in which others are drinking or using, may result in your being the one who is faced with having to deal with problems that arise from someone else's use."

Intoxication/high BACs...unknown amounts...dangers of putting someone to bed, or letting them 'sleep it off.'

Identifying someone who could be called in an emergency.

_____ Keep the door open.

Identify yourself as someone to whom questions can be addressed.