



CONNECT QUEST

ADULT ALLIES

Parents & Caregivers Guide



connectquest.ca



School
Mental Health
Ontario

Santé mentale
en milieu scolaire
Ontario

Land Acknowledgement

School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON) is based in the City of Hamilton, and is situated on the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Confederacy. This land is covered by the Dish with One Spoon treaty, which calls all nations to share the land with care and respect, now and for future generations.

As treaty partners, we have a duty to uphold Truth and Reconciliation by learning and unlearning the truth about the history of Canada, and through efforts to address the present day impacts of colonization. Reconciliation calls for sustained learning, reflection and action. Identity, culture and community are inextricably linked to mental health and well-being. Authentic Truth and Reconciliation efforts address the impacts of colonialism by supporting practices and policies that amplify the ways of knowing and being of Indigenous communities.

As we continue to live and work on this land, we commit to deepening our understanding of its histories and acting as responsible residents, neighbours, partners and caretakers. We remain dedicated to co-creating and developing mental health resources that foster mentally healthy learning environments informed by, and rooted in Truth and Reconciliation.

Acknowledgement of the Enslavement of Africans, Anti-Black Racism and Black Excellence in Canada

School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON) recognizes the present-day anti-Black racism that persists in schools and society as a legacy of colonial systems and enslavement. We acknowledge that it is our shared responsibility to dismantle anti-Black racism, both individually and institutionally in support of student, family and community wellbeing and mental health.

Enslavement, colonialism, and systemic oppression have deeply shaped the experiences of Black people, including within mental health services and supports in education systems. To address these impacts systems, schools and individuals require a shared commitment to co-creating spaces that foster healing, understanding and belonging that are responsive and relevant to members of the Black community.

Parents and Caregivers Guide

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Definitions	2
Connecting with your child	4
Talking about substance use health, and balanced device use - why it matters	5
Tips for participating in youth-led conversations	7
Featured activities	8
Featured resources	9





Introduction

Connect Quest activities help young people deepen their self-understanding, strengthen connections, and build skills and confidence. With these foundations, they're better equipped to make thoughtful choices about substance use and device use.

As parents and caregivers, you support your child's understanding of topics like substance use and device use. It can be helpful to start by reflecting on your own feelings about substances and devices, as well as your own relationship with them. Learning more about how substances and devices can affect our bodies, minds, and daily lives can help prepare you for discussions with your child.

When you show interest and talk openly, your child is more likely to build the skills they need to make safe, informed choices.





Definitions

Substance use health is a newer term. It means “the full range of positive and negative impacts associated with the use of substances” (CAPSA, 2022). CAPSA’s Substance Use Health Spectrum shows a person’s relationship with substances on a scale, from “no use” to “substance use disorder.” Everyone fits somewhere on this spectrum, and there is always a way for each of us to move toward better health.

Many parents and caregivers don’t feel confident talking about substance use with their child. They may fear that bringing it up might encourage their child to try it or may think they need to use scare tactics to prevent use. In reality, open and honest conversations build trust and safety. The goal is to have thoughtful, caring conversations.

Substance use is varied and serves different purposes. Understanding that some substance use has benefits (can bring relief from pain, can be used ceremonially), but also carries real risks (harms to physical and mental health, unsafe choices) can help you to speak in a non-judgmental, supportive way.

Listen, ask questions, share facts, and be clear about your family’s expectations.

Substances include caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, cannabis and other drugs.





Definitions

Balanced device use is based on being thoughtful. It means using devices in a way that is manageable, meaningful, and mindful. This is called the 3Ms. [mediasmarts.ca](https://www.mediasmarts.ca)

- **Manageable:** You feel in control of your device use. It doesn't interfere with other important activities or responsibilities. You can balance your device use with other things you need, enjoy, or value.
- **Meaningful:** The time you spend on your device feels worthwhile to you. You learn new things, create content, or connect with others in a meaningful way.
- **Mindful:** You make an intentional choice to use your device. You stay present and focused on your activities. You aren't distracted or disconnected.

The 3Ms are for everyone!

Device use refers to screen time used for games, social media and other online interests.



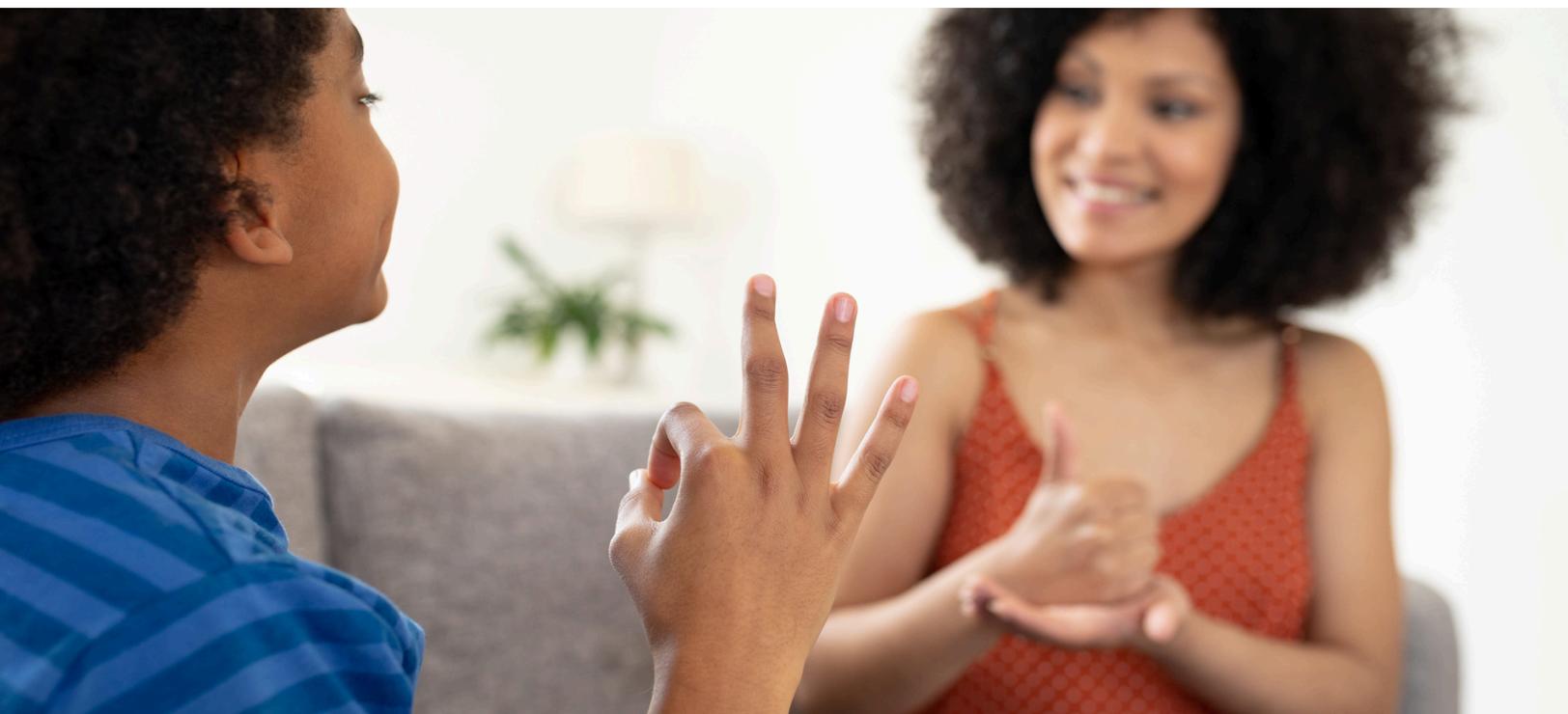


Connecting with your child

The Connect Quest activities can support you in having open conversations with your child. You can choose activities about general health, substance use health and balanced device use.

Ways to support your child:

- **Connect with your child at home.** Use Connect Quest [activities](#) and other [School Mental Health Ontario](#) resources that give your child opportunities to learn about themselves and the world.
- **Create space for your child.** Let them lead a family talk using Connect Quest activities.
- **Continue to strengthen your relationship with your child.** A strong and supportive relationship is key to resilience. It can help your child develop skills needed to navigate substance use and device use later on. It also supports them in making decisions that match their values.
- **Know where to find help.** Local organizations, programs and resources can help your family if a problem develops.





Talking about substance use health and balanced device use – why it matters

Pre-teens and young teens are beginning to make more independent choices. It's a good time to talk about choices that support health and wellness.

1. Start with connection

- Spend regular time together through meals, games, walks, or hobbies.
- Show interest in their music, games, and online activities.
- A strong bond makes it easier to talk about challenging topics.

2. Build knowledge (honest and age-appropriate)

Substance use:

Explain what substances are and how they can affect growing brains and bodies.

- You can learn more about substances by visiting:
 - [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#)
 - [Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction](#)
 - [Kids Help Phone](#)

Devices:

Talk about how too much screen use can affect sleep, concentration and mood.

- Use relatable examples: You might say, "I know that sometimes when I spend too much time on my (personal device), I end up feeling tired and cranky."

3. Encourage critical thinking

- Ask open-ended questions. This shows there isn't one 'right answer' to complex issues.
 - "Why do you think some kids try vaping?"
 - "What do you notice about how you feel after an hour online?"
- Help them think about how advertising and social media can glamorize unhealthy choices.





Talking about substance use health and balanced device use – why it matters

4. Explore coping tools together

- Explore alternatives to screens or substances they can use when stressed or bored. This could mean sports, art, music, journaling, outdoor play, reading, or cooking.
- Teach them to think of feelings like boredom, stress, or loneliness as signals to try a new or familiar activity that they find enhances their sense of wellness.

5. Model healthy balance

- Show moderation with your own screen time and habits.
- Create device-free times, such as during meals or before bed.
- Reflect on your own substance use and device use.
- Share your own healthy coping strategies, such as walking, reading, or talking things out.

6. Keep communication open

- Invite their thoughts with curiosity-based questions like:
 - “What do young people your age think about vaping?”
 - “How does gaming with friends online feel different from hanging out in person?”
- If problems come up, respond with curiosity and problem-solving rather than punishment.

Bottom line:

- Help your child understand why balance matters.
- Support them with healthy alternatives.
- Build and maintain trust so they can come to you with questions or challenges.





Tips for participating in youth-led conversations

Your child may invite you to do activities from the Connect Quest website. Here are some tips for making these moments meaningful:

- Let them shine! Be an active participant and help them only when needed.
- Have fun! Remember that the goal is to build bonds and learn a little about health and wellness along the way.
- You don't have to agree with your child! And you don't have to say more than you're comfortable sharing. Just be curious and thoughtful about what your child has to say.
- It's okay if you find the content or questions in an activity challenging or difficult. Tell your child you need to think about things and will get back to them. Work together to find another activity that is more your style. Then, spend some time exploring what exactly bothered you about the content or questions.
- Be sure to follow up with your child in the same respectful ways you expect others to share their perspectives. This type of role-modelling helps children understand how to think and talk about difficult things and communicate in a healthy way.



Featured activities

Give it a try right now!

Why not try the [Rat Park Adventure](#) or the [10-10 Challenge](#)?

Both activities invite you to begin a discussion with your child or youth and start the conversation about why connection matters!





Featured resources

For more information on how to talk about substance use and device use at home, visit the [By Your Side Parent/Caregiver Learning Hub](#):



Substance use prevention

Resources and webinars about cannabis, opioids, how to talk about and recognize the signs of substance use and addictive behaviours, and the intersection of addictions and mental health.



smho-smsso.ca/parents-and-caregivers/substance-use-prevention



Navigating digital technology

Information about how to help your child manage available in multiple languages and a webinar about technology overuse and problematic gaming.



smho-smsso.ca/parents-and-caregivers/navigating-digital-technology



Mental health at home

Information, guides and activities to help parents and caregivers nurture their child's mental health and well-being at home. Includes a suicide prevention guide.



smho-smsso.ca/parents-and-caregivers/mental-health-at-home





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