

# Mental Health and Substance Use -Tips for Educators by Youth

*Tool*

**Resource:** Vaping Education Resources

**Grade(s):** 4 5 6 7 8

**Division(s):** Junior Intermediate

## Recognize the Connection Between Mental Health and Substance Use

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- Acknowledge that sometimes substances are used to cope with mental health concerns.
- There is a need for open and honest education about mental health and substance use.

## Just Listen

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- Understand that there is a likelihood that students have a lot going on, and everyone struggles sometimes. Create a judgment-free zone. There is value in just listening.
- Create a safe space for students to have conversations and keep open lines of communication. Rigid barriers will shut them down.

## Help Find Safer Experiences

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- If you can't make school tolerable, help find safer experiences for students that need them. Help students explore their interests and learn new skills to get a sense of control in their life.

- School can be overwhelming. Using a variety of strategies like role-playing can help build skills to cope and gain a sense of control over various situations.

## Ask Why

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- Think about substance use from a student's headspace. Ask why. Why might youth be using substances?
- There is a multitude of reasons: the stress of achievement, coping, or trying to escape can all be linked to substance use.

## Avoid Power Struggles

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- Adults have much less control than they might think when it comes to youth and substance use.
- Autonomy for students is important. You don't always need to try to fix the problem.