

# Strengthening substance use prevention messaging for youth in the wake of COVID-19

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# Disclosure Information

**Strengthening substance use prevention messaging for youth in the wake of COVID-19**

Sunday, April 3, 2022, 11am - 12pm ET

Pam Pietruszewski, MA

- ◆ No financial disclosures



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# Learning Objectives

- ◆ Identify the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of substance use and substance use prevention among youth ages 12 – 18 years.
- ◆ Recognize best practices for building trust and rapport with a young person to deliver substance use prevention messages.
- ◆ Explain how to utilize the message guide and supplementary resources to engage youth in substance use prevention conversations.

# Youth Substance Use: Prevalence & Availability

- A majority of youth report engaging in some form of substance use before they graduate high school.
- In the first 6 months of the pandemic, alcohol and marijuana use among 12<sup>th</sup> graders remained steady despite record decreases in perceived availability.
- In 2021 there were significant decreases in use across 8<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> graders for most substances including alcohol, marijuana and vaped nicotine.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting isolation has generated stress and other mental health challenges for youth.

University of Michigan. *2021 Monitoring the Future Survey*. National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Drug Abuse; 2021. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/trends-statistics/monitoring-future>. Accessed January 25, 2022.

Miech R, Patrick ME, Keyes K, O'Malley PM, Johnston L. Adolescent drug use before and during the U.S. national covid-19 social distancing policies. *Drug Alcohol Depend*. 2021; 226. doi: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.108822.

Snell A, Kline J, Caramelli E. *Findings from an online needs assessment of youth ages 13 - 18 years old*. Lake Research Partners and National Council for Mental Wellbeing. 2021.



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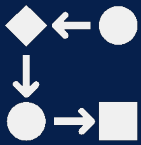
# Project Overview



**Primary Substances** Alcohol, marijuana, and prescription opioids



**Target Audience** Youth-serving providers and organizations who work with youth ages 12 - 18



**Activities**  
Environmental scan & literature review  
National needs assessments of youth and providers  
Key informant discussions  
Message testing



**Resources** Message guide & toolkit to support substance use prevention conversations with youth during and in the wake of COVID-19

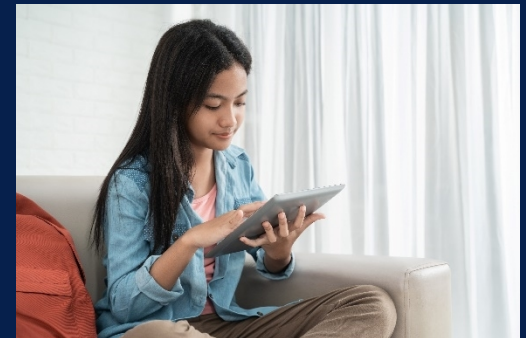
# Online Need Assessment

## First assessment conducted in January 2021

- ◆ Youth (n=600) ages 13 – 18
- ◆ Youth-serving providers (n=761)
- ◆ Assess the impact of COVID on youth state of mind, knowledge of and access to substance use prevention programming and information, messengers, tools/resources, perceived drivers of substance

## Second assessment conducted in May 2021

- ◆ Youth (n=600) ages 13 – 18
- ◆ Test draft messages





# Youth Demographics

Race/Ethnicity ( <i>more than one may apply</i> )	%
White	49.5%
Hispanic/Latino	23.5%
Black/African American	17%
Asian American	8%
Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native	3%
Other	2%
Arab American	1%
Prefer not to say	1%
Pacific Islander	0.5%

Geographic Area	%
Big city	19.5%
Smaller city	34.5%
Suburb	28.5%
Rural	12.5%
Not sure	5.5%

Gender Identity	%
Male	48%
Female	45.5%
Gender non-conforming	3.5%
Transgender	1.5%
Other/self-describe	1%



Snell A, Kline J, Caramelli E. *Findings from an online needs assessment of youth ages 13 - 18 years old.* Lake Research Partners and National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

2021

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# Provider Demographics

Organization Type ( <i>more than one may apply</i> )	%
Community behavioral health organization	44%
Youth-serving community-based organization	25%
Education-based organization	18%
Community coalition/network of youth-serving organizations	11%
Other health care-based organization	11%
State or local government agency serving youth	9%
Adolescent/pediatric health provider	7%
State or local health agency	6%
Juvenile legal-based organization	4%
Faith-based organization	2%
Other	3%



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# We Asked – Youth Answered



## How do you feel most days?

Stressed	44%
Okay	27%
Worried	27%
Lonely	25%
Worried/Anxious	25%
Happy	25%
Depressed	24%



## What matters most to you in your life?

Family	60%
Friends	29%
Happiness/quality of life/mental health/health	19%
Future/goals	10%
God/religion	9%
School/grades/education	7%
Significant other	4%



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# Youth Perceptions of Harm & Access



Substance	“Very easy” to get	“Much easier” to get during COVID-19
Alcohol	19%	14%
Tobacco/nicotine	19%	11%
Marijuana	18%	11%
Prescription drugs	10%	6%
Illicit drugs	5%	4%

Substance	Risk of harm from this substance	No risk of harm from this substance
Alcohol	66%	22%
Tobacco/nicotine	72%	17%
Marijuana	53%	35%
Prescription drugs	69%	17%
Illicit drugs	80%	7%

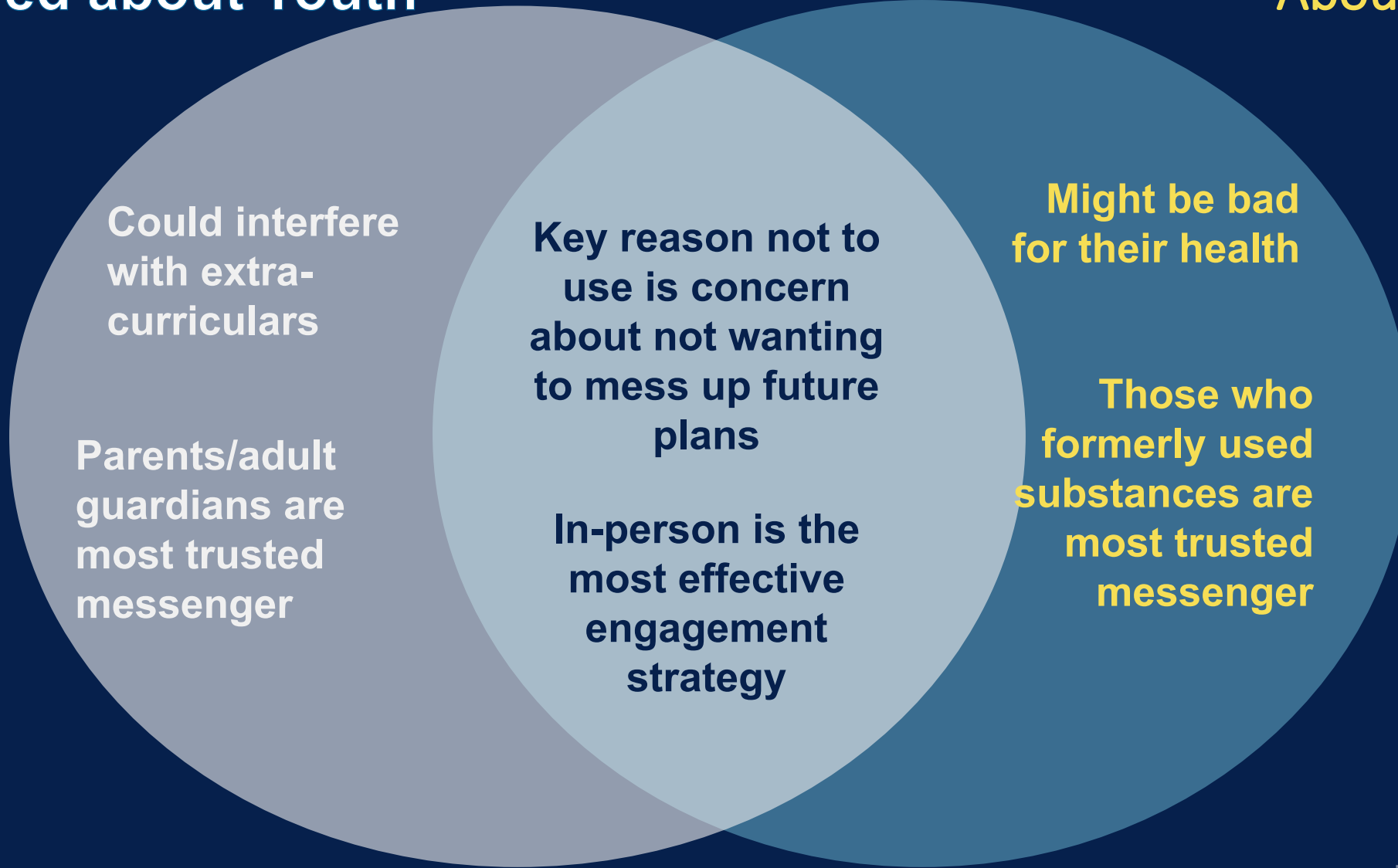


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# What Providers Believed about Youth

# What Youth Identified About Themselves



# Your Role as a Youth-Serving Provider

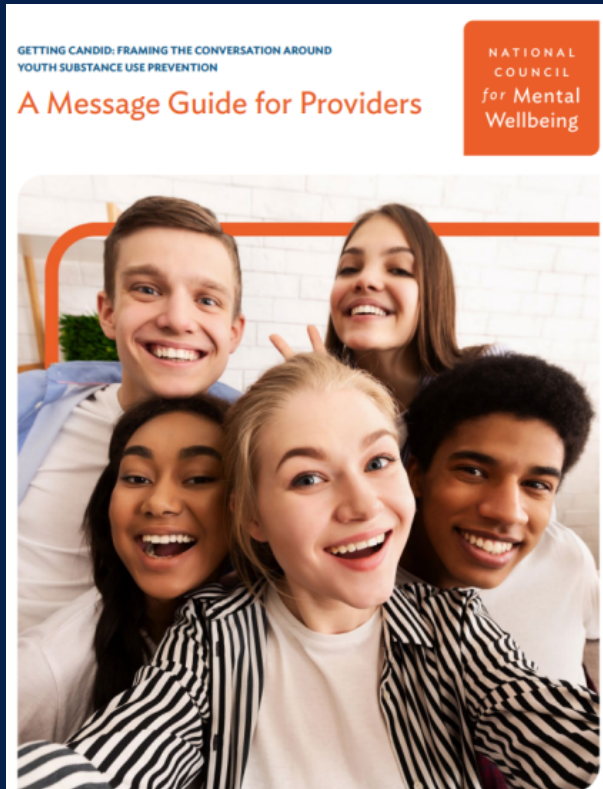
Effective early identification and intervention of youth substance use decreases the likelihood of developing a substance use disorder in the future, and other consequences related to the use of alcohol and other drugs.



- ◆ Create a safe space to have conversations that normalize substance use and connection to health, school, finances, and relationships
- ◆ Maximize regular touch points and pre-established, relationships to reinforce prevention messages and encourage healthy peer relationships
- ◆ Identify potential risk/protective factors



# Message Guide



## PURPOSE

- Equip youth-serving providers with substance use prevention messaging that appeals to a large and broad population of youth
- Share guidance on how to effectively deploy the messaging with middle & high school youth (12–18 years)

## CONTENT

- Getting grounded in the attitudes and beliefs of young people
- Message framework when communicating with youth
- Communication pathway

MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH	HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH
<b>THE FUTURE</b> Don't let drug and alcohol use change or control your plans for the future.	
<b>RISK OF ADDICTION</b> Drugs and alcohol change parts of your brain that impact how you think and act. The more you use them, the harder it can be to stop even if you want to.	
There are people in your life who matter to you and care about you. And you try hard not to let them down.	There are people in your life who matter to you and care about you. And you try hard to make them proud.
<b>ACTIVITIES</b> Participating in sports, music, hobbies or other activities can help you build friendships, stay in shape, get into college and receive scholarships, and have fun.	
<b>SELF-AFFIRMATION</b> You respect yourself and want to make decisions that are best for you. Trust yourself and your choice not to use drugs or alcohol.	

\* Note the difference in how middle and high school youth respond to the relationship messaging. While middle school youth care very much about not disappointing the people in their lives, high school youth respond better to the idea of making the people they care about proud.

# Communication Pathway



## ESTABLISH TRUST

Build rapport and establish trust.



## GATHER INSIGHTS

Seek guidance and input from youth on what matters to them.



## FRAME THE COMMUNICATION

Choose the frame for communication based on insights from youth.



## MAKE THE CASES

Select evidence to provide compelling reasons not to use drugs or alcohol.



## SUGGEST ACTION

Select one or more actions to suggest.



# Communication Pathway: Establish Trust



## ESTABLISH TRUST

- Ask permission before sharing information
- Create a safe space
- Be authentic
- Approach the conversation informally
- Do more listening than talking
- Be transparent and trustworthy
- Pay attention to body language

# Communication Pathway: Gather Insights



ESTABLISH TRUST



GATHER INSIGHTS

Seek guidance and input from youth on what matters to them.

Ask things like....

- What matters most to you in your life? Why?
- What do you look forward to most in the coming year (or after you graduate, or beyond)? Why?
- When you're faced with making a tough choice or decision, what do you consider or think about most?

# Communication Pathway: Frame the Communication



ESTABLISH TRUST



GATHER INSIGHTS



FRAME THE  
COMMUNICATION

**The Future:** Don't let drug and alcohol use change or control your plans for the future.

**Risk of Addiction:** Drug and alcohol use change parts of your brain that impact how you think and act. The more you use them, the harder it can be to stop, even if you want to.

**Relationships:** There are people in your life who matter to you. *(For middle school)* And you try hard not to let them down. *(For high school)* And you try hard to make them proud.

**Activities:** Participating in sports, music, hobbies or other activities can help you build friendships, stay in shape, get into and receive scholarships for college and have fun.

**Self-affirmation:** You respect yourself and want to make decisions that are best for you. Trust yourself and your choice not to use drugs or alcohol.

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# Communication Pathway: Make the Case



ESTABLISH TRUST



GATHER INSIGHTS



FRAME THE COMMUNICATION



MAKE THE CASES

## Some statements considered most convincing by youth:

- Not only is purchasing drugs and alcohol illegal for people your age; it also takes money you could be saving or spending on other things you want, need or enjoy.
- Marijuana use directly affects the brain, especially at your age when your brain is still developing. It can make it harder to pay attention, remember things and learn.
- More than 30 people die from overdoses involving prescription pain medications every day.
- Even people who are prescribed pain medications by a doctor can become addicted. Signs of addiction can include feeling nauseated when you stop taking the drug or needing to take more medication than before to feel better.

Alcohol can alter your mood, energy, memory & increase anxiety or depression. #ASAMAnnual2022

# Communication Pathway: Suggest Action



ESTABLISH TRUST



GATHER INSIGHTS

Actions identified by youth as those they would most likely take:

Explore new ways of dealing with **stress**, like music, reading, art, getting outdoors, talking with friends you trust or just being by yourself.\*



Make your own personal **commitment** or pledge to avoid alcohol, tobacco/ nicotine, marijuana and other drugs.\*



**Educate** yourself about alcohol, tobacco/nicotine, marijuana and other drugs by visiting a website or information on social media.



Find someone you can **talk** to if you feel tempted or pressured to use alcohol, tobacco/nicotine, marijuana or other drugs.



Talk to your **friends** and encourage them not to use alcohol, tobacco/ nicotine, marijuana and other drugs.\*



FRAME THE COMMUNICATION



MAKE THE CASES



SUGGEST ACTION

# Communication Pathway: Putting it all Together



## ESTABLISH TRUST

Build rapport and establish trust.



## GATHER INSIGHTS

Seek guidance and input from youth on what matters to them.



## FRAME THE COMMUNICATION

Choose the frame for communication based on insights from youth.



## MAKE THE CASES

Select evidence to provide compelling reasons not to use drugs or alcohol.



## SUGGEST ACTION

Select one or more actions to suggest.

# Tips for Framing

- If more than one frame could resonate, weave them throughout the conversation, return to each periodically or find connections between them.
- If limited time to engage or for broader and less direct communication (e.g., social media, group setting) **The Future** and **Risk of Addiction** effectively tested most widely across the youth population.
- If generating a series of communications (e.g., multiple posts to build awareness and education) focus on one frame at a time, with each outlining the issue differently to target various audiences with different values (e.g., risk of addiction, self-affirmation).

# Discussion & Practice

**Ava, age 13:** I was at a sleepover and my friend had gummy bears. But someone said they weren't regular gummies - they had stuff in them that makes you high. I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to get in trouble, so I said I had a stomachache and had my mom pick me up

The Future	Risk of Addiction	Relationships	Activities	Self-affirmation
<p>Don't let drug and alcohol use change or control your plans for the future.</p>	<p>Drug and alcohol use change parts of your brain that impact how you think and act. The more you use them, the harder it can be to stop, even if you want to.</p>	<p><i>(for middle school)</i> There are people in your life who matter to you. And you try hard not to let them down. <i>(for high school)</i> There are people in your life who matter to you. And you try hard to make them proud.</p>	<p>Participating in sports, music, hobbies or other activities can help you build friendships, stay in shape, get into and receive scholarships for college and have fun.</p>	<p>You respect yourself and want to make decisions that are best for you. Trust yourself and your choice not to use drugs or alcohol.</p>



# Toolkit Overview

## Safely Communicating with Youth

- ◆ Building rapport and trust
- ◆ Engaging parents/caregivers

## Strategies for Engagement

- ◆ Language guide
- ◆ Social media tip sheet

## Sharing Information with Young People

- ◆ Substance fact sheets
- ◆ Share Your Why video series

## Making Connections

- ◆ Resource referrals
- ◆ Warm handoffs

## Implementation and sustainability

- ◆ Implementation plan
- ◆ Educational course



*“If someone my age asked me why they should avoid drugs and alcohol, I would tell them it’s because it’s important to respect yourself and make decisions that are best for you.”*  
- *Seble Alemu, first year college student in Virginia*

# Key Opportunities

- 1.** Download the message guide and access the supplemental resources at [www.thenationalcouncil.org/getting-candid](http://www.thenationalcouncil.org/getting-candid)
- 2.** Implement the message guide in your interactions with youth
- 3.** Share the message guide with your networks of youth-serving providers

# Questions?



For more information or to inquiry about these resources, please email [gettingcandid@thenationalcouncil.org](mailto:gettingcandid@thenationalcouncil.org)

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# References

1. University of Michigan. *2021 Monitoring the Future Survey*. National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Drug Abuse; 2021. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/trends-statistics/monitoring-future>. Accessed January 25, 2022.
2. Miech R, Patrick ME, Keyes K, O'Malley PM, Johnston L. Adolescent drug use before and during the U.S. national covid-19 social distancing policies. *Drug Alcohol Depend*. 2021; 226. doi: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.108822.
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