

MAKING the LINK

Talking to Teens about Seeking Help



Turning Point

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Supported by the Australian Government

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What is **MAKINGtheLINK**: Talking to Teens about Seeking Help?

The MAKINGtheLINK Parent Workshop was developed by Eastern Health Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre for NCPIC. It is based on the original student program *MAKINGtheLINK: Promoting Help Seeking for Cannabis Use and Mental Health* which can be downloaded from <http://ncpic.org.au/>.



By seeking help early, young people are less likely to develop long-term consequences of substance use and mental health issues. However, research indicates young people are reluctant to seek professional help and tend to keep their problems to themselves or turn to their friends, parents or teachers for support – people who often don't know what to do.

Why aren't young people seeking help?

Just as with adults with cannabis or other substance use problems, many young people don't know or acknowledge that they have a problem. It is not uncommon for them to believe that they should sort out their problems on their own, or be too embarrassed to talk to someone about their problems. They might also be worried about the confidentiality of information they give a professional.

Why involve parents?

Research informs us that the adults that young people turn to for help are often likely to be their parents. This may be a relief for many of us, however, it also means we need to know what to do and say so our responses are meaningful and useful.

MAKINGtheLINK: Talking to Teens About Seeking Help educates parents about the adolescent barriers to seeking help from a professional and how to minimise them. It explains what kinds of helpers there are in school and in the community, how to access them and how they can help. It promotes parents as important helpers and teaches them how to assist and motivate young people to seek professional help. The multimedia vodcasts model to parents how they can talk to teenagers about difficult issues, such as substance use.

Materials

- Trainer's Manual (includes all materials for the activities)

- 4 Vodcasts



- PowerPoint presentation slides



Introduction

It is essential that trainers have experience in facilitating groups before delivering this workshop. Leading discussions around young people's substance use can be challenging as parents may have personal stories they want to share and/or different views to other people in the group. Having a co-presenter is recommended to manage some of these difficulties. Allow 90-120 minutes for the workshop, depending on the size of your group. The number of participants can range between 8 and 25.

Prior to delivering this workshop, it is essential that trainers read the accompanying manual and PowerPoint presentation, prepare the materials for the activities and become familiar with the vodcasts. It is also advised that trainers read the student program at <http://ncpic.org.au/workforce/teachers/making-the-link/>

Each activity in the Trainer's Manual has a unique colour which corresponds to a particular slide in the presentation. For example, Ranking for Risk is red and corresponds to slide 7. All four of the vodcast activities are purple and are presented throughout the workshop.

Summary of Activities

Activity	Page
1. Ranking for Risk	6
Task: Parents rank problem situations of young people with emerging substance use and/or mental health problems according to how concerned they would be and whether they need professional help.	
Strategy: Pair and Share.	
Aim: To enable parents to explore their own values and attitudes with respect to a teenager's emerging problems and whether help is needed.	
2. Teen Barriers	8
Task: Parents discuss the enablers and barriers they believe either encourage or discourage teenagers from seeking help from a professional.	
Strategy: Small group.	
Aim: To identify common adolescent barriers in order to minimise them.	
3. Helpers	9
Task: Parents learn about different types of helpers available to young people within schools and the community.	
Strategy: Whole-group discussion.	
Aims: Identifying different types of help available and increasing understanding of professional confidentiality.	
4. Vodcasts: <i>Motivating Teens to Seek Help for Substance Use</i>	13
Task: Parents watch four video clips throughout the workshop and discuss the strategies the mother character uses when talking to her adolescent son about his substance use.	
Strategy: DVD and whole-group discussion.	
Aims: To up-skill parents in talking to young people about substance use problems and assist them to seek professional help.	
5. Useful Websites	16
Task: Parents are provided with a list of websites and a worksheet to take home which explains how they can evaluate the reliability of information on websites for their children.	
Strategy: Whole-group discussion.	
Aim: To introduce parents to useful and reliable help-seeking sites for substance use and/or mental health problems.	

1. Ranking for Risk

Slide 7

The Ranking Cards provided describe young people whose mood or behaviour has changed lately. Some of these changes may be the beginning of a mental health or drug-related problem. Most of the situations involve either cannabis or alcohol use in various environments. Using a PAIR and SHARE strategy, parents are asked to imagine the teenager in the situation is their child, think about how concerned they would be about them and whether the teenager is at risk and needs help. In pairs, parents are required to rank the teenagers described, from the one who needs help the *least* to the one they believe needs help the *most*.

Aim: To enable parents to explore their own values and attitudes with respect to a teenager's emerging problems and whether help is needed.

Resources: Red Ranking Cards for half the group and blue for the other half. Twelve situations are provided to choose from. It is important to select those that are most relevant for the group participants where possible.

Duration: 20 minutes

Instructions:

- ✓ Explain to parents that this activity requires them to think about how concerned they would be if their teenager was in the situation described on the Ranking Cards and whether they think the teenager is at risk and needs help. They will then rank the cards depending on their level of concern.
- ✓ Explain the ranking continuum; card at the bottom = least concerning and card at the top = most concerning
- ✓ **PAIR** Ask parents to find a partner and give each pair 4 cards to rank (either 4 blue or 4 red). Ask them to discuss the cards with their partner and rank them from least concerning to most concerning, laying them on a flat surface like a table.
- ✓ **SHARE** Ask each blue pair to find a red pair and rank the 8 cards as a group.
- ✓ Explain to parents that there are no right or wrong answers; the value of this activity lies in the discussion that happens along the way and not how the cards are ranked.
- ✓ Ask each group to provide feedback to the whole group about which situation they were least and most concerned about.
- ✓ Conclude by saying that there may be differing levels of concern about young people who use drugs or have mental health problems, dependent on a range of factors including their own values and experiences. It is important to monitor changes in teenagers and identify risks. If they are currently concerned about a young person it can help to talk to others about it.

Trainer Tip

Be aware that discussions about substance use and mental health can be sensitive issues for some parents.

Trainer Tip

Explain that alcohol and other drugs affect people in very different ways, depending on the drug they use, the characteristics of the drug user and also the environment or place where the drug is used.

Alternative

Instead of asking parents to rank the cards on their tables, give each parent a card and ask them to place themselves on a continuum in front of the group, depending on where they think their card belongs

1. Ranking for Risk

Ranking Cards

Your teenager prefers to smoke cannabis at home rather than go out with friends.

For the past few weeks your teenager hasn't been able to concentrate and has started forgetting things. You received a call from her maths teacher because she forgot to bring her text book for an open book exam.

Your teenager used to put in a big effort looking nice for school and parties, but now he/she doesn't seem to care what he/she wears or looks like.

Your teenager goes out every Saturday night and has more than 5 alcoholic drinks.

Your teenager was picked up by police on the weekend for being drunk and vandalizing a street sign.

A parent from the school phoned you to say that your child gave her son cannabis on the weekend.

Your teenager has told you that he/she smokes cannabis because he/she can't cope with life.

Your teenager gets lifts home with drivers who have been drinking even though you have explained the risks to her/him.

Your teenager has become really aggressive and yesterday he/she punched his/her sister in the face.

Your teenager hardly talks to you anymore. He/she is missing a lot of school and doesn't want to do any of the things they used to enjoy, like going out with their friends or playing sport.

Your teenager has told you that last weekend they tried smoking cannabis for the first time.

On the weekend, your 11 year-old child stole alcohol from your cupboard and got drunk for the first time.

2. Teen Barriers

Slide 9

Some young people keep their problems to themselves whilst others speak to their friends, siblings or parents. Many do not choose to seek help from a professional who is trained to help them for a number of reasons. These reasons or beliefs are often referred to as 'barriers'. The following are some common barriers identified by young people, which may prevent them from seeking help from a professional:

- they are unable to recognise or acknowledge they have a problem
- they are unsure about where to go and what will happen
- stigma, embarrassment, shame
- fears about confidentiality
- they believe that they should manage their own problems
- they believe that no-one can help
- cannabis use itself, as it can increase anxiety and decrease motivation

To begin the process of overcoming these barriers, parents can provide opportunities for young people to ask questions about different health professionals and services and talk about their belief-based barriers to help-seeking. Parents need to know which particular barriers are significant for their child in order to minimise them, if and when the need arises for professional help.

Aim: To identify and explore the barriers that prevent young people from seeking help for substance use problems.

Duration: 20 minutes

Resources: Butchers paper or small whiteboards.

Instructions:

- ✓ In small groups ask parents to brainstorm the factors which encourage or discourage young people from seeking help. They then need to divide the butcher's paper into 2 columns; 'for' and 'against' seeking help and list their arguments, and then report back to the group. Hang the lists on a wall.
- ✓ Highlight for the parents the belief-based barriers that are found in their responses. Explain that we need to know what the particular barriers are so we can minimise them for each young person. Discuss any common belief-based barriers that have not been addressed from the list above.
- ✓ Ask parents if young people's barriers to seeking help from professionals are very different to adults?

Trainer Tip

'Professional help seeking' means seeking help from a professional, such as a general practitioner (GP), school counsellor, drug and alcohol worker or a mental health professional such as a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Alternative

Ask parents to argue their responses in a debate (3-4 people on each team).

3. Helpers

Slide 12

Some young people keep their problems to themselves, while others will choose to talk to a friend or parent. However, many will not seek out a professional who is trained to provide help and support. Some common barriers to young people seeking help include:

- they are unable to recognise or acknowledge they have a problem
- they are unsure about where to go and what will happen
- stigma, embarrassment, shame
- fears about confidentiality
- they believe that they should manage their own problems
- they believe that no-one can help
- cannabis use itself, as it can increase anxiety and decrease motivation

Informing young people about professionals who they can access for help for different types of problems is one way to begin overcoming these barriers. Parents themselves don't always know who is available to help adolescents in the school or wider community. Knowing who can help and what they do can lead to a parent or young person feeling more confident about seeking help.

Aim:

1. To identify different types of help
2. To identify barriers that stop young people seeking help for substance use and/or mental health problems
3. To raise parent awareness about the types of helpers they can access in the school or local community.
4. To increase understanding about professional confidentiality

Duration: 20 minutes

Resources: Helper handout, Jason's story, whiteboard and markers (or butchers paper).

Instructions:

- ✓ Ask parents to move into small groups and list people who they have heard about in the school and community who could provide help for a teenager who is experiencing mental health difficulties and/or developing problems with substance use.
- ✓ Ask parents to share their responses and list them on a whiteboard or butchers paper. When creating the list divide the responses into school-based and community-based.
- ✓ Ask parents to share their understanding of professional confidentiality (use Trainer Tip box on page 9 for details). Talk about which of the helpers listed might be bound by professional confidentiality.
- ✓ Hand out Helper Cards to participants and ask them to read their card aloud to the group.

Trainer Tip

'Professional help-seeking' means seeking help from a professional, such as a general practitioner (GP), school counsellor, drug and alcohol worker or a mental health professional such as a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Trainer Tip

Young people need to believe that the benefits of seeking help outweigh the fears they have about reaching out for assistance.

Alternative

Ask parents to argue their responses in a debate (3-4 people on each team).

3. Helpers

- ✓ Ask parents to discuss which helper they would go to for help if Jason (from the video) was their child (if parents want more information about Jason his story is provided below). What reason do they have for their choice? Also explain that parents can get advice and support from different people on the list, and that they do not necessarily need to attend with their teenager.

Trainer Tip: Community Support Agencies

There are a number of places in the community where a young person can get help. Parents also need to know that they can access these places without their teenager to get advice and support. Often the first contact for families is their local GP. A GP can listen to a parent's concerns and suggest appropriate referrals. Other places that a parent can contact includes:

- the youth services department of their local council
- headspace
- Family Drug Support (FDS)
- Directline

Parents should also be encouraged to look for informal contacts as well. This might include an allied health worker in the family or maybe another adult who their adolescent would talk to.

Trainer Tip: Professional Confidentiality

Many professionals have a legal duty within their workplace to keep patients' or clients' private information private (confidential). These professionals can only disclose information if they are given permission by you to do so, or if there is a risk of harm to yourself or others or there is a court order.

These helpers are required to talk to you about confidentiality before you begin your session with them (for example, a psychologist should talk to you about confidentiality before they begin counselling). If they don't, you have the right to ask them about it before you say anything about yourself.

Questions you could include are:

- Will you ask my permission before you share my information with anyone?
- When will you have to tell someone about my circumstances without my permission?
- What information will you tell them and who will you tell?
- What happens to my information when my sessions are over?

3. Helpers

Trainer Tip – Allied Health pathways

Allied Health professionals may provide specialised clinical services to schools. They can include psychologists, speech pathologists, social workers and other allied health staff. Parents cannot access them directly. Any referrals for their teenager must be made by the school they are attending, usually by a welfare coordinator or school nurse. If a referral is accepted by the allied health professional, a parent will be required to give informed consent before any work can be conducted with their child.

Jason's story

Pretend Jason is your son.

Jason is in Year 9. Recently he has been missing school and coming home drunk or stoned from parties. He's always been a really social teenager but you have noticed that his friends don't seem to be coming to the house anymore. He recently broke up with his girlfriend who you really liked. You saw her at the local shops recently and she told you she is really worried about him. She said he started getting aggressive with her so they broke up. Last Saturday night Jason was taken to the emergency department because he was so drunk he fell over and had to get 20 stitches in his arm.

You have tried to speak to Jason about your concerns but he just doesn't seem to care. You're really worried about him but angry as well. You don't know what to do.

Who could you go to for help?

Helper Cards

Home Room/Pastoral Teacher

I am the home room/pastoral teacher at your teenager's school. I am often the first point of contact if you have concerns about your child. I can find out how they are going in their classes and also look for changes that might be happening with their behaviour or attitude at school. I can also talk to the year level coordinator or school well-being staff and ask them to speak with your teenager to try to provide additional support.

Other parent/spouse

I am Jason's Mum/Dad. Although we may manage the current situation in different ways we are both really worried about Jason and don't know what to do. I know you sometimes think I don't understand but I can assure you that I care about our son and will do my best to help him. I can go with him to see our family doctor or a counsellor and I can be a good support for you along the way.

3. Helpers

Doctor

I am a doctor, also called a general practitioner or GP. I have been trained to deal with all sorts of physical and mental health issues. I can refer your teenager to a mental health professional or an alcohol and other drug (AOD) service if I think you need more help. I am bound by professional confidentiality.

Mental Health Professional (outside of school)

I am a mental health professional. I have expertise in helping people manage a range of difficulties, such as mental health or substance use problems, social or family problems or behaviour or learning problems.

I may be a psychiatrist, psychologist or other health professional. One of the ways I can help is by providing counselling which is the process of talking to a person about their feelings and symptoms, and discussing different ways of managing them.

All mental health professionals are bound by professional confidentiality.

Friend

I am your friend. I know you really well and we have similar thoughts and feelings about some things so I can probably understand where you're coming from. I might not know how to help you but I can listen and support you. I am worried about Jason too and am always here for you.

Alcohol and Other Drug Worker

I am an Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) worker. I can provide information and counselling and can talk to you about how drugs are affecting your life. We can also discuss ways to cut down what you're using if that is something you are ready to try. Even if you don't know if you have a drug problem, that's ok, you can still come and talk to me. I am bound by professional confidentiality.

Trainer Tip

What does the 'other' refer to in this helper's title: alcohol and 'other' drug worker? This is to emphasise that alcohol is also a drug.

Trainer Tip

Young people need to believe that the benefits of seeking help outweigh the fears they have about reaching out to others for assistance.

4. Vodcasts: *Motivating Teens to Seek Help for Substance Use*

We know that young people talk to each other about their problems rather than seek help from a professional or their parent. Often young people do not know what to say or do when they need help. There is still a lot of stigma around having a mental health problem and young people don't want to be seen as 'crazy'. When drug use is involved it can be even trickier as young people may not want their parents to find out.

Giving parents skills in talking to their teenager about issues of concern, including drug use, can mean that a young person gets the help that they need sooner. It is important not to dismiss teenagers if they begin to talk about what is happening for them but to provide support and advice about how you can assist them to seek help. We need to up-skill parents to open discussions about alcohol and other drug use, and to seek professional help when necessary, because we know that early intervention leads to better outcomes. We need to build their confidence by showing parents *how* to help and provide them opportunities to develop and practice help-seeking skills.

Aim:

1. To up-skill parents in talking to young people about substance use problems
2. To up-skill parents in assisting young people to seek help
3. To up-skill parents to manage resistance and reduce barriers

Duration: 30 minutes, including 4 x 2.5 minute video clips

Resources:

- Video clips
- DVD discussion questions
- Audiovisual equipment

Instructions:



Clip 1 | Missed Opportunity

Slide 5

Key points:

- Mum is a caring parent with a typical relationship with her son.
- Mum does all the talking, Jason has little opportunity to respond or tell his story.
- Mum doesn't listen reflectively nor show any empathy.
- Mum makes statements rather than asking questions, very few response opportunities for Jason.
- No suggestions of help or guidance for Jason.
- No tangible resolution. He is relieved that she has walked away.

DVD Summary

This activity uses DVD clips/ vodcasts to explore with parents different ways of talking to teenagers about substance use problems. It also models how to raise the subject of seeking help from a professional in a gentle and understanding way and how to effectively reduce barriers and manage resistance.

Clip 1



Discussion Questions:

What did the mother do well/not so well?

What could she have said?

4. Vodcasts: *Motivating Teens to Seek Help for Substance Use*

✓ Clip 2 | Engaging Jason

Slide 8

Key points of differentiation from previous clip:

- Mum does less talking – Jason has more opportunities to speak.
- Mum shows more empathy and is less judgemental.
- Mum asks open-ended questions and provides opportunities for Jason to respond and tell his story.
- Mum provides some suggestions and guidance for Jason.
- Mum is successful in getting Jason to consider that he doesn't have control over his substance use which is an important step.

Clip 2



Discussion Questions:

Clip 2 begins the same as Clip 1. Compared to Clip 1, how did the mother go this time?

Which conversation was more effective and why?

✓ Clip 3 | Change Talk

Slide 10

This clip has additional strategies that professionals use when talking to young people. They try to elicit 'change talk', or self-motivational statements. 'Change talk' involves statements or affective communications that indicate the young person may be considering the possibility of change; whether that is to seek help or consider that their substance use may be a problem.

Clip 3



Discussion Questions:

What are the strategies that you noticed?

(Decisional balance: good versus less good about substance use; scaling: how important is change to you on a scale of 1 to 10?).

What other key questions did the mother ask?

What would happen if things stay the same?

What is it about (the substance/behaviour) that you like?

What do you think we should do?

What could you do starting from now?

Do you think a parent could use these strategies or ask these questions?

4. Vodcasts: *Motivating Teens to Seek Help for Substance Use*

✓ Clip 4 | Rolling with Resistance

Slide 13

Key points:

- This clip is called 'Rolling with Resistance' as Mum tries to manage Jason's resistance and the barriers he is concerned about.
- Resistance is normal for a teenager as they are trying to become independent from their parents, however they still need guidance and boundaries.
- Avoid resistance but when it arises reframe statements to create a new momentum towards change.
- Avoid confrontation.
- Reframe and debunk any myths you are hearing (for example, minimise erroneous beliefs or barriers).
- Emphasise they have personal control and choice.
- Use reflective responses.

Clip 4



Discussion Questions:

Which barriers did Jason talk about and how did Mum manage them?

Is Jason likely to see the GP?

How would you talk to a teenager about seeking help from a professional?

✓ To conclude, discuss with parents some of the things they could say and do to assist a young person to get help:

- Don't locate the problem within the young person
- Collaborative approach/family issue/our problem/I need help too
- Takes time/it's a process/many conversations to get to this point
- Listen non-judgementally
- Tell them you are concerned about them
- Explain to them gently how their behaviour is affecting you and those around them
- Ask if they have thought about getting professional help
- Tell them about the different helpers they could go to
- Talk about the barriers; what is stopping them, what are they worried about?
- Talk about someone else's positive help-seeking experience
- Offer to make an appointment with them/go with them/get more information for them

5. Useful Websites

Slides 14 & 15

Aim:

To introduce parents to useful and reliable help-seeking sites for substance use and/or mental health problems.

Resources:

- Cannabis information www.ncpic.org.au
- Alcohol, pharmaceuticals and other drugs information or gambling problems: www.turningpoint.org.au
- One-stop-shop for young people: www.headspace.org.au
- Online counselling:
www.eheadspace.org.au
www.counsellingonline.org.au/en
www.familydrughelp.org.au
www.parentingstrategies.net

Instructions:

- ✓ Inform parents that young people are increasingly turning to the internet for help. Ask parents if they see online forums as a legitimate source of help? It is important for parents to know how to evaluate whether a website has reputable information or not.

5. Useful Websites

Handout

How do I know if my child is accessing a reputable website?

1. Who wrote it?

- ☐ Is he/she an expert in the field? A professor or teacher?
Or just someone with a little interest in the area?
- ☐ Is there biographical information available?
- ☐ What exactly do we know about the author?
- ☐ Unless the web page is part of a larger site (e.g. an encyclopedia or journal), there must be an author cited.

2. Who is publishing it?

- ☐ Has an individual just put up his/her own site? Or is it part of a university or company site?
- ☐ If you come across a geocities, angelfire, tripod, or aol site, you need to remember that anyone can (and does) create web pages on these sites.
- ☐ If in doubt of the source, try going to the base site (i.e. <http://www.geocities.com>). If this site ends up being just a web page provider, think twice about using the information.

3. Is the information accurate?

- ☐ Is the information reliable and error-free?
- ☐ Is there an editor or someone who verifies/checks the information?

4. Is the information factual and objective?

- ☐ Who is providing the information?
- ☐ Does the information show a minimum of bias?
- ☐ Is the information backed up by research?
- ☐ Do they have any self interest in the way they present the information? (e.g. watch out for information on alcohol from a company that markets alcohol)
- ☐ Is the page designed to sway opinion?
- ☐ Is there any advertising on the page?

5. Is the information up-to-date?

- ☐ Is the page dated?
- ☐ If so, when was the last update?
- ☐ How current are the links? Have some expired or moved?

6. Is the information comprehensive?

- ☐ What topics are covered?
- ☐ What does this page offer that is not found elsewhere?
- ☐ What is its intrinsic value?
- ☐ How in-depth is the material?

Suggestions

Look for a header or footer showing affiliation

Look at the URL

<http://www.headspace.org.au>

Look at the domain

.edu, .com

.ac.uk

.org, .net

This handout adapted from <http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/evalcrit.html> and http://webquest.sdsu.edu/processguides/evaluating_student.html