



**cmc:** center for motivation & change

# THE PARENT'S 20 MINUTE GUIDE

A guide for parents about how to help their children change their substance use

# CMC ◦ PARENT'S 20 MINUTE GUIDE

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## Introduction: Welcome to CMC's 20 Minute Guide to Helping Your Child

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If you are here, you are probably a very concerned parent\* looking for guidance on how to help your child who is using substances (or engaging in other risky behavior). You may have mild concerns about your child's focus at school, choice of friends, or drug "dabbling." On the other hand, you may be facing sudden and terrifying changes in your child. You may also be struggling with the drag of your child's increasingly closed off, non-communicative behavior that shuts you out. Regardless of where you are starting, parenting an adolescent is challenging. When you throw substances into the mix, it can be nerve-racking at best and explosive at worst.

\*A note to all the grandparents, aunts, uncles, step, foster and adoptive parents. We know that many kids are not raised in a "traditional" constellation, and we wish we had the space it deserves to address what can be even bigger challenges in these family constellations, but we can't. Please understand our shorthand of "parent" and step into this material.

### A Complex Situation for your Child

In general, substance use problems are intertwined with a variety of complex issues. The issues affecting teens and young adults who misuse substances are even more complicated. Specifically, in adolescence, the prefrontal cortex (the "braking" system of the brain) is still developing and as a result, they have more difficulty managing impulses and exhibiting consistently good judgment. The decision to use drugs or alcohol is a complex one for sure, and teenage brains do not manage the complexity well. In addition, substances are chemicals that are simultaneously affecting this rapidly developing brain.

Many teens who decide to start using substances early also struggle with other psychiatric problems (e.g., depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety problems, conduct disorder, ADHD, or early onset psychotic disorders). Many have learning disorders with the ensuing academic problems, or impulse control problems with the ensuing relationship, legal or institutional/authority problems. In addition, teens are particularly sensitive to events in their environment like the death of a loved one, divorce/separation of parents, medical/mental illness in a loved one, the financial strain/unemployment of a parent and the dynamics associated with peer relationships (making/ending friendships, sexual identity issues, bullying).

### A Complex Situation for You (and Your Partner/Co-Parent)

Last, given the complexity and emotional combustibility of raising your child, it can be hard to co-manage these problems with your spouse or partner. Collaboration with your partner can be severely tested by these events (if you're a single parent, the pressure of raising a child alone carries with it an entirely different set of challenges). Parents must cope with the reactions of school professionals, police, other parents, extended family members, and people in the outside world that load on their help, judgment, misunderstanding, punishment, and fear. Many parents find that the "helping" responses and concern of others can start to feel overbearing and even shake parental confidence. Being on the same page (or at least the same chapter) as your partner in all this can be critically important for everyone.

### CRAFT – A New Way to Navigate

On this site, you'll find many topics related to the challenges you face right now. CRAFT, or Community Reinforcement and Family Training, is a behavioral and motivational approach developed by Robert Meyers and is designed to help you, your child and your whole family. While we work with families using CRAFT at CMC, we know it can be hard to find a provider in your community, as the word and the evidence is still spreading. As a result, we developed our "What We Tell Parents (When We Only Have 20 Minutes)," guide which highlights things to keep in mind as you navigate your way toward positively influencing your child. The "20 Minute Guide" can serve as a "quick reference" for many of the CRAFT strategies and concepts,

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including tools you can use to help your child make changes in his substance use, improve communication and overall family relationships, and address your own emotional well-being.

The guide is mostly drawn from the CRAFT approach, which is the leading research-supported way for families to help their substance using loved ones. CRAFT has proven to reduce or stop substance use in the loved one and increase their willingness to get help. It has also been shown to improve the well-being of the person in your position (the person trying to help who loves someone abusing substances). Unlike other approaches, CRAFT teaches you how to stay involved in an *active, ongoing, and positive* way, while also taking care of yourself. Both! The ingredients for dealing with all of the challenges that substance use can bring to your family are outlined so that you can learn and practice the tools and apply them to your unique situation.

You will learn tools such as:

- how to react when your child has been using and how to react when he *HAS NOT* been using,
- how to co-parent and collaborate as effectively and smoothly as possible,
- getting more of what you want to see from your child and less of what you don't want to see,
- how to talk to your child so that you are more likely to be heard,
- how to take care of yourself all along the way.

## How Does this Work?

The **20 Minute Guide** is a quick synopsis (“bullet points”) of some of the key strategies found in the CRAFT approach. In subsequent pages, we break out each bullet point in greater detail, so that you can spend a little more time understanding what they are, why they are important, and how you can use them to start to make changes in your current situation. You can click on whatever tools you want to start with and you don't have to go in any particular order. Last, we provide worksheets that show you how a hypothetical parent could use each of the strategies we describe and room to begin making your own changes. We hope you will print out and use these worksheets to practice these skills as many times as you want/need. Also, there are **Good Idea** sheets you can refer to for additional suggestions, such as fun things to do by yourself or with your child, ways to set goals that are proven to help you meet them and feel less overwhelmed by them, and strategies for successful problem solving. While it can be very helpful to get outside consultation, we know it is not always an option and we hope this guide is the beginning of a positive path for you and your family.

**A Final Note** - The last point in our **20 Minute Guide** is one we want to state up front:

Be patient, and practice, practice, practice! It may be that some (or all) of these skills are new to you. It may be that some are a reversal of what you have been trying to do (arguing, confrontation, punishment only). Either way, the CRAFT strategies are skills that require learning and practice. Developing your helping skills will take time, trial and error. You won't get it right every time! The reality is that encouraging change is a process. Give yourself room to work on it, make mistakes, and not get discouraged. If you give yourself permission to “practice”, you will get better at helping your child make the changes you hope to see. And with your help, your child will get better at managing everything that comes along with being a teenager or young adult.

# Start With Self-Care

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## 1A. This is Really Stressful: Take Care of Yourself.

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As a parent of a child struggling with substance use, you may find that your worry, frustration and feelings of helplessness consume huge amounts of time and energy. As you focus on your child, taking care of yourself is likely to fall to the bottom of the list, if it makes the list at all! Though it might be the furthest thing from your mind (e.g. how can I go to the movies when I'm worried my child is out getting high again?), finding room to focus on your own self-care is vital if you are going to be helpful to your child and the rest of your family. As the first item on our **20-Minute Guide**, we encourage you to resist the impulse to put your life on hold while you go into emergency/panic mode.

As you well know, it's hard to carve out space to focus on yourself when you have kids. When your family is dealing with something as complicated and anxiety-provoking as a substance use problem, it can feel impossible. Depending on the severity of the situation, it may be that you don't feel like you have room for anything other than trying to help your child and react to the latest crisis. Never mind having to deal with all the "have tos" minute to minute, day to day.

Helping your child change their relationship to substances is likely to be a long-term project. It's better to think of it as a marathon, not a sprint. Just like running a marathon, you need to keep your energy reserves up and pace yourself for the long haul. You also need to have energy for hills, bad weather and stiff competition. We are not being "touchy-feely psychologists" when we say this. We are trying to help you be tactical in the midst of a difficult struggle, and it matters. Try to keep in mind what they say on planes before takeoff: if the oxygen masks are needed, resist the urge to put it on others before you put it on yourself. Many people have the impulse to help their loved ones BEFORE they help themselves. But the oxygen recommendation is not aimed just at you; it is designed to help the whole group. If *you* get enough oxygen, you are available to help your child. Without attention to this air supply, you (the "helper") are at risk for getting hurt (emotionally, physically, and financially). And if you are hurting, you won't be able to guide, direct, think, and help as effectively as you would if you were healthy and focused.

We know that you may balk at the idea that you are facing a long haul as opposed to a short crisis. The benefit of taking care of yourself at the outset of this process is that it will help regardless. It will help in a sprint (we hope this is all you face) and it will save your life in a marathon. Taking care of YOU will help you and your family (your spouse/partner, other children, and other loved ones) stay healthy as you navigate helping your child.

**A CRAFT Suggestion** – As you learn the skills of CRAFT, we recommend that you spend time *each week* doing something that makes you feel good, relaxed, content, and soothed. These activities should be a WANT, not a SHOULD (see Appendix A for ideas). We recommend that *each week*, you take a few minutes to review how your self-care is going and to set reasonable, SMART goals (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, **T**imely... see Good Idea #1 for a more detailed explanation) for taking care of yourself in the week ahead. You might find yourself wondering how in the world you can make yourself a priority when you have so many other, more urgent demands. We ask you to try, because the oxygen mask metaphor is true: you won't be any good to your child (or anyone else in your family) if you pass out. In addition, many of the CRAFT skills require that you approach the problem with clarity and consistency, which are difficult to do if you are physically or emotionally exhausted. Take care of yourself in order to help your child.

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## 1A. Take Care of Yourself Worksheet

Use your problem solving skills (see our [Good Ideas: S.M.A.R.T. Goals](#) and [Self-Care](#)) to identify **S**pecific ways that you can contribute to your own self-care this week. Remember that getting swallowed up by worry, fear, anger, resentment or stress is not going to help you help your child. As you complete this worksheet we encourage you to think about your health (nutrition, sleep, exercise) as well as things that nourish you intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. The reason we are putting such an emphasis on this is that you need to put your oxygen mask on first if you are going to be the best support possible for your child.

**Step 1:** Identify the areas of your life that need attention in order for you to feel less stressed or improve the quality of your life. We have included some questions to get you thinking about each area but we encourage you to brainstorm whatever comes to mind as it relates to your own self-care (brain, body, heart and soul).

How do you feel about your Intellectual Well-Being? (Have you felt cut-off or disengaged from things that used to interest you? When was the last time you learned something new? Had a discussion about something other than your child?)

How do you feel about your Physical Health (How are you sleeping? When was the last time you exercised? Have you found yourself eating poorly? When was the last time you had a check-up?)

How do you feel about your Emotional Well-Being (Have you been more emotionally reactive lately? Do you find that you are feeling numb, shut down, angry? Are you doing or saying things that don't match who you want to be?)

**Step 2:** Be **S**pecific. Think about **WHAT** you would like to accomplish as it relates to your own self-care and **WHY** you feel like it would help you build the resiliency you need to help your child.

What I would like to accomplish...	Why it would help me...
I WOULD LIKE TO SLEEP THROUGH THE NIGHT.	IT WOULD HELP ME FEEL LESS IRRITABLE IN THE MORNING.
I WOULD LIKE TO FIND THE TIME TO READ A GOOD BOOK.	IT WOULD HELP ME TAKE A BREAK AND FEEL LESS FRUSTRATED WITH SPENDING ALL MY TIME WORRYING ABOUT MY CHILD.

**Step 3:** Once you have identified what you would like to accomplish and why, convert it into a **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant and **T**imely goal (to make sure you can tell whether or not you've met the goal next

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week, to make sure you have all the tools you need to meet it, and to check in with yourself whether your goals are challenging, but not overwhelming). Set two self-care goals for the coming week (we recommend at least one of them be something that's fun and will add enjoyment to your life).

To improve my self-care, this week I will: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Example: "I will go for a run 3 times (but not 5 times!) this week so that I am more tired when I go to bed"*

To increase joy in my life, I will: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Example: "I will go to the book store on my way home from work and buy a new book. Then I will shut the TV off at ten and quietly read my book"*

**Step 4:** Identify barriers that can interfere with you meeting the above "goals of the week" for improved self-care and enjoyment in your life.

<b>Obstacles to practicing this goal</b>	<b>Coping Skills for handling the obstacles</b>
IT'S HARD TO FIND TIME TO GO FOR A RUN	PLAN OUT THE WEEK AND SCHEDULE TIME FOR RUNS AROUND OTHER ACTIVITIES. COMMIT TO IT LIKE AN APPOINTMENT.
I'M TOO WORRIED TO SIT AND READ, I GET DISTRACTED	TAKE DEEP BREATHS AND GIVE MYSELF PERMISSION TO START SMALL. IF I CAN SIT FOR 15 MINUTES, THAT IS BETTER THAN NOT SITTING DOWN AT ALL.



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## 1B. You're Not Alone: Reducing Isolation

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Loving someone who is struggling with substance use or other risky behaviors can be very stressful, scary, and frustrating. When that loved one is your child, these feelings are amplified 100 times over. You may wonder if anyone can really understand what you're going through. The truth is that your path *is* unique, with all of the specific "only in my family" parts that are unique to you. At the same time, millions of people have walked down similar roads; roads with stories, realizations, experiences, heartbreaks and successes that look, sound, and feel a lot like what you are experiencing.

It turns out there is a lot to be gained from talking with other people as you try to help your child change. Research has found time and again that getting support from a social circle is a huge factor in dealing successfully with pretty much every stressful thing that can come up in life, including coping with a loved one's addictive or destructive behavior. We know that you may be worried about privacy, gossip, and the "public" perception of your child/yourself/your family. While these are reasonable concerns, we also know that isolation has a big downside and can make you feel worse over time, depriving you of much needed energy and resiliency.

It may be that you are not even consciously choosing to withdraw from support you have in your life. It may be that you are simply rushing around dealing with issues, sometimes with your heart in your throat, and your focus has naturally turned more inward. You may feel bad for your child or protective of him; and to be truthful, you may at times be embarrassed by your child's struggles ("He's hooked on drugs? What will people think about us!"). All of these feelings can *easily* lead you to pull away from the support systems you normally rely on in your life. This can be especially true if you are someone who is used to being very busy, has a hard time fitting socializing on the calendar, solves most problems in a solitary way, or is not in the habit of asking for help (or maybe even dead-set against it!).

As you try to help your child by using the CRAFT approach, please do not underestimate the toll that isolation can have on you. Isolation can increase depression, anxiety, and stress. This, in turn, can make it more difficult for you to handle difficult situations. The goal here is to increase your *resiliency*. The more isolated you are with your child's problems, the more stressed you will become (whatever flavor your stress plays out as: anxiety, feeling down, sadness, irritability), and your buffer zone will get smaller and smaller. Over time, your ability to take an emotional "hit" from your child, be it small (late from school), medium (truancy notice from school), or large (he crashed the car) and not sink or act out gets really diminished. And resiliency is exactly what you need *more* of, not less. The unfortunate side effect of limited resiliency? Increased tension with your child which will make it more difficult for you to be an effective helper. It will also likely make your child *more* resistant to being helped. A bad deal all around. You are not alone; fighting the pull toward isolation will help you find solutions to your problems faster.

**A CRAFT Suggestion** - Even if you don't feel this is a big factor in your stress right now, consider trying to do something social at least once a week to see if it helps anyway. "Something social" can be as simple as a phone chat with your sister or as elaborate as a dinner with friends. Isolation creeps up on you. Important note: reaching out to others doesn't have to mean pouring your heart out; it can just be a relaxed night out to *not* think about your struggles. It's actually important to have "time off" from talking about what you're going through. It's as important as talking about it.

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## 1B. Reducing Isolation Worksheet

Use your problem solving skills (see a [Good Idea: S.M.A.R.T. Goals](#)) to identify **Specific** ways that you can connect with another person (or people) this week. Keep in mind that you can get support in all kinds of ways and may need different kinds of support at different times. We encourage you to consider who in your life might be useful to confide in, but also who is good at making you laugh, distracting you, doing something fun with you, or good at just helping you feel relaxed. Our recommendation to get support does not mean we think you need to be having confessional, “spill your guts” conversations (though if that is what you need right now, go for it). We want you to find ways to stay engaged with the world and the people you’re connected with as you manage potentially stressful times with your child.

**Step 1:** Brainstorm (see [Good Idea: Problem Solving](#)) for socializing ideas. Be **Specific** in order to identify people in your life who you can spend time with and who fill different needs for you. Remember, some people may fit in more than one category.

Good Listener:	_____	Good Advice Giver:	_____
Just for Fun/ Makes Me Laugh:	_____	Cheerleader/ Someone who Encourages Me:	_____
Can Really Confide In:	_____	Will Do Enjoyable Things with Me:	_____
Shoulder To Cry On:	_____		

**Step 2:** Look over your answers to Step 1 and pick a person you’d like to see this week. Think about what kind of socializing you’d most prefer right now. (...think the “WHO and WHY”). For example, if you are looking for someone who is both fun and a cheerleader, see if you have anyone who fits in both categories for you. Then come up with an idea that you think is **Attainable** (challenging but not overwhelming) that you can try this week in order to decrease chances of isolating and increase your connection to your social supports.

I need someone who is: \_\_\_\_\_

I want to try and spend time with: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to do\*: \_\_\_\_\_

\*For this line include specifics like *when* you would like to meet them and *what* you would like to do with them (e.g.- I want to meet my friend on Wednesday night for dinner, I want to meet my friend Sunday afternoon for a movie)

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**Step 3:** Think through and identify obstacles that could interfere with meeting your goal(s) for connecting with others this week. Then, come up with a strategy that can help you deal with each one of these barriers, so you can maximize your chances of accomplishing your goal.

<u>Obstacles to achieving my goal</u>	<u>Coping Skills for dealing with the obstacles</u>
HARD TO FIND TIME TO DO THIS	ASK FOR HELP WITH HOUSEHOLD CHORES TO FREE UP SOME MORE TIME DURING THE EVENINGS. SCHEDULE TIME IN ADVANCE SO THAT WE HAVE IT ON THE CALENDAR AS AN "APPOINTMENT."
MY FRIEND MIGHT NOT BE AVAILABLE	HAVE A BACK-UP PLAN IN CASE SHE'S NOT FREE. CALL HER A WEEK IN ADVANCE SO THAT SHE HAS A BETTER CHANCE OF MAKING HERSELF AVAILABLE.

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## 2. Collaboration Helps: You, Your Partner, and Your Child

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When a *child* is struggling with substance use or other behavior problems, there is often a communication breakdown between the *adults*, and an increase in tension about how to manage on a day-to-day basis. Most people struggle to not get defensive, or lose their cool when they have to make decisions while emotionally distressed or when in situations they don't understand or know how to control. It's not uncommon for parents to feel at wits end *with each other* when trying to understand and help a child who is engaging in risky, upsetting behaviors. Bottom line? Disagreements are understandable AND collaboration with your co-parent/partner matters *a lot*.

When parents are trying to help their child change, they sometimes become (or remain) what we call "misaligned." Think about what can happen even under the best of circumstances:

- Your partner (in your humble opinion) is too much of a softie when it comes to making sure the kids get to bed at a reasonable hour, do their homework, eat their vegetables
- Your partner (sooo unfairly!) wishes you would relax a little and have some fun with the kids, and step out of being rigid with them about things such as curfew, homework, chores.

Given that it's pretty normal for couples to be on different pages when it comes to "easier" parenting issues such as homework and T.V. watching, it's very common to get polarized around how to handle a child when he is abusing alcohol or drugs!

### Why does collaboration and "getting aligned" matter?

As you implement CRAFT strategies, it will be important for every adult involved to give clear directions and consequences (positive and negative) to your child in order to help them get moving in a more positive direction. The changes you want your child to make are not easy to do, and your child will be ambivalent about making them. It will be hard for your child to change some of his friends, or not be high at parties, or leave events earlier than other kids. The more ambivalent your child is about making these changes, the more important it is to have your expectations be totally clear. Having different (actual or implied) expectations from your partner will prevent you from sending the clear messages that your child needs.

The more agreement you can reach with your partner about expectations, the less stressed you will each feel and happier you will both be. Being in alignment will also help you be consistent and more positive with your child (because there will be less conflict in general).

Collaboration and alignment with your partner doesn't mean across the board, united front agreement on "the party line". This is dependent in a big way on the age of your child, and can be quite flexible depending on age.

- For younger children (ages 12-14), a more "unified" front is less confusing.
- For a 17 year old, since they reside in the adult world somewhat, they know that uniform agreement is not reality.

Alignment can really mean parents understanding what they agree on, what they don't agree on, AND what the "policy" is regardless of the degree of agreement: "Your father and I have a slightly different feeling about this, but we've decided it's important for you to be home by midnight in any case". Here you can be acknowledging differences, but still be in "alignment" with your expectations.

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## 2. Collaboration Worksheet

Identify (using the [Good Idea - Problem Solving sheet](#)) ways this week that you can move toward getting on the same page with your partner or co-parent. Focus on [setting goals that are S.M.A.R.T.](#), by thinking through **Specific** and **Relevant** ways you can improve communication (so that you are sending the same message to your child) and reduce tension (improve connection, see each other's perspectives). Consider taking time out from discussing problems (and instead discuss things that are going well!), as well as scheduling specific and uninterrupted time to strategize about how to deal with challenges that arise with your child. Start small, and try to manage your expectations... it takes many steps and a lot of practice to get on the same page. Set goals you can **Measure** so that you can monitor the natural drift back into familiar roles and patterns, and bring yourself back to the "alignment project" you are engaged in. The overall goal is to foster good will between the two of you so that you can support your child in a collaborative way (and feel better yourselves!).

**Step 1:** Brainstorm ways you can improve communication and collaboration with your partner/co-parent. Include all ideas, even if you are not ready or willing to try them right now. Then, write the pros and cons of that idea, and see if you are willing to try it this week. Choose one of these goals to try this week. Try to have your goal be **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant**, and something you can accomplish this week (**S.M.A.R.T.**)

**IDEA #1:** (COLLABORATION GOAL) WE (HUSBAND AND I) WILL FIND 10 (FULL) MINUTES A DAY TO TALK ABOUT PLANS FOR THE NEXT DAY

<b>Pros:</b> WE WILL BE LESS LIKELY TO GET OUR WIRES CROSSED ABOUT WHO IS DOING WHAT I WON'T WORRY ALL DAY	<b>Cons:</b> I FEEL SO BUSY AND HE GETS MAD AT ME WHEN I SAY WE NEED TO TALK
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**IDEA #2:** (COMMUNICATION GOAL) I WILL PRACTICE ACTIVE LISTENING 3X'S THIS WEEK BY ASKING HIM HOW HIS DAY WAS, AND LISTENING FOR 3 (FULL) MINUTES WHILE HE ANSWERS

<b>Pros:</b> MY HUSBAND WILL FEEL APPRECIATED BY ME IT WILL FORCE ME TO SLOW DOWN AND BE CALMER	<b>Cons:</b> AT THAT TIME OF NIGHT I AM FRANTIC AND I MAY NOT BE ABLE TO DO IT, WHICH WILL MAKE ME FEEL LIKE A LOSER
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**IDEA #3:**

<b>Pros:</b>	<b>Cons:</b>
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**IDEA #4:**

<b>Pros:</b>	<b>Cons:</b>
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**Step 2:** Brainstorm ways you can reduce tension between you and your partner/co-parent. Again, include all ideas, even those you are not ready or willing to try right now. Then, write the pros and cons of that idea, and see if you are willing to try it this week. Choose one of these goals to try this week.

**IDEA #1:**

I WILL AGREE TO TRY ONE OF MY HUSBAND'S IDEAS FOR A CONSEQUENCE FOR OUR SON, EVEN IF IT'S NOT ONE I WOULD CHOOSE MYSELF.

<p><b>Pros:</b> MY HUSBAND WILL FEEL LESS DEFENSIVE AND WON'T FEEL LIKE I SHOOT DOWN EVERYTHING HE SAYS...MAYBE HE WILL ALSO BE MORE OPEN TO MY THOUGHTS</p>	<p><b>Cons:</b> I THINK SOME OF HIS IDEAS ARE TOO HARSH AND I WON'T WANT TO AGREE TO THEM NO MATTER WHAT</p>
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**IDEA #2:**

<p><b>Pros:</b></p>	<p><b>Cons:</b></p>
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**IDEA #3:**

<p><b>Pros:</b></p>	<p><b>Cons:</b></p>
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**IDEA #4:**

<p><b>Pros:</b></p>	<p><b>Cons:</b></p>
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**Step 3:** List any and all obstacles that come to mind that can interfere with you meeting the above goals this week. Then, write coping skills you can use to help maximize your chances of getting through each obstacle and meeting your goal(s).

<b><u>Obstacles to Practicing Goal</u></b>	<b><u>Coping Skills for Handling the Obstacles</u></b>
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<p>HE WORKS LATE EVERY NIGHT THIS WEEK AND WILL BE TOO TIRED TO WANT TO TALK ABOUT HOW TO MANAGE OUR SON</p>	<p>I WILL ASK HIM TO GET UP 20 MIN EARLY SO WE CAN TALK BEFORE HE GOES TO WORK... AND I'LL MAKE HIM COFFEE</p>

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## 3. One Size Does Not Fit All...One Answer Does Not Fit All

***“What should we do if our teenager is drinking or using drugs?”*** The answer is that there are many answers, many paths, and many ways to help your child change their relationship to substances. The answer will depend on the dynamics of your family as a whole and your child as a unique individual in the system. It will depend on what sorts of other problems they have, how long the behavior has been going on, their age, who their friends are, what they think about their use, and about 50 other things. Every single one of these details will be a part of answering this question.

Inpatient, outpatient. Group therapy, individual therapy. Outpatient once a week, twice a week, every day. Struggles with socializing. A history of being bullied. A history of being a bully. Good athlete; bad athlete. Medications for co-occurring disorders like depression or attention deficit. Getting involved with different kids. Wilderness camp. Therapeutic boarding school. Self-help support groups. Cognitive-behavioral therapy. “90 in 90.” Starting to exercise more. To say that there are as many ways to change as there are kids is an understatement as each kid will have multiple things that contribute to the changes they make. Improving family and friend relationships, increasing healthy habits and introducing new interests all help. In addition, there are many, many options for treatment and therapeutic activity. Sometimes treatment options are not readily available, and some approaches are better supported by evidence than others, but there are options to be explored.

If we could give you one quick thing to do, for simplicity’s sake, we would. If we were giving you that one clear answer though, you shouldn’t listen to us. One clear answer would be giving you a plan based on generalities, not on your family and your child, and it would be a worse plan because of that. We want you to know that *one size really doesn’t fit all*. While it is a little (sometimes a lot) harder to grapple with, and more anxiety-provoking, the fact that the change process is different for different people means both that a single option is not right for everyone, AND that there are many possible paths that will work to help your child and your family. Having a plan each step of the way, *based on your family and what makes sense for your child and situation*, is what will matter and be effective.

One unfortunate message parents often get is that they are “co-dependent” or “enabling” of their child’s substance use. While a whole other topic, we’d like you to know: staying actively involved, being positive, trying to reward good behaviors, and understanding that you are in a great position to help is critical. *You don’t need to step away*; you need to know how to step forward in a constructive and loving way, and remember that there are specific paths that will work for you and your child.

If you are brave enough to ask for it, or probably even if you don’t ask, you will get lots of opinions, advice, and even veiled criticism when it comes to parenting. This can be especially true when it comes to parenting a child who might be “acting out” or using substances. You may notice that the advice you get from family, friends, and even professionals can span some pretty big territory of extremes. From one person, you might hear, “How could you let that happen in your own house?? You should kick him out! If I had ever spoken to my mother like he just spoke to you, I would’ve gotten my butt kicked!” At the same time, someone else will be giving you feedback that is exactly the opposite and sounds something like, “Are you going to ground him forever? What’s the big deal? We don’t get worked up about things like that - after all, think what we all managed to live through! I just think parents are over-protective these days.” We could go on and on, and when we’re done, we are sure you could add many more different opinions and judgments you’ve heard.

Who should you listen to? What’s the best advice? Again we say the most important things to bear in mind are (1) no one size fits all and (2) having a choice among treatment plans and plans for change in general



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predicts positive outcomes. *On these points the evidence is crystal clear.* Giving people options helps them feel less trapped and more invested in the plan.

Do your homework. Helping your child is actually kind of complicated. If the first (or fifth) person you consult with tells you they know exactly what needs to happen, you might want to get some more opinions (especially if they say this without meeting your child). There is a lot of black and white thinking around these issues, and usually, that kind of conviction is going to miss out on who your kid actually is. Maybe it's a simple answer, and maybe it's not, but take your time in sorting out what is going on, and resist the impulse to jump for the flash in the pan.

Even more importantly, we counsel you to be patient; with yourself, with your partner, with your child. And, after you collect information about your specific situation, to trust *your* sense of what is best. It's hard to deal with others' judgments and advice, especially people you care about. Our suggestion: make an effort to resist getting trapped in the quicksand that can come from guilt and self-doubt. Getting input is important, and then you need to trust your sense of the situation and your family.

**A Suggestion:** Ask around...get some feedback from others about who they have seen for consultation (a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker etc) that they liked. "The Top 100 Doctors in New York" may not be the list you want to start with either; the guy your sister's *son* liked might be a better port in the storm. These suggestions are geared toward starting with questions, as opposed to starting with answers. Not one size; not one answer.

Consider getting a professional consultation, because having other eyes on the issues can be very enlightening. You are not alone. Describing it as a "consultation" may be useful for your child, because it can help them not feel trapped into "therapy" forever.

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## 3. One Size Does Not Fit All Worksheet

This week, make a list of all the advice you get from other people about how to deal with your child's substance use that can "trigger" significant feelings or thoughts of self-doubt in you. Next to each trigger, list a potential "coping response." By thinking through a response to comments and suggestions made by other people, you will be better equipped to stay open to suggestions and not feel less able and confident about your own instincts and thoughts.

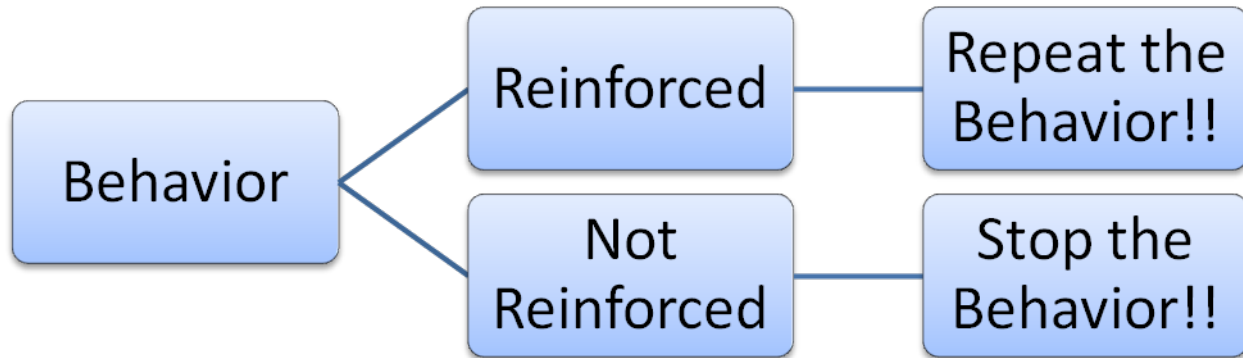
Self-doubt "Trigger" Comments	Coping Response
"YOU SHOULD SEND HIM AWAY TO REHAB"	WE ARE NOT IN A PLACE WHERE WE THINK HE NEEDS THAT INTENSIVE A TREATMENT, AND WE WANT TO TRY TO ENGAGE HIM IN MAKING CHANGES WITHOUT CHANGING HIS ENVIRONMENT
"YOU SHOULD KICK HIM OUT"	WE ARE NOT WILLING TO KICK HIM OUT RIGHT NOW, AND WE THINK THERE ARE MANY STEPS TO TRY BEFORE TAKING SUCH DRASTIC ACTION
"YOU SHOULD CHILL OUT. IT'S JUST POT"	WE ARE CONCERNED BECAUSE OF THE CHANGES WE NOTICE SINCE HIS SMOKING HAS INCREASED: GRADES DROPPED, DIFFERENT FRIENDS, SEEMS UNMOTIVATED IN GENERAL

# Understanding Why It Makes Sense

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## 4. Behaviors Make Sense... Even your Child's

It's unlikely that your child is simply being a "bad kid" or trying to drive you crazy (although sometimes it feels like it). His behavior is rewarding for him. In psychology, we call this "reinforcement." We take action (study for a test, work hard at a job, smoke pot) and then repeat that action because we get something from doing it. Doing well on the test, getting a raise, being the life of the party; these are the rewards or "reinforcers" for our actions, and those reinforcers lead us to keep doing the action. We don't generally repeat things (for very long) unless we get some benefit from this behavior.



People (including your child) use substances because they get something from them. Feeling relaxed, exhilarated, less anxious, braver, funnier, part of the group, are all potential *benefits* of using substances. If there were no benefits, your child would not be using substances. Knowing how substances are affecting your child and what is enjoyable/pleasurable/soothing about it is incredibly helpful, because it provides clues about *what could happen instead*. For example, if you think that your child is drinking in part because it helps him take a break from his hectic school schedule, then you will want to think about what other, healthy ways he might be able to get those breaks. You might decide to do more relaxing things together as a family, schedule "homework free" time, or relax some of the pressure you notice he's feeling at home.

Understanding what your child gets from his use can also lower your fear and anxiety. This might seem hard to imagine, but when you understand what your child is getting from his substance use, you can better predict when it's likely to happen (e.g., if he is using to fit in with other kids, then you know he is more at risk when he's out socializing than home with the family). While this won't get rid of your anxiety, it can lower it because the behavior will feel less random and more predictable. And when you learn CRAFT skills, you will be equipped to intervene constructively to influence the patterns.

Another benefit of learning about your child's reinforcers will likely be an increase in empathy. What is the value of empathizing with something so destructive as your child's substance use? It will help you stay connected, take his use less personally (how can he do this to us?) and feel less angry, which will give you energy to focus on helping him change. Instead of thinking he is just being willful, bad or torturing you, you can see the underlying loneliness, insecurity, depression, or boredom, which are all things you can help your child address. In the end, understanding your child's behavior (instead of just being upset about it) can help *him* feel understood, which will make him much more likely to collaborate on a plan for change.

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## 4. Behaviors Make Sense Worksheet

In order to reinforce positive activities and interests that can compete with your child’s use of substances, you need to understand what they get out of using those substances in the first place. In this exercise, we ask you to brainstorm (let your mind generate obvious and not so obvious options) about what your child may like about using substances. We know this task may be distressing because you wish he would simply “just stop using”. Clarifying what your child is getting out of use, however, gives you a better chance of helping him make changes. In addition, through clarifying his reasons for use, you will likely increase your sense of empathy toward your child. Typically, this will improve your relationship with him, which in turn can allow him to accept help from you more easily. Although it’s tough, really try to put yourself in his head and think through what he might say he gets from using.

<p><b>Step 1:</b> List any reasons you believe your child may be using substances. Start with reasons they have told you in the past (“I like hanging out”, “its fun”, “everyone is smoking pot”, etc.) and also include reasons you believe from your own observations. Try to avoid blaming or accusatory reasons (“because he’s an idiot”, “because he doesn’t care about anything”, “he’s trying to piss me off”).</p>	<p><b>Step 2:</b> Outline the basic needs that the reason in Step 1 fulfills. Below is a list of potential needs, and you can add others.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Stress Reduction</td> <td>Anxiety Relief</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Enjoyment</td> <td>Social Interaction</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mood Stabilizer</td> <td>Risk taking – thrill</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Rebellion</td> <td>_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>_____</td> <td>_____</td> </tr> </table>	Stress Reduction	Anxiety Relief	Enjoyment	Social Interaction	Mood Stabilizer	Risk taking – thrill	Rebellion	_____	_____	_____	<p><b>Step 3:</b> Once you have identified underlying reasons why your child is using substances, brainstorm about alternative ways you can help them with that issue.</p>
Stress Reduction	Anxiety Relief											
Enjoyment	Social Interaction											
Mood Stabilizer	Risk taking – thrill											
Rebellion	_____											
_____	_____											

Reasons For Use	Basic Needs Being Met	Alternatives
EVERYONE ELSE IS SMOKING POT  I JUST NEED TO UNWIND	SOCIAL COMFORT, MAYBE ANXIETY RELIEF, STRESS REDUCTION	TALK TO DOCTOR ABOUT ANXIETY; HELP EXPOSE HIM TO NEW GROUPS OF FRIENDS; GIVE TIME TO UNWIND AFTER SCHOOL WITHOUT CHORES

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## 5. Ambivalence is Normal - and Makes Sense Too!

As you try to help your child change, it can be very helpful to understand that ambivalence is normal, and par for the course. Sometimes change makes sense to your child, other times it doesn't. They may give reasons for change at one time (what we call a "green light" in communication) and at other times argue against it (the "red light" of communication). This motivational seesaw ("Maybe I should change?" "I'm not so sure about this change stuff?" "Change? Are you kidding?") is how ambivalence gets expressed and it's a part of making almost any significant change in life (dieting, ending relationships, changing careers), not just changing substance use.

Why might your child be ambivalent? Well, for one thing, while the change you hope for may have its benefits, your child gets something from using substances. As a result, they will have competing desires and times when each position makes sense. The additional fact that change can be challenging and uncomfortable makes it even more difficult and can further fuel reasons NOT to change (the downside of changing). Because of this, changes do not always happen quickly. Unhealthy behaviors can continue for long periods of time because it is easier to continue with them than it is to change course and begin the learning process toward a new behavior.

You can hear your child's ambivalence in what we call "red light/green light talk". Luckily, there are specific communication strategies that are very helpful in dealing with it (see the "Communication" section), but for now, just try to embrace that your child can have very reasonable reasons for both changing a behavior and for not changing it, or staying with the same behavior. Change can be understood as a "cost-benefit" equation; the "Cost-Benefit Box" below helps illustrate this.

We are going to use a behavior that is less "loaded" than substance use to illustrate how normal ambivalence is, and how it is a part of the change process for many behaviors. The proposed behavior to change in this case? "I have to start exercising because my doctor says I need to for my heart and blood sugar."

**Cost-Benefit Box**

Reasons to Exercise/Change (Benefits)	Reason to Not Exercise/Not Change (Costs)
better health doctor will be happy increased energy feel better about myself	don't want to pay for gym get fatigued from exercise feel really awkward in the gym socially reminds me of how out of shape I am like extra time at home

From a distance, we tend to look at things we want other people to change (e.g. lack of exercising) and think "what's the problem...this is a no-brainer...get to the gym!" We present the Cost-Benefit box above to help you see that there are reasons for both changing and not changing. Most of the reasons make some sense to the person thinking about change. This is ambivalence: wanting to go in two directions at the same time, often with good (or good enough) reasons for both directions! Understanding that making a change often kicks up some ambivalence can help you A LOT as a parent in making sense of your child's response (or lack of it) to the changes you think should happen.

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Don't take the bait! How you react to your child's ambivalence can influence the motivational see-saw and help them move toward change. If you react to "I don't want to change" (red light) talk by trying to shout it down, arguing with it, or trying to make them see your side, ("what do you mean you want to smoke pot, you are failing school because of it!"), then you will probably just get a defensive response. Your child might even become more invested in defending their reasons for not changing. AND you may miss hearing the other more subtle examples of your child's desire to change ("I don't want to have to go to summer school").

What to do? Don't take the bait of trying to squash their red light reasons, even though it's tempting! The communication strategies discussed later will help you speak to your child without activating the "red lights". For now, allowing both sides of their reasoning to be on the table (not just the green lights) is the fastest way to move forward.

And before we get to those communication strategies, we will get to the core of CRAFT: positive reinforcement for positive change. That is, while there may be aspects about their current (not so great) behavior that they like, those things can be replaced with constructive paths that they can value instead. The competition! Ambivalence doesn't need to be fought with; it can be affected by the gentle guiding of your responses and actions

# The Tools of Change



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## 6. Your Love Matters: Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is *the* crucial concept to grasp in this **20-Minute Guide**. In a nutshell, positive reinforcement means giving your child a reward when they do something positive/constructive/not substance-related that you want them to do again (this works at any age by the way!). The “reward” you give can be ANYTHING you think *they* will find rewarding, such as a compliment, a hug, a home cooked meal, a gift card, or often, simple acknowledgement of what they have done (this is often overlooked). The idea is to find the “gold stars” that help them feel like they want to act that way again. The tricky part is to figure out what’s rewarding to your child and tolerate the discomfort you might feel in deciding to reward things you think she “should be doing anyway.”

Positive reinforcement will help move your child away from substance use and toward healthier behaviors. Contrary to what you might have heard before, confronting and using punishment are not the best strategies. Detaching is also not the answer if you want to help your child change. Being actively involved and rewarding steps towards healthy change is what will work to help motivate your child. “Catch them being good” (as rare as that may seem sometimes!) is a winning behavioral strategy that has been proven to be the best way to help people make lasting change, even when it comes to substance use.

If you take a step back, you may notice that you are unintentionally rewarding unhealthy behaviors by giving them all of your attention. The focus on negative behaviors can consume everything, even the times when you child is not using. For instance, when he is sober, it’s natural that you still feel anxiety (when is this going to stop/happen again? etc), anger (how can he keep doing this?) sadness (I can’t believe this is my child) and other negative emotions. These feelings make it difficult to notice and/or give attention to the positive things that *do* happen (he is sober and doing his homework right now, he is sober and having dinner with the family right now, etc).

When in this cycle, your child may be getting only negative attention. It may seem to him that he can’t ever do anything right (because you are upset all the time), so why bother? Of course, it’s important to put limits in place (eg- no driving for a week if you come home high), but the key to your child making changes that will stick long term will be your attention (which is a reward in and of itself) to the healthy, adaptive behaviors that you see.

We want to repeat this because it’s such an important point to take with you in this guide: positive reinforcement works! With you thoughtfully and strategically setting up reinforcements (think “gold stars”) around the positive behaviors you hope will compete with risky behavior, your child will get a sense of accomplishment and feel more motivated to try that new, healthy behavior again. It’s helpful too, to think about ways you can reward steps along the way to healthier behavior. So, for instance, if you’re trying to help your child stop using drugs, you can reward him when he stays home at night, because you know that if he’s home, that means he’s sober.

So what’s a gold star for your child?

### ***Is Positive Reinforcement Bribery?***

You might be wondering... isn’t this the same as bribery? How will my child learn to want this for himself if he’s making changes in order to get rewards?

Actually, positive reinforcement, when practiced consistently, will help ENHANCE your child’s internal/intrinsic motivation over time. Why? Because real change that lasts over the long haul occurs when your child learns and practices what he can do INSTEAD of using substances. Your reinforcement will speed up his willingness to engage in healthy, constructive behaviors that have the potential to be more REWARDING than drugs or alcohol.

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- **Remember that "reward" is in the eye of the beholder.**  
A two week vacation in Italy might feel like winning the lottery to you, but for your child, earning a later curfew and an iTunes gift card might be more likely to hit the mark. Spend some time thinking, talking to your partner, or even talking to your child about what he finds rewarding. You can also look around for what "rewards" your child is already getting that you might want to tie to his behavior. A great example is access to a car. If you know this is meaningful to your child, allowing him the privilege of driving when he stays sober could be a big incentive for him to resist the temptation to use a substance.
- **The "reward" can be anything.**  
ANYTHING you think your child will find rewarding, such as a compliment, a hug, a break from chores, a favorite snack, or trip to the mall, a later curfew, more texting minutes, or movie tickets. Think outside of the box!
- **Remember to shift your rewards according to your child's needs at different life stages.**  
For instance, at ten years old, spending quality time with a parent is all fun and games but by 20 years old... not so much. Do your best to know your child and think through with your partner, if applicable, what your particular child might find rewarding at this point in time.
- **Positive Reinforcement Works!!**  
When practiced consistently over time, it will help ENHANCE your child's motivation. Try to manage your expectations and resist the urge to say "this doesn't work for my child" or "he doesn't care about anything" when his behavior doesn't shift after you reinforce healthy behaviors. Check in with yourself about whether she is finding the reward rewarding. Does the offer to go to the mall with you sound fun, or would she rather ask a friend and have you pick her up later? Are you being consistent with rewarding him as close to his positive behavior as possible. Noticing in the moment or shortly after works a lot better than rewarding a behavior BEFORE it happens or at some later time. Consistent behavior change is hard for everyone, especially teens and young adults, as they are so "in flux" anyway. Try to tolerate the process and remember that changing patterns takes a TON of practice in order to extinguish old patterns and develop new ones.

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## 6. Positive Reinforcement Worksheet

It's crucial to start rewarding positive behaviors if you want to increase the likelihood of your child doing them again. In helping your child change substance use, it's important to notice when he's sober and doing something you like by rewarding it. This not only increases the chances it will happen again, it also builds your child's sense that his world when he's sober is more rewarding than his world when he's under the influence.

This week, pick one of your child's behaviors that you're hoping will change (e.g. going in late to school, coming home high) and use brainstorming to define a "positive opposite" behavior that you can begin rewarding. After you pick a behavior you want to reward, pick a reward you feel willing and able to give, and give it to your child as soon after the behavior as possible. Remember, it is NOT reinforcing if you give it BEFORE the behavior happens... so resist the temptation to give something NOW in the hopes that their behavior will change LATER.

**Step 1:** Using your brainstorming skills, write a list of behaviors you hope your child will change, and identify the "positive opposite" behavior for each of them.

Behavior to Change	Positive Opposite to Reinforce
COMING HOME AFTER SCHOOL LATE AND STONED	COMING HOME ON TIME AND SOBER
GETTING UP LATE AND MAKING MORNING STRESSFUL FOR EVERYONE	GETTING UP ON TIME

Example of behavior to be rewarded this week (using S.M.A.R.T goals):

I WILL REWARD COMING HOME FROM SCHOOL ON-TIME. IT'S SPECIFIC, OBSERVABLE, CAN HAPPEN AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK (MEASURABLE, ATTAINABLE, AND RELEVANT) AND IT'S A STEP-TOWARDS OTHER BEHAVIORS LIKE COMING HOME SOBER.

The behavior I will reward this week:

**Step 2:** Brainstorm possible rewards to give your child each time he does the "positive opposite" behavior this week. Remember, think of rewards you can give AFTER your child does the positive

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behavior. It's also helpful to think of "free" rewards in addition to ones that cost money. Your attention and praise often go farther than any other reward you can offer, especially if there has been tension between you and your child. Use the Good Idea: Reward Sobriety sheet to help you think of ideas if needed.

Free Rewards	Rewards that Cost Something
IF HE COMES HOME ON TIME, I WILL COMPLIMENT HIM FOR WORKING HARD TO COME HOME INSTEAD OF HANGING OUT WITH HIS FRIENDS	IF HE COMES HOME ON TIME I WILL GIVE HIM A \$5 GIFT CARD TO DOWNLOAD APPS.
I WILL LET HIM HANG OUT AND PLAY VIDEO GAMES FOR A BIT BEFORE DOING HIS HOMEWORK	IF HE COMES HOME ON TIME 5 DAYS IN A ROW, I WILL LET HIM HANG OUT WITH HIS FRIENDS AT THE MALL ON SATURDAY

The rewards I will give AFTER he does the behavior I want to see:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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## 7A. Consequences: Naturally Occurring Consequences

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CRAFT is a behavioral approach for helping your child, and in this Guide we stress the importance of positive reinforcement. This includes promoting positive activities that compete with substance use, using positive communication as much as possible, and trying to reward positive behaviors. The goal can be wrapped up in a simple statement: “catch ‘em being good”, and acknowledge it! No new electronic gadgets or concert tickets necessary, just a recognition of their positive actions.

The strength of positive reinforcement is made all the more powerful by how you address your child’s negative behaviors (using drugs or alcohol, coming home late, not doing homework). At these times, your focus needs to shift to letting consequences be felt. And there is a difference worth noting between the consequences that you put in place (typically punishment) and those that are a direct result of your child’s actions. It may surprise you that the naturally occurring consequences (failed grades, missed social events/opportunities, a cold supper) that are a direct outcome of your child’s actions are often the most powerful and meaningful when it comes to promoting change.

Many parents have strategies for meting out punishment for negative behavior (grounding, time outs, withdrawal of money, scolding) but struggle to let the naturally occurring consequences of their child’s behavior affect them. For example, getting a child who stayed up all night (partying) out of bed so they don’t miss class or their weekend job prevents them from having to deal with the “natural” consequences: their principal speaking with them or an upset boss. Letting natural consequences occur will help your child connect the dots and start to understand the results of their actions in the world. The world is a powerful teacher if we let it be.

No one likes to see their child suffer, feel bad, be disappointed, or feel left out. You of course want them to be included, feel relaxed, do well in school/job and feel close to their friends. From a behavioral standpoint, however, the trouble begins when you try to shield your child from some of the “bad” things that are caused through their actions/decisions. By blocking the consequence, your child learns that their negative actions have no downside. And in simple terms, why wouldn’t they keep doing them?

The combination of positive reinforcement and allowing for natural consequences is powerful. If you are using reinforcement strategies, your child can experience the very positive path of acting in the world and having good things happen as a result of their actions. They can start to learn that they are the producer of good things in their life (“when I come home from school on time and do my homework, my mom lets me use the car on the weekend”).

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## **What the heck is “enabling”?**

First, it is an overused word and idea. Second, it matters a lot. It means softening or taking away the negative consequences of someone’s action (letting them call in sick even though they are hungover), with the result being continued or increased negative behavior because there is no bad outcome. The problem is that many parents think that enabling means doing *anything* nice or supportive for their kid who is abusing substances. If in your anger and disappointment, you cut back on all positive behaviors toward them (making them dinner, being pleasant, washing clothes etc), you end up creating a negative environment that is not good for anyone (you or your child).

We are telling you in CRAFT: do nice and supportive things for your child! But here’s the point: do rewarding, positively reinforcing things for them when they are doing constructive, positive things; that will create a nourishing environment for the positive behaviors to happen more often *and* compete with the negative behaviors. When your child is doing destructive things, and you still reward them, or saw off the rough edges for them, in effect taking away the downside of their negative behaviors... then YES, that is enabling! And it’s not so helpful.

**Promote positive behaviors with positive outcomes.  
Allow negative behavior to have a negative outcome.**

Simple, but hard to do. Keep practicing; you’ll get better, and so will they.

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## 7A. Consequences Worksheet

When we discuss “naturally occurring consequences”, we are meaning the direct outcomes of your child’s substance use (or the behavior associated with it) that he would experience if nothing (or no one) interfered. In cost-benefit terms, they’re the costs he naturally incurs by using. The costs can range from emotional costs (depression, embarrassment, shame, or feeling out of control) to physical costs (sleep disruptions, feeling run down, agitation) to loss of relationships and academic or legal problems.

While you don’t want to see your child suffer, feel bad, be disappointed, or feel left out, from a behavioral standpoint, if you shield your child from some of the “bad” things that your child *has caused through their actions/decisions*, they won’t have any reason to change. If nothing uncomfortable or problematic comes out of their use, why wouldn’t they keep using?

<b>Step 1:</b> What are the potential (and actual) natural consequences of your child’s substance use?	<b>Step 2:</b> Is there anything buffering his experiencing of these directly? Is there anything <i>you</i> are doing, inadvertently or purposefully, to mitigate the costs?	<b>Step 3:</b> What can you do to let your child feel the natural consequence more directly (without putting him at too much risk)?
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Negatives of Use	Potential Buffers to Negatives	How I Can Get Out of the Way
INCOMPLETE HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS AND TEACHERS THREATENING SUMMER SCHOOL	MONITORING IF ASSIGNMENTS ARE COMPLETE	LET HIM FACE TEACHERS AND HAVE TO COMPLETE SUMMER SCHOOL INSTEAD OF GO TO CAMP
STAYING UP LATE AND SLEEPING IN. MISSING SOCCER PRACTICE	GETTING HIM UP AND DRIVING FAST TO PRACTICE SO HE DOESN'T MISS IT	LET HIM MISS PRACTICE AND BRING HIM TO TALK WITH COACH AFTERWARDS
COMING HOME LATE AND MISSING DINNER	COOKING HIM SOME LATE DINNER SO HE ISN'T HUNGRY	LET HIM FIGURE OUT WHAT TO EAT ON HIS OWN

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## 7B. Consequences: The 3 “C”s: Clarity, Consequences and Consistency

Underlying all aspects of helping your child is the importance of *clear communication* about agreed upon expectations (with your child, your partner or anyone else involved), clearly defined (ahead of time) *consequences* (**both** positive and negative) for observable behaviors, and *consistent* and reliable *follow through* on those agreed upon expectations. A breakdown anywhere in this chain leads to problems.

In our **20 Minute Guide** and handouts you learned about the importance of being on the same page with your co-parent in conveying expectations to your child, and the value of using the elements of positive communication to convey the message. You are also hopefully trying to use a lot of positive reinforcement, where you give something rewarding to your child when he does something you like and want to see him do again.

Of course, there are going to be many times when you need and want to give a consequence to your child for engaging in behavior you want to see LESS of (e.g. smoking pot in his room, skipping school, coming home after curfew). At these times, structure and consistency are crucial.

First, it is important to let your child know **BEFOREHAND** what is going to happen if he engages in the behavior you want him to avoid. This means figuring out ahead of time what are realistic, possible, and meaningful consequences for the range of behaviors you want to address (the consequence should match the severity/risk of the behavior). For example, maybe she loses access to her computer for a day if she stays up too late and can't get up in time for class. Maybe she gets grounded and can't go out with her friends for the weekend if she comes home from school stoned. The consequences also have to be possible to enforce. For example, if you consider taking away his computer for the day only to realize it's not possible logistically (because he has to do his homework), then work out the kinks so that it is an effective consequence (download his homework and then cut off internet access).

### **Helpful Tip:**

When it comes to consequences, do your best not to use your “biggest hammer” right away. You want the consequence to fit the behavior, rather than responding to all behaviors with the biggest consequence you have.

Save the big consequences (if you do that again, I'm kicking you out of the house, never getting your allowance again, shipping you off to rehab) for the really big stuff, and have some smaller consequences for smaller issues.

Next, the process of giving a consequence will go better if you and your partner are on the same page and present a united front (even if you feel differently). Everyone involved needs to be **WILLING** to give the consequence and be **ABLE** to enforce it. Discuss both of these elements beforehand and pick consequences you can agree to, and that you can help each other enforce. For example, if you plan to take away driving privileges for a week if your child comes home drunk, work out who is going to drive him to school and other places he needs to get to. Similarly, if one of you knows you are going to feel less than sturdy in sticking to the consequence (e.g. who is the “softie”?), then work out a plan for how to help each other stay consistent. The process will go better if you support each other in following through and let the other one know when you're wavering so you can make a plan to cope with it. Communication at all stages is essential.

Why does all this matter? Thinking through all of these things helps enormously with consistency. It's better to not have any consequence or reward at all than to tell your child they exist and then not follow through on them. Failing to be consistent hurts your credibility as well as your ability to influence positive change for your child.



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The more you work out a plan around consequences ahead of time, the better able you will be to follow these important “3C’s”. You will be able to be as clear as possible within yourself, which will help you be clear with your child. You will be able to sort through ahead of time what is going to happen if your child does or doesn’t do something and agree within yourself and with your partner what consequences you’re going to give. You’ll also be able to let your child know in advance so that he knows what to expect, and he can begin to have thoughts such as, “I really want to stay out and not go home for curfew, but I know if I do that, I won’t get the car this weekend...better get home now.” Finally, you’ll be able to work out any obstacles ahead of time. Thinking through things that might make it tough to implement the consequence and coming up with solutions will help enormously with your consistency. Consistency helps your credibility, your sense of control, and your child’s motivation.

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## 7B. The "3 C's" Worksheet

In helping your child make changes, it is important that there is *clear communication* about agreed upon expectations (with your child, your partner or anyone else involved), clearly defined (ahead of time) *consequences* (**both** positive and negative) for observable behaviors, and *consistent* and reliable *follow through* on those agreed upon expectations. A breakdown anywhere in this chain leads to problems.

This worksheet is designed to help you think through in advance how you want to give a consequence to your child for engaging in a behavior you want to see LESS of (e.g. smoking pot in his room, skipping school, coming home after curfew). At these times, structure and consistency are crucial.

**Step 1:** In the left-hand column, list your expectations. Then in the right-hand column, identify the consequence that will result from going against the expected behavior. Use your [S.M.A.R.T strategies](#) as you outline expectations and focus on **Specific** and **Measurable** behavior.

Expectations (CLARITY)	CONSEQUENCE for Negative Behavior
HE WILL COME HOME ON-TIME FROM THE PARTY.	IF HE IS MORE THAN 15 MIN LATE HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO USE THE CAR THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND.

**Step 2:** Use Positive Communication skills to spell out how you will tell your child in advance of these consequences and identify any problems that may get in the way of being consistent with your message.

COMMUNICATION in Advance	Things that may get in the way of CONSISTENCY
I KNOW IT IS HARD TO LEAVE YOUR FRIENDS, BUT YOU NEED TO BE HOME BY CURFEW. IF YOU ARE LATER THAN 15 MIN YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO USE THE CAR NEXT WEEKEND. I'M HAPPY TO SEND A TEXT REMINDER?	I WILL BE WORKING AND HE MAY NEED TO GO TO SOCCER PRACTICE. I WILL MAKE SURE MY HUSBAND CAN DRIVE HIM.

### Expectation for the Week:

Expectations (CLARITY)	CONSEQUENCE for Negative Behavior
COMMUNICATION in Advance	Things that may get in the way of CONSISTENCY

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## 8A. Communication: The 7 Elements of Positive Communication

This is the 1<sup>st</sup> of two sessions about communication. We include two because communication may be the most powerful skill you can develop and use for improving everyone's life, as well as helping your child change. Positive communication is an essential skill and it's often the first thing to go when stress or emotions are running high. It is, however, a crucial part of creating space for change to take place. Not only will better communication help in your relationship with your child, using these skills will help ALL of the relationships in which you practice it. If you use these skills, you will feel more understood, listened to, and better in general.

Many of us talk a lot in business, in social situations, and with our families, so we generally think we're pretty good at communicating, and we often are. It is in our more intimate relationships, however, especially when the stakes are high (typically when things aren't going so well) that communication breaks down. It's natural, understandable, and avoidable! Having some proven anchors for communicating at these times can be the difference between going off the rails and maintaining a positive trajectory (or at least not doing damage).

Communicating in a positive way does not mean always saying nice and positive things or avoiding conflict. "Positive communication" is based on a very specific set of strategies that have been demonstrated to improve interactions and allow relationships to move forward constructively.

A few important things to remember as you learn these skills:

1. It's really helpful to write down and practice what you want to say before you say it...rehearse before the big show. You can try role playing with your partner to see how it goes when one of you plays the role of your child. You can anticipate responses and then fine tune accordingly.
2. Keep in mind the TIMING of when you have conversations. Do your best to make sure your child is not under the influence or hung over, and that he (and YOU!) are in okay moods.
3. It's important to remember that it is NOT a requirement that you use all 7 steps in every interaction! However, attempting to include all of them, especially when practicing, can be really helpful in getting the hang of this process.
4. Start with small ticket items, or easier relationships. Practicing when the stakes are lower for a bit helps when the stakes are higher
5. Using these skills effectively takes a LOT of practice, so try not to get discouraged if you attempt a communication and it doesn't go so well the first couple, or many times. There are typically big communication ruts that need to be fixed for these skills to become natural and effective. But it's worth the effort!

Following are the seven elements of positive communication (taken from Smith and Meyers CRAFT approach). They are both simple, AND hard to do. As always, the best solution is practice.

### Positive Communication is:

- A proven set of specific skills that improve interpersonal communications.
- A way to (hopefully) increase the odds of getting the other person to understand and maybe even agree.
- A way to help maintain a relationship, even if the conversation is a difficult one.

### Positive Communication is NOT:

- Only saying "positive" or "nice" things all the time.
- Avoiding confrontation!
- Enabling.

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## 1. Be Brief

- We all have a tendency to bring up a laundry list of things we want or things that are bugging us once we get going. Also, once we have made our point, we might slip into sounding like Charlie Brown's teacher and go on and on in a way that causes others to tune us out and hear, "waa waa waa" instead. Do your best to practice being brief and sticking to one point in each conversation or request you make.

## 2. Be Specific

- This works much better than giving vague criticism, requests, or feedback. Think about how you have felt when people have asked you to "listen better" or "be more organized" or "stop nagging." Often, this feedback leads to confusion because everyone can define things differently. For instance, if you want your child to be more responsible, a specific example of this would involve saying concretely what behavior you want to see more of, eg "I want you to come home at your curfew time."

## 3. Be Positive

- Again, this doesn't mean being a cheerleader, saying things like "You're great! I love you" (though that's allowed too!). It means telling someone, such as your child, *what you want to see*, as opposed to telling him what you do NOT want to see. Telling people which direction to head in helps with motivation, and also helps decrease defensiveness. Being told to STOP something, or being told NO tends to increase defensiveness and rebellion. For example, framed positively, "Stop coming home late" becomes "Come home by curfew time." You're more likely to get the results you want.

## 4. Label Your Feelings

- In most communications, it's helpful to say a bit about your emotions. Try to keep them on the "less intense" end of the continuum....meaning even if you are feeling "furious, enraged, and terrified," it would help to tone down the expression to "frustrated and worried." Stating an emotion is really helpful in the conversation not feeling like a lecture..you are in the game too and it helps the other person get where you are coming from. But keep this part short!

## 5. Offer an Understanding Statement

- This is crucial because the more the other person believes that you "get" why he is acting the way he is, the less defensive he will be and the more likely to listen, grant your request, etc. Also, asking yourself to try to understand another person's perspective helps you develop empathy for them, which also helps your relationship.

## 6. Take Partial Responsibility

- This one tends to be tough for people (and it's incredibly powerful). This does NOT mean taking blame for things you didn't do ("It's my fault you use drugs"); rather it DOES mean looking really hard for the piece of a situation you can *genuinely* own. Again, the goal of this is to increase the other person's willingness to hear you and motivation to do what you are asking.

## 7. Offer To Help

- Again, a little tends to go a long way. Saying something as simple as "Is there anything I can do to help you come home on time?" can both help your relationship, and maybe even generate some creative ideas....such as "yeah, if you texted me 30 minutes beforehand, that would help remind me it's time to go."

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## 8A. Positive Communication Worksheet

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Positive communication is an essential skill. Using these specific strategies will help you communicate more effectively with your child (and everyone else in your life!) and help you positively influence him to change his behavior. Practicing these skills will also contribute to you feeling listened to and better understood. When you start using these skills, however, they will probably feel a little awkward, just like when you try anything new. That's why we recommend writing down what you want to say first. Then rehearse it, fine tune it, even role play with someone else pretending to be your child to see how the communication goes before you "take it on the road." (An even more interesting practice strategy is to role play your child while someone else plays you...always makes for an interesting perspective!). Use these strategies to map out a request you want to make of your child (e.g. coming home at curfew, waking himself up for school, staying sober at the football game).

## Step 1:

Write down how you'd usually deliver your request. Then, modify your request by trying to hit on the 7 steps as a way to frame it. If you decide to have the conversation, remember to pick a time when he's sober and you're both in calm moods. Also remember: when you have the actual conversation, you may well not remember or choose to use all 7 points.

My request as I usually say it:

## Step 2:

Use the 7 positive communication strategies to map out a new way of making the request. We have given you some examples so that you can fine tune your request.

For reference, the 7 guidelines of positive communication are:



**Be Brief:** Make sure you only make one request at a time and try to have your request stick to your point in a succinct way. No wandering!

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<p><b>First Try:</b> I WANT YOU TO DO A BETTER JOB OF CLEANING UP AFTER YOURSELF, YOUR ROOM IS A MESS, AND YOUR CLOTHES ARE EVERYWHERE. YOU'RE DRIVING ME CRAZY.</p>	<p><b>Modified:</b> I WOULD LIKE YOU TO PICK UP YOUR CLOTHES.</p>
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**Be Specific:** Make sure you are clear about your request.

<p><b>First Try:</b> JUST BE TIDIER WITH YOUR CLOTHES!</p>	<p><b>Modified:</b> PUT YOUR CLOTHES IN THE HAMPER</p>
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My Request Specific and Brief:

**Be Positive:** Tell you child what you *WANT* him to do rather than what you *don't* want him to do

<p><b>First Try:</b> STOP LEAVING YOUR CLOTHES ON THE FLOOR</p>	<p><b>Modified:</b> PLEASE PUT YOUR CLOTHES IN THE HAMPER</p>
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My Request using Positive Frame:

**Label your Feelings:** Identify your feeling and describe it without being too intense. If it can include a positive feeling as well, bonus points!

<p><b>First Try:</b> YOU MAKE ME CRAZY WITH HOW LITTLE YOU SEEM TO CARE ABOUT THINGS!</p>	<p><b>Modified:</b> IT FRUSTRATES ME TO COME HOME AND SEE CLOTHES LYING AROUND. I'D REALLY APPRECIATE YOUR HELP IN THIS.</p>
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My Feelings:

**Make Understanding Statement:** Use this strategy to help your child feel heard and non-defensive.

<p><b>First Try:</b> I'M NOT ASKING ANYTHING OF YOU THAT I DON'T ASK OF EVERYONE ELSE... WE ALL CHIP IN.</p>	<p><b>Modified:</b> I KNOW YOU FEEL RUSHED TO GET TO YOUR PRACTICE AND DON'T THINK YOU HAVE TIME TO DEAL WITH YOUR CLOTHES.</p>
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My Understanding Statement:

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**Take Partial Responsibility:** This does not mean to say it's your fault or accept blame. Just look for the piece of the problem you can own and take responsibility for.

First Try: IT'S NOT MY JOB TO BE YOUR MAID!	Modified: I REALIZE I HAVE BEEN PICKING UP YOUR CLOTHES AND HAVE NOT TOLD YOU HOW MUCH IT FRUSTRATES ME.
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My Effort to Take Partial Responsibility:

**Offer to Help:** See if there is anything you can do to help your child achieve your request.

First Try: YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO GROW UP SOONER OR LATER	Modified: IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP YOU, SUCH AS PUT AN EXTRA HAMPER IN YOUR ROOM SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO TO THE LAUNDRY ROOM?
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My Offer to Help:

Now see how your request sounds when you put all the elements together... Put it in an order that makes sense and change the wording until you like it and think your child will be most likely to respond well. Keep in mind that even the most PERFECTLY scripted requests don't guarantee the outcome you want. They do, however, really increase the odds of being heard, which is a huge step forward. Using positive communication strategies will help you consistently move things in a positive, hopeful direction that brings you closer to your goals, as well as closer to your child (because they will be less defensive).

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## 8B. Communication: Red Light/Green Light Talk: Pay Attention to the Lights!

In the 1<sup>st</sup> of our two sessions on communication (“The Seven Elements of Positive Communication”), we discussed talking with your child in a way that is more likely to lower defensiveness and allow for a constructive discussion. In this 2<sup>nd</sup> communication session, we discuss strategies for keeping the conversational traffic flowing in a positive direction, and staying out of traffic jams!

You have, of course, already tried to talk to your child (or shout at, plead with, etc.) about changing his/her behavior. In fact, trying to talk your child into changing may be the one strategy you have relied on most. As your experience may tell you, conversations about change (and conversations period!) can be difficult and tricky. There are probably many times you started a conversation with great intentions only to see the discussion go off course and become unproductive or downright destructive. You and they feel backed into a corner, “red lights” all around.

We refer to this mixture of responses you get as “Red Light/Green Light talk”, and describe them as follows:  
**Green Light Talk** - when your child is more positively engaged with you, more willing to hear what you are saying and have a constructive back and forth, and *may* be talking about moving toward change.

**Red Light Talk** – when your child is destructively engaged with you (e.g. yelling, cursing), is not listening, and is probably moving away from the idea of change (e.g. defending their substance use).

In discussions with your child, you’ll be sure to hear both (though often it feels like only red lights!). One second you think you are moving forward in a good direction (green light), the next you’re stopped in your tracks (red light). In our Red Light-Green Light Communication Box below, we illustrate the types of responses you might hear.

**Parent: “I’d like to talk to you about not drinking at the party tonight”.**

**Red Light-Green Light Communication Box**

(Green Light Talk)	(Red Light Talk)
“ok, but can we not have a fight about it”? “can we talk about it”? “I won’t drink, I have practice early in the morning”.	“you’re just going to force your rules on me”. “why do you get so bent out of shape about this”? “I hate when you meddle in my social life”.

It can feel incredibly frustrating to hit those red lights, especially when you are in a rush to make change happen, to get a green light and drive on through. And yes, it’s very easy to gun it, close your eyes and just drive. A common result: everyone feels *worse*, not *better*, and people retreat to their respective corners. The conversation didn’t have the desired effect! Over time, many families are left with broken down communication, landmines of negative, defensive feelings laying all around, and everyone afraid to even try talking. Sound familiar?

Talking is one of the most frequently used tools for affecting the behavior of others. Learning to understand the types of questions and statements you use, noticing what parts of your child’s talk you tend to focus on, and planning how to respond to your child’s talk can have a powerful and positive effect on the direction



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and type of conversations you have. These strategies are a more surefire path to a green light, which allows everyone to move forward.

## Welcome to OARS

OARS is an acronym for four conversational strategies (taken from a powerful therapeutic approach called Motivational Interviewing) that will INCREASE the chances that a discussion is productive instead of destructive, open instead of closed, calm instead of explosive. It's an approach to helping the red lights turn green, instead of driving straight through or trying to force things.

Start by listening to your child talk about his behavior and see if you can begin to identify Green Light and Red Light talk. The OARS strategies below will help you learn to talk in ways that can help tip the motivational see-saw toward engagement and change. The way you talk about issues has a powerful impact on motivation, defensiveness, and willingness. The OARS suggestions will help in all these areas.

**Open Ended Questions** – Your child may give you both Green Light Talk and Red Light Talk in the same conversation. You can increase the likelihood or frequency of Green Light Talk (or, help move them away from ambivalence) with the types of questions you ask. **Open** questions (for example, “*What concerns you most?*” Or “*What would you like to be different?*”) invite and help your child get *their* ideas about change on the table. In addition, asking permission (“*Would it be alright to talk about last night now; if not, when in the next day works for you?*”) sets a collaborative tone and makes your child a partner in the process.

**Affirm: look for the positives** – Conversations can easily become about what is NOT going right. Finding things that ARE going right can provide some balance and help reduce Red Light responses. **Affirming** (highlighting your child's strengths, identifying positive behaviors, etc.) can be crucial both in your relationship with your child and in helping your child change. Affirming involves recognizing with words when your child is doing something you want them to continue (coming home on time, helping with the dishes, spending positive time with the family, or even taking time to talk and participate in a conversation). Seasoning a conversation with affirming statements reduces defensiveness, which helps when you are trying to get into the tougher issues at hand. It also builds self-esteem and helps your child feel good about positive behaviors.

**Reflect: use active listening** – Reflective (or active) listening is “listening in action.” It is not agreeing with everything that is said, but being at least willing to hear how they see things, instead of immediately “countering” their view. It is a way of listening that helps you get a better understanding of what your child is saying and also communicates that you are trying to understand their perspective. **Reflections** (after the listening) are statements that capture and mirror back what your child is saying (“it sounds like being sober at a party would be a little nerve-wracking”). Reflective listening helps your child feel understood, keeps the discussion flowing, and is useful in responding to Red Light Talk.

**Summarize: making sure we're on the same page** – Discussions that include open questions, affirming, and reflections may result in a lot of talk. **Summarizing** can help pull the important things that were said together. Importantly, it also communicates that you have been listening. Try, however, to summarize as accurately as possible, without re-editing the conversation to include things you wished they had said! A great thing about summaries is that they can also help guide the conversation toward a “next step”, without it seeming as though all you want is “the right answer” out of them.

## Which side of the coin do you want to be on?

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There are two sides in a conversation about change: the Green Light side and the Red Light side. *Often, if you take one side of that discussion, your child will take the other.* And the more forcefully you take one side, the more forcefully they will take the other! If you are hearing a lot of Red Light talk from your child, this may signal that you have taken up the Green Light side in the conversation, leaving only that other side of the conversation for them. This can result in your child *defending* the behaviors he may actually be *ambivalent* about.

The cardinal rule of not pushing them into defending themselves, then, is to not take a side. Listen to their ideas, both Red and Green talk, try to understand it from their perspective; then share your perspective. This *doesn't* mean you can't use conversations to lay down a rule, deliver a consequence, or express your expectations for the future. It *does* mean in getting their perspective you are not demeaning their ideas as stupid, expressing the sense that they will have no input at all, or are unwilling to forge a plan together instead of by yourself.

**A Side Note:** Take a moment to notice Red and Green lights in conversations with *anyone*; when you don't jump to taking a side, you'll find people can consider *both* sides more easily; when you strongly advocate for one side ("don't give ME a red light!"), notice how quickly the other person picks up the opposite, all based on YOUR approach!

## Conversational Bonus Points Section: Steering Clear of Conversational "Traps"

We offer you this "bonus" section because there are well-worn, classic "traps" that happen so often you can see them a mile away... if you know what to look for!

**The Information Trap:** *If only they knew the facts they would see things differently and change!* Information can be helpful, and most helpful when it fills in a gap in knowledge. It is less helpful if it is telling your child things they already know. If you want to provide information, "serving an information sandwich" may avoid the blank stares or Red Lights. An information sandwich uses the following sequence (and is digested better!):

- 1<sup>st</sup> – open question/affirmation ("What's your take on...?"/"You did a great prep job for your test")
- 2<sup>nd</sup> – information ("Did you know the test registration is today at 5 pm")
- 3<sup>rd</sup> – open question/affirmation/offer ("what do you think about what we just talked about?"/"I'm happy to help to register if it's useful")

**The Lecture Trap:** This is a deeper information trap. One sign that you have entered this trap is when you find yourself talking "at" your child about what you think he should do, what his problems are, what went wrong last week, etc., rather than talking "with" him.

**The Blaming Trap:** If you are (understandably) worried, frustrated, or sad about the current situation with his substance use, it is likely you'll at times get stuck in the blaming trap. Conversations can stumble into finding who is at fault or who is to blame for a situation ("well if you hadn't\_\_\_, then\_\_\_"). This trap shuts down a conversation and backs your child's motivation into a corner (Remember "behaviors make sense").

**The Labeling Trap:** Labels are NOT necessary for change, and at times get in the way (e.g. "I am not an 'addict'", "I am not 'co-dependent'!"). This trap results in a conversation that is no longer about the behavior of concern but the label.

**The "Question and Answer" Trap:** Using a lot of closed questions can set off this trap ("did you get high last night"?). Open questions are more likely to steer your conversation away from being an interview, or worse, an interrogation.

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## 8B. Talk Worksheet

This worksheet will highlight some of the ingredients for more effective communication, lay out some “conversational traps” that can take you off course, and guide you away from the corners that are so easy to get into. These strategies are quite helpful in reducing “Red Light” responses, as well as promoting a feeling of understanding and collaboration, which is critical to developing a positive environment and the likelihood of change. To help remember these strategies, you can use the acronym “OARS”.

**Use Open questions.** Open questions invite your child to talk. It lightens the conversational burden a bit because it provides your child with the opportunity to fill you in on their perspective. It also gives you space to listen. Open questions start with the words like *How* (*How are things going?*), *What* (*What would be most helpful?*), and can even be a statement like *Tell me more about that*. If a question can be answered with one word, (like no or yes) it is a closed question. Closed questions make *you* work harder! With a closed question, you are always trying to find the perfect question to ask, and they usually do not give you the answer you were looking for. Think through some of the ways you have phrased questions in the past and try to turn them into open ended questions.

Closed Questions	Open Questions
DID YOU DRINK LAST NIGHT?	HOW DID IT GO WITH THE ALCOHOL LAST NIGHT?
WHY DID YOU DO THAT?	TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT....
DON'T YOU WANT TO CHANGE?	WHAT WOULD BE DIFFERENT IF YOU CHANGED YOUR USE OF ....?

**Questions Tip:** Try to avoid *Why* questions; they often back you into a corner by inviting your child to justify their negative behaviors. These responses can sound like Red Light talk.

**Affirm: Look for the positives.** Conversations can easily become about what is NOT going right. Finding things that ARE going right can provide some balance and help increase Green Light talk responses. Write

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down ways that your child has tried to explain their behavior in the past and then imagine Affirming responses that you could use that would recognize with words the behavior you want them to continue.

Situation	Affirming Statements
I TRIED NOT TO USE BUT IT DIDN'T WORK OUT LAST NIGHT...	YOU TOOK A STAB AT DOING SOMETHING DIFFICULT...
I KNOW I DIDN'T TELL YOU 'TIL YOU ASKED ME ABOUT IT...	I APPRECIATE YOU TALKING HONESTLY TO ME ABOUT THIS...
I DID TRY TO AT LEAST NOT START USING 'TIL LATER IN THE PARTY...	IT TOOK SOME COURAGE TO TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT LAST NIGHT.

**Reflect: Use active listening.** Reflective (or active) listening is “listening in action.” It is not agreeing with everything that is said, but being at least willing to hear how they see things, instead of immediately “countering” their view. List some of the things your child has said to you about how they feel and how you have responded in the past. Try to re-construct into a more reflective response.

Your Child's Statement	“Counter” Response	“Reflective” Response
YOU NEVER LISTEN TO ME	THAT'S NOT TRUE YOU ...	YOU FEEL YOU'RE NOT BEING HEARD...
I DON'T WANT TO STOP USING	DON'T YOU SEE THAT YOU HAVE A PROBLEM?!	USING DRUGS IS REALLY IMPORTANT TO YOU
I DIDN'T USE LAST NIGHT	YEAH BUT ITS ONLY ONE NIGHT....	BEING ABSTINENT WAS IMPORTANT TO YOU LAST NIGHT

*Reflection Tip:* Notice the impulse to “correct” what your child is saying. What you get for your correction is usually further justification by them of their “rightness”. What you get for letting them have their version of events is a *greater* likelihood they can hear another perspective.

## 9. Managing your Negative Emotions

You're only human, so it's natural that when your child is struggling, you sometimes struggle too. Despite your best efforts and wishes, you will likely experience many painful emotions while navigating difficult

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issues with your child. You may find yourself yelling and even screaming, nagging and begging, crying and shutting down. At times, you may even feel like throwing in the towel and giving up entirely. These feelings can be really hard to tolerate, especially if they are a big contrast to how things used to feel with your child, or to how they feel with other children in your house. We want to tell you two things about these feelings and reactions: 1) they are to be expected and 2) you need to have effective ways to deal with them, so that they don't get in the way of you being as helpful as you can to your child, the rest of your family, and yourself.

## **Your Negative Emotions**

When your child is using substances or engaging in other risky behaviors, *of course* you will experience fear, anger, a sense of betrayal, confusion, and a whole bucket full of other painful feelings. All of these negative feelings are normal and to be expected. The trick is to find a way to manage them that DOESN'T include acting on them with your child.

Many parents find that dealing with their own negative emotions is one of the hardest parts of effectively dealing with their child's behavior. You might notice feeling all kinds of negative ways towards your child (angry, disappointed, resentful, and even hateful) while at the same time feeling guilty ("How can I have these feelings about my own child? What if it's my fault that he's doing this in the first place?"). As counter-intuitive as it may seem, the more you are able to acknowledge your negative feelings to yourself as they are happening, the quicker you will notice them being defused. Allowing this awareness and acknowledgement is truly part of "self-care" (which we discussed as the first point in our **20 Minute Guide**), and it allows you much quicker access back to the positive emotions you need to help your child change. This awareness will also keep your negative emotions from bursting out of you in the form of confrontational or aggressive behaviors that will push your child away and move you further away from your ultimate goals.

## **Your Negative Behavior**

Breaking down, detaching, checking out and confronting are all examples of acting out your negative feelings. Breaking down will likely worry or overwhelm your child or allow him to think you are the problem ("my mom's crazy"). Detaching and checking out will eliminate your ability to have a positive influence. And confrontation leads to resistance!

Being calm, engaged and non-confrontational however, *does not mean you are passively accepting or allowing risky behaviors*. Keeping high emotion out of your conversations with your child will help him listen to you. Staying engaged will let him know you care. And if you are successful, you will be modeling behaviors and communication strategies you want to see from your child!

We know that keeping this mindset when dealing with the high emotion typically evoked by a teenager taking risks is easier said than done! But it's important. One way to keep your cool with your child is to prepare in advance for getting your buttons pushed. The more you know what your child does or says that really gets your emotions running hot, the better you will be able to anticipate how you can respond constructively (e.g., with limits, a moment to cool off, a well-crafted communication). The goal is to push for healthy behavior change without either of you getting lost in the spiral of negative emotion and destructive patterns.

## **How to Manage YOUR Negative Emotions and Behaviors**

- Anticipate them! How does your child push your buttons? What are the actions (triggers) that make you more likely to react with anger, yelling, and other confrontational behaviors? Make a list of these, and then brainstorm potential responses. Include limits (consequences), taking a time out if

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you need to cool off, and positive communications of your expectations (see next “20 Minute” point).

- Upon reflection, you might discover that you are especially sensitive to name-calling or swearing, yelling or physical aggression (door slamming, throwing things, menacing). As you think through limits, tell your child in advance what they can expect if they engage in these behaviors moving forward (“I know it’s hard for you to talk about things when you are mad, but if you curse at me you will lose your computer for the night).
- Come up with alternate, non-confrontational reactions you are *willing* to practice to help keep interactions with your child as cool as possible. Brainstorm strategies that help you be a little less reactive (sleep, exercise, time to yourself), and therefore better at helping your child change (and taking care of yourself, too). Think about things that can help you once your buttons are pushed, and more importantly, things that can help you avoid feeling triggered in the first place.
- Try strategies like silently labeling your feelings or describing to yourself what’s happening: “I feel really angry amazingly fast when he has that disrespectful tone with me.” Just narrating to yourself what’s happening can sometimes provide a little bit of distance between you and your emotional reaction.
- Practice taking a “time out” when you first notice yourself feeling heated and give yourself permission to avoid some of your more triggering situations while you try to improve the climate in your home.
- Oddest suggestion of all? During a difficult moment, try imagining how you’d react if it was your neighbor’s kid. Probably a lot more calmly, less judgmentally, and with a lot less emotion. Try it on for a couple of minutes and see if it helps get through the moment.

**Remember your goals:** You want your child to *change his relationship with substances* and you want him to eventually feel like he's *interested in making the changes for reasons that matter to him*. You want him to feel *loved and supported*, even lovable, because you know that no matter how scared, angry, or frustrated you get, this is your child and you love him.

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## 9. Emotions Worksheet

The more you know what your child does or says that pushes your buttons, the better able you'll be to prepare yourself for how to remain calm and cool (easier said than done, we know) and react in ways that keep you on track to help your child change. This week, brainstorm what your child does that trigger your negative emotions. Identify the things s/he does that put you at risk for being angry, yelling, and engaging in other confrontational behaviors. Then, use your [S.M.A.R.T goals](#) to come up with alternative, non-confrontational reactions. Be sure to identify **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, and Relevant** goals that you are willing to practice to help keep interactions with your child as cool as possible. The goals should be designed to help you be a little less reactive, and therefore better at helping your child change (and taking care of yourself, too). Pick one goal to practice this week.

### **Brainstorming:**

In the left-hand column, list everything you can think of that your child does that pushes your buttons and makes you more likely to act on negative emotions. Then, in the right-hand column, use your **S.M.A.R.T** goals to employ non-confrontational reactions in response. Identify one coping response to practice using this week.

Your Child's Behaviors that Increase Your Negative Emotion	Potential Coping Response or Alternative Way to React
HE COMES HOME OBVIOUSLY UNDER THE INFLUENCE.	THIS WEEK, I WILL PRACTICE RESISTING THE URGE TO TALK TO HIM WHEN HE COMES HOME UNDER THE INFLUENCE; INSTEAD, I WILL GO TO A PLACE IN OUR HOME WHERE I DON'T SEE HIM AND WHERE I CAN FOCUS ON SOMETHING ELSE.
HE IGNORES ME/TAKES A REALLY SNOTTY TONE WITH ME WHEN I ASK HOW HIS DAY WENT.	THIS WEEK, I WILL GO IN MY ROOM, RELAX, AND TELL MYSELF I CAN TALK TO HIM MORE EFFECTIVELY TOMORROW WHEN I'M CALMER.

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## 10. You Can't Get it Right Every Time... Practice, Practice, Practice!

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The final thought we want to leave you with in our **20-Minute Guide** is not so much related to CRAFT or coping with a child's substance use as it is about the process of learning ANY new skill... and that is: PRACTICE. We all can learn to change, learn new skills, and take pride in new behaviors, but doing so takes practice! Whether it's positive communication, golf, collaborating with your husband, playing guitar, or figuring out your new phone, when we learn something new most of us feel awkward, not good at it, confused, and frustrated. As you learn new CRAFT strategies, you might get frustrated and be tempted to give up. You might notice saying things to yourself such as "this isn't working. This won't ever work. This isn't me. I'm no good at this and won't ever be." While these are very natural thoughts and impulses to have as you learn a new behavior, they are important to put in perspective and manage if you are going to persist. Since CRAFT is likely a new set of skills for you, we want to stress the importance of managing your desire to give up before you've mastered them.

Navigating the rocky terrain of having a child who's abusing substances requires emotional resilience, good reinforcement strategies and positive communication. All of the skills we have outlined to help you require a lot of practice to implement effectively. In fact, it would be very unusual if you tried any of them one time and got amazing results, or felt natural doing it and totally motivated to do it again. It is more likely that you notice how the new skill doesn't go well or feel effective. You may also feel that your child doesn't seem to change at all as a result of you trying it.

One thing we encourage you to do as you pick some or all of these CRAFT skills to work on is to think about other skills you have and what it was like when you FIRST were learning them. Driving for instance was initially a skill to be learned and now is likely so habitual you don't even think about the details of it. At first, you needed to think about where your hands were on the steering wheel, where the pedals were, and maybe it took you a bunch of tries to parallel park. It was a learning process, and it took time. Likewise, CRAFT skills for helping your child and your family are skills to be learned. Seeing them in that light can help you feel calmer, and allow you to remain patient in learning to use them.

But as in all learning, *wanting* to know the skill doesn't get you the skill; practice does. We urge you to practice each of the skills in the **20 Minute Guide** handouts many times. Take time to fine tune the things that aren't going well, and run experiments and learn from the "data" you collect (e.g. maybe you think time by himself will be rewarding for your child and then you learn that actually, he likes spending time with the family more ). The process of changing any behavior, including substance use, is a complicated one, and usually follows a bumpy, up and down road, rather than a straight and smooth one. The more you can approach the CRAFT ideas and techniques as tools to put in your toolbox and pull out and use as much as possible, the more influence you will have on your child changing.

As you read through all the behavior strategies in the 20 Minute Guide handouts, you'll sometimes think, "but I've tried this before and it didn't work." Although we imagine this is true, we also know it is probably true that you have not combined the consistency, timing, or collaboration that you need in order to get results. You are a loving parent with only the best of intentions and we want to help you help your child. By advising you to practice, we are hoping you realize that you can shift your child's behavior by shifting your own.

Last, as is helpful with learning any new habit or skill, it's useful to "track" your practice. Tracking your progress helps for lots of reasons. It gives you a record to look back on and can help you remember what you're doing, when you're doing it, and how it's going. You might feel, at times, that you've been practicing



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forever, and then look back and see that you only started a month ago. Also, you can start to see what strategies are influencing your child in a positive way. You may also notice feeling more relaxed overall, and you can look back and see that it relates to when you started exercising more frequently or having dinner with friends more regularly. On the worksheets for “Practice” you’ll see listed all of the skills you can learn and space to keep track of when you are practicing each of them. There are many “tracking apps” on smart phones and you should feel free to make your own system if that works better for you.

Developing your helping skills will take time and patience. Helping your child change through your relationship will be a process. Give yourself room to work on it, make mistakes, and not get discouraged. You will get better at the changes you are trying to make, and so will your child.

# Some Good Ideas

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## A Good Idea: Problem Solving Skills

### 1. Define the problem as narrowly as you can.

- People tend to get overwhelmed by a problem and then lump multiple problems together. When you're describing a problem, be on the lookout for separate problems within the description, and tease them apart. The goal is to define one relatively discreet problem at a time (even if there are many!). It's easier to deal with a series of smaller problems rather than one large complicated one; the solutions are more manageable and you'll feel more optimistic and accomplished as you get through them.

### 2. Brainstorm possible solutions.

- In this step, your task is to come up with as many options as possible so that you have a lot to choose from. Brainstorming is meant to be an open, free-for-all process of allowing all ideas in the door, to be sorted through later. We have a tendency to shoot down ideas out of habit or caution, which can eliminate real potential solutions. This step helps you list out options without judging them and ruling them out as non-workable before you've thought them through.

### 3. Eliminate unwanted suggestions.

- Next, after you've let any and all ideas in the door, you can examine them more closely and get rid of any potential solutions that are unappealing for any reason. Eliminate options you can't actually imagine ever doing. Get rid of options that seem to have a lot of downsides or that seem unrealistic. If you end up crossing off every option, then repeat your brainstorming step.

### 4. Select one potential solution.

- Pick the one solution that you feel makes the most sense to try in a timely manner (like this week). Typically, this will be the one that feels the most doable to you, and has more pros than cons when you think about trying it.

### 5. Identify possible obstacles.

- What potential obstacles could get in the way of completing your task? You want to anticipate problems so you can plan strategies for dealing with them. This can include both predictable obstacles, as well as just an awareness that unforeseen challenges may arise during the process, which can lend you some emotional resilience in dealing with them.

### 6. Address each obstacle.

- Come up with specific strategies (not just "I'm sure I can deal with it") to manage each obstacle so that you can cope effectively and not allow the obstacle to prevent you from moving forward.

### 7. See how things go.

- After you've carried out your plan, evaluate the process...how did it go? Look at what went well and what was more challenging about implementing your plan and working towards your goal. Did obstacles come up that you didn't predict? Did your strategies for dealing with your obstacles work well? Are there things you would want to do differently next time? Evaluating how a plan turns out is a crucial step in assessing what works and what doesn't work for you.

Adapted from pp.187-190 in: Smith, J., & Myers, R. (2004). Motivating substance abusers to enter treatment: working with family members. New York: Guilford Press.

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## **A Good Idea: Rewarding Sobriety When Your Child is Not Drinking/Using**

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Positive reinforcement is a powerful tool. It is very helpful to give positive attention to your child when he/she is not drinking/using. This is especially true if there has been conflict or tension in your household and in your relationship. Compliments, smiles, pats on the back are all free ways of acknowledging positive changes in your child's behavior. Remember, you are competing with the rewards of their substance use, so creating a rewarding, encouraging, pleasant environment between you will go a long way toward this end.

### **Do:**

- Spend time with him doing something fun when he is sober
- Really acknowledge/appreciate him verbally
- Take a walk together
- Facilitate something that he likes (take him to the mall/gym; buy him and his girlfriend dinner)
- Talk about topics he enjoys
- Prepare his favorite foods
- Give a 5 minute shoulder rub
- Go out to a favorite, fun restaurant
- Watch a movie together
- Play a card or board game together
- Read a book or play a video game together
- Give praise and support
- Give small or inexpensive gifts
- Give him a break from a chore he does not like to do
- Get involved in an activity that he enjoys
- Do \_\_\_\_\_
- Do \_\_\_\_\_

**Have a good time with your child and focus on enjoying their positive actions.**

### **Don't:**

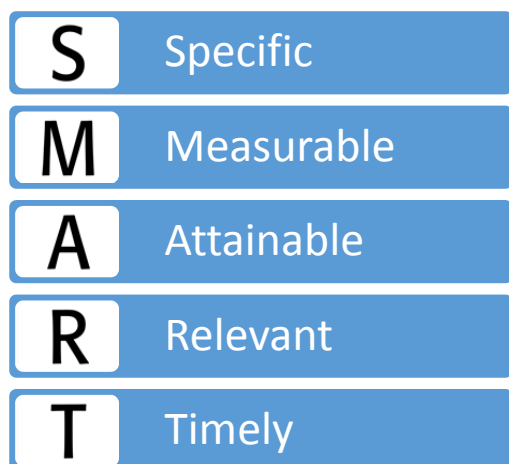
- Nag her about her actions the last time she was drinking or using
- Try to punish her for recent use by giving the "cold shoulder"
- Lecture or give rational explanations why drinking or using is bad
- Repeatedly explain why she "has to stop"
- Follow her around to make sure she stays out of trouble
- Threaten her
- Resort to emotional pleading, crying
- Get caught up in yelling/fighting about the use that took place yesterday, last week, etc.
- Don't \_\_\_\_\_
- Don't \_\_\_\_\_

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## A Good Idea: S.M.A.R.T. Goals

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When you translate your goals into SMART format, you have a much better chance of successfully accomplishing them. Why? First, you are able to take an idea that might feel overwhelming (“I want to get healthy”) and break it down into doable steps toward that goal (“I will walk for 15 minutes twice this week”). This also allows you to make sure each step is actually attainable and not unrealistic. You are also concretizing something hard to measure, giving you a chance to track your progress. Just like with driving, when you know where you are headed, it is much easier to get there than if you just get in your car and drive.

The acronym “S.M.A.R.T.” will help you conceptualize, state, and then lay out your goals in a way that will greatly increase the likelihood of moving forward and meeting them.

### Specific:

A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal. To set a specific goal, you can answer these five “W” questions:

*WHO:* Who is involved (if anyone)?

*WHAT:* What do I want to accomplish?

*WHEN:* When am I going to work on this goal/ when do I want it to take place?

*WHERE:* Identify location (if relevant).

*WHY:* Specific reasons, purposes or benefits of accomplishing the goal.

Example: A general goal would be, “Get in shape”, while a specific goal would be, “Join a health club and exercise three days this week”.

### Measurable:

Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress towards each goal you set. When you measure your progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience the positive momentum that encourages putting in the effort required to reach additional goals. To determine whether your goal is measurable, ask questions such as “How will I know when it is accomplished?” and, “Will I be able to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the question of whether I have accomplished this goal.” To draw from the above example, “get in shape” would be difficult to figure out how to measure, while “3x’s a week” is clear.

### Attainable:

To be attainable, a goal must be one that you are both *willing* and *able* to work toward. While it might feel nice to “set a high bar” for yourself in your goal, probably more important is to develop a goal that you have the resources, tools, and ability to accomplish. A goal can be both high and realistic; you are the only one who can decide just how high your goal should be. But be sure that you are challenging yourself, not overwhelming yourself. Ask yourself if this seems like the “next step” or if there are other steps you need to take before this goal will be attainable. Additional

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ways to know if your goal is attainable include determining whether you have accomplished anything similar in the past and asking yourself what conditions would have to exist to accomplish this goal.

## **Relevant:**

“Why do I want to accomplish this goal”? This is a critical question, and if you’re really not sure of the answer, you might reconsider the goal. Sometimes we decide on goals out of guilt or reactivity. Example: “I feel so bad I keep letting the kids down...I’ll promise to be home by 8 every night for a month”! Bad idea! This goal is relevant for reasons that are not sustainable. In fact, your boss keeps you at work often in ways that are out of your control, so this is a goal that you do not really have the means to achieve. If we had examined the “why” of this goal ahead of time, we would have noticed it was born from guilt. Make it a goal that you can realistically honor and thus value. If it’s to see the kids at night (and you often have to stay late), then figure out just how important this is (how “relevant”) and develop your goal accordingly, anywhere from getting a new job to letting the kids know you will call them every night at 7 to let them know tonight’s plan. When you identify goals that are most relevant and important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them a reality. You develop the attitudes, abilities, and skills to reach them.

## **Timely:**

A goal should be grounded within a time frame. With no time frame tied to it, there is no sense of when you want your goal to be accomplished. If you want your son to stop smoking pot, how quickly do you want him to do this? If your answer is “today!” and your wife’s answer is “I’m sure he’ll grow out of it soon”, we have no time frame to work with. It is also critical to think through what timing is realistic. “Today” may feel right, but not be based in the reality of your son’s functioning, abilities, and willingness. If you anchor your goal within a realistic and concrete time frame, “by June 1<sup>st</sup>” for example, you can start setting up milestones to let everyone know whether you are on track to meet the goal.

**A Final Note** - When you set up a goal, it’s very helpful to revisit your thinking about it from time to time, specifically to make sure it is still relevant to you. “Relevant” is where you ask “Why is this my goal”. Rigidly adhering to a goal past its prime in the relevance department leaves you not really wanting to achieve it anymore, or holding yourself to something that is just frustrating.

This SMART goal format is helpful to use no matter what area of your life you are targeting... from goals in exercise and friendship, to career and nutrition, you will find that it’s a helpful set of tools to get you where you want to go.

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## A Good Idea: Practice Good Self Care

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There are many ways to tend to your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. We are including a list to help you brainstorm your way to better self-care. The list is to stimulate, not define.

- Visit with a friend (face-to-face, on the phone, by email etc)
- Cook your favorite meal
- Go out to eat your favorite meal or eat a “comfort food” that you find soothing
- Take a class in a topic that interests you
- Let yourself space out and watch TV
- Go to a movie
- Watch hilarious videos on YouTube
- Get a manicure, pedicure, or massage
- Go for a walk or run. Let yourself take in the sounds and smells. Try to be present
- Go for a hike (even in the city). Walk somewhere you have never been before. Take in the “newness” of your surroundings
- Engage in a sport (either alone or with people) you enjoy (swimming, golf, biking, tennis, yoga, bowling)
- Do an activity that gets your adrenaline pumping (rock climbing, skydiving, roller coasters, horseback riding, karaoke singing)
- Take a nap, let yourself doze off
- Sincerely complement/appreciate another person (including a stranger)
- Play cards, do brain teasers, crosswords, word games
- Listen to music you enjoy
- Get a haircut
- Help someone out
- Take your dog for a walk, play with a pet
- Sit outside and watch the clouds for 10 minutes, sit in a park and watch the birds and squirrels
- Watch a live sporting event or go hear some live music
- Visit an exhibit at a museum or go wander around a gallery
- Go for a drive
- Lift weights, take a class at the gym, let yourself hire a trainer for a few sessions
- Listen to a podcast
- Go to a bookstore, magazine store. Read something for enjoyment.
- Go to services at your place of worship
- Go to services not at your place of worship
- Engage in a hobby you enjoy (take photos, knit, garden, cook, paint)
- Meditate, download a guided mindfulness training tape
- Buy your favorite flowers and smell them
- Re-read a favorite book, poem, or article. Let yourself sit and flip through a magazine
- Draw a picture, doodle
- Spend an hour window shopping, visit a flea market
- Drink a cup of tea or coffee while doing nothing else
- Volunteer for an afternoon or evening
- Take a bath, light your favorite candle
- Write yourself a nice note that you can read again and again
- Make a photo album, put a puzzle together
- Take a day trip, plan a trip
- Play an instrument, learn a new song
- Dress in your favorite outfit, buy yourself something you have wanted
- Visit your favorite coffee shop, buy yourself an ice cream cone

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