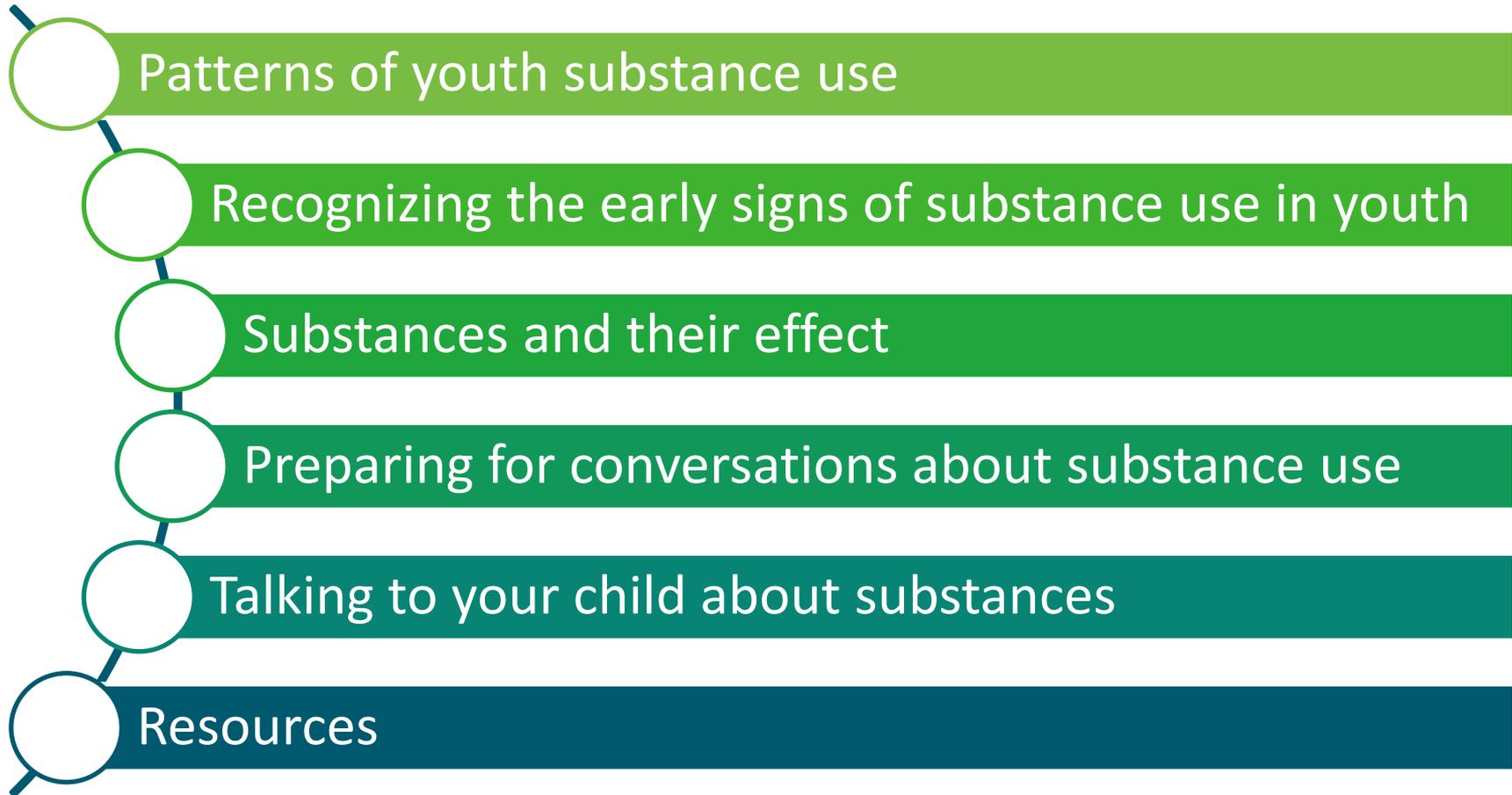




# What Parents Need to Know: Navigating Youth Substance Use

Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction Department

# Overview



# Patterns of youth substance use



Alcohol is the most used substance by students, followed by vapes and cannabis



Grade 12 students report the highest use of substances



Students rated alcohol and cannabis the easiest to get, usually from family and friends

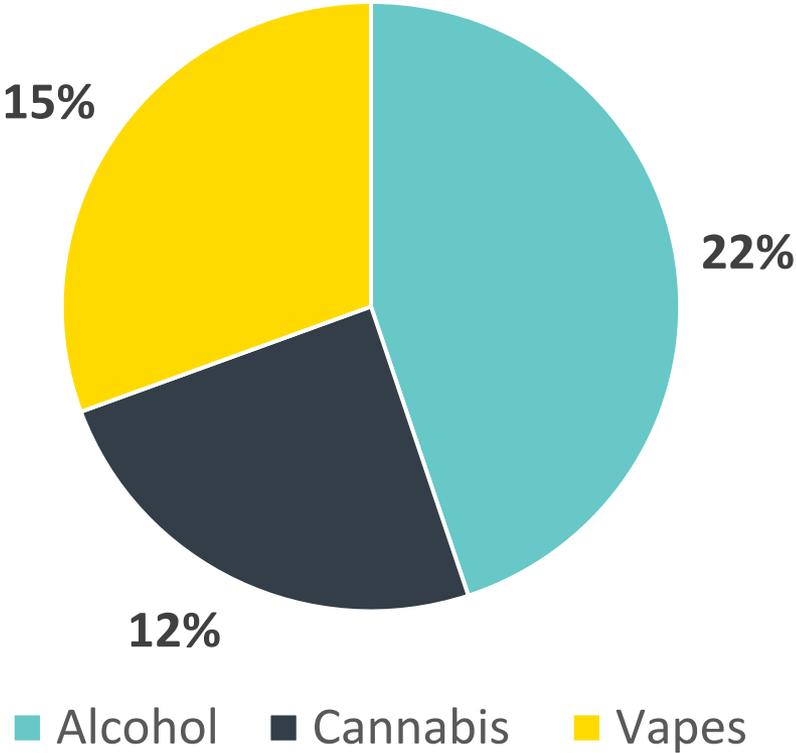


Gr.7 students were most likely to be unaware of risks of substance use

Source: Health Canada, 2025

# Alcohol and Drug Use Among Students in Canada, 2023-24

Substances Commonly Used by Students



# Recognizing the early signs of substance use in youth

## Shifts in mood

- Hyperactive, angry or unusually excited
- Silent, uncommunicative
- Less motivated and withdrawn

## Behavioral changes

- Absenteeism or loss of interest in school
- Changed relationships with family or friends
- Secretive with use of their phones

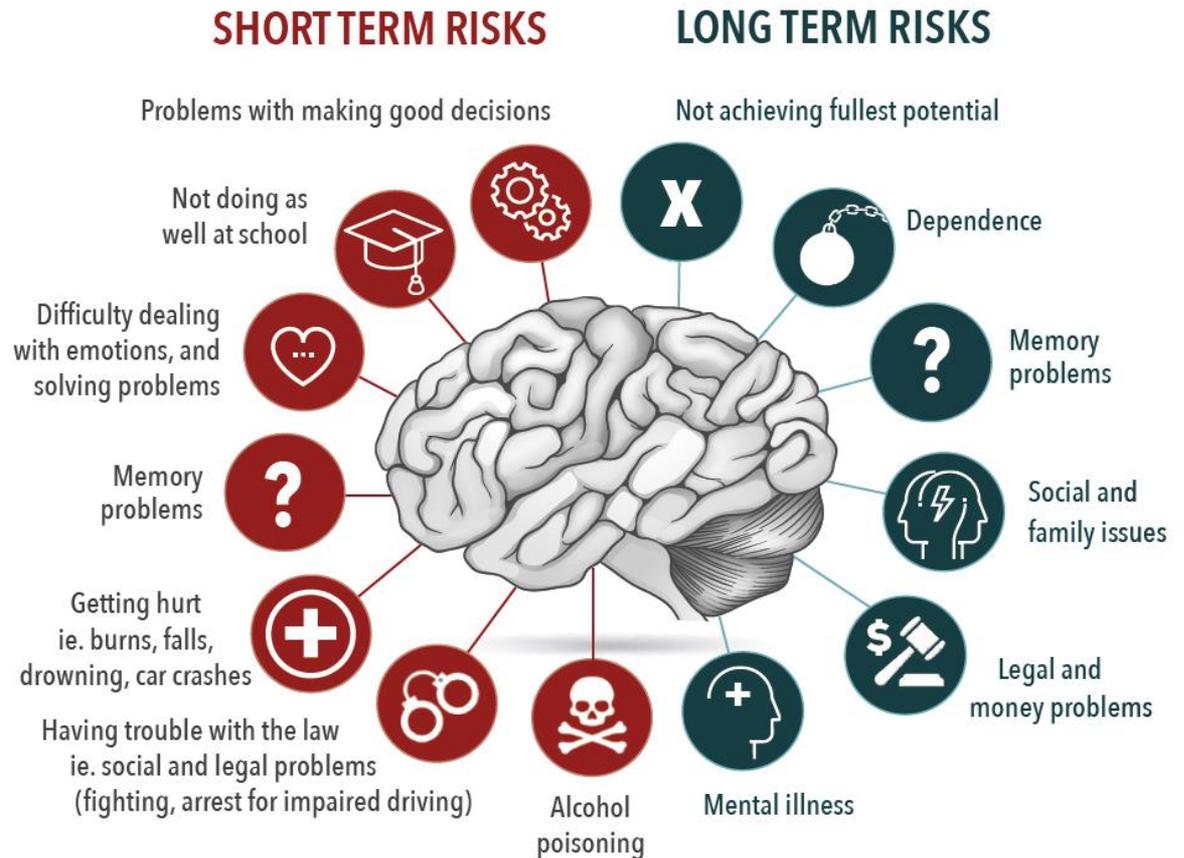
## Physical

- Unusually tired and/or lethargic
- Slurred speech or rapid-fire speech
- Sudden or dramatic weight loss

# Substances and their effect

Brain development isn't complete until mid 20's

As a result, young people are more sensitive to effects of alcohol and drugs



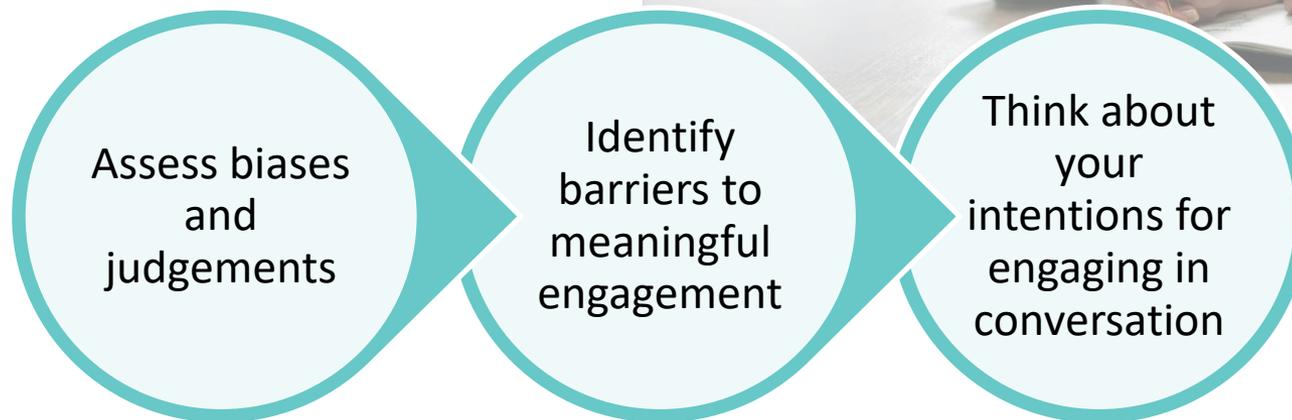
Source: Rethink Your Drinking

# True or False

Starting to use substances at a young age can make it harder to manage emotions, go to school regularly, and remember things.

**TRUE**

# Self-Reflection – Understanding Preconceptions



Source: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction

# Self-Reflection Exercise

## 1. Reflect to when you were younger. Ask yourself:

What were some of the stresses you were experiencing?  
What were your needs while experiencing these pressures?  
What was your perspective on substance use ?

## 2. Keeping these insights in mind, answer the following:

What is your current opinion on substance use?  
Why do you think you feel this way?  
Do you feel you are properly informed about substance use?



# Preparing for conversations about substance use



# Step 1: Get in the right frame of mind

**Release judgement** identified in self-reflection. This involves:

- Listening to your youth without your own personal beliefs
- Identifying shared goals, overlapping thoughts
- Being open to what your youth can teach you and what you can both relate to

**Identify your purpose.** Ask yourself:

- Why do you want to have this conversation?
- What are the reasons a young person might have for engaging in the conversation?

# Step 2: Establish values



Values are the foundation to having effective conversations about substance use



Your values should guide the way conversations are approached



Values should not be imposed, but instead shared in a way that fosters rapport and respect

# Étape 2 : Établir des valeurs



Les valeurs aident à avoir de bonnes discussions sur la consommation de substances.



Tes valeurs devraient guider la façon dont tu abordes les conversations.



Les valeurs ne devraient pas être imposées, mais partagées d'une manière qui favorise le lien et le respect.

# Step 3: Creating a Safe Space



Think about your language and tone

Be present and mindful

Listen

# Étape 3 : Créer un espace sécuritaire

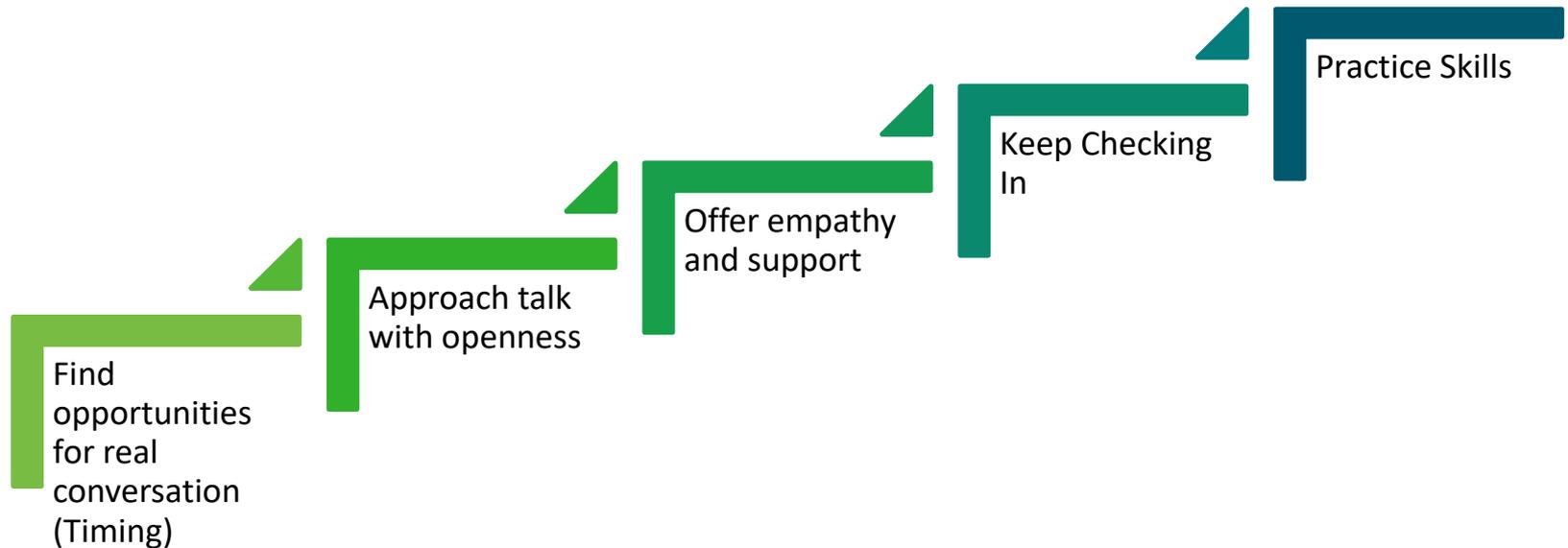


Pense au langage et au ton

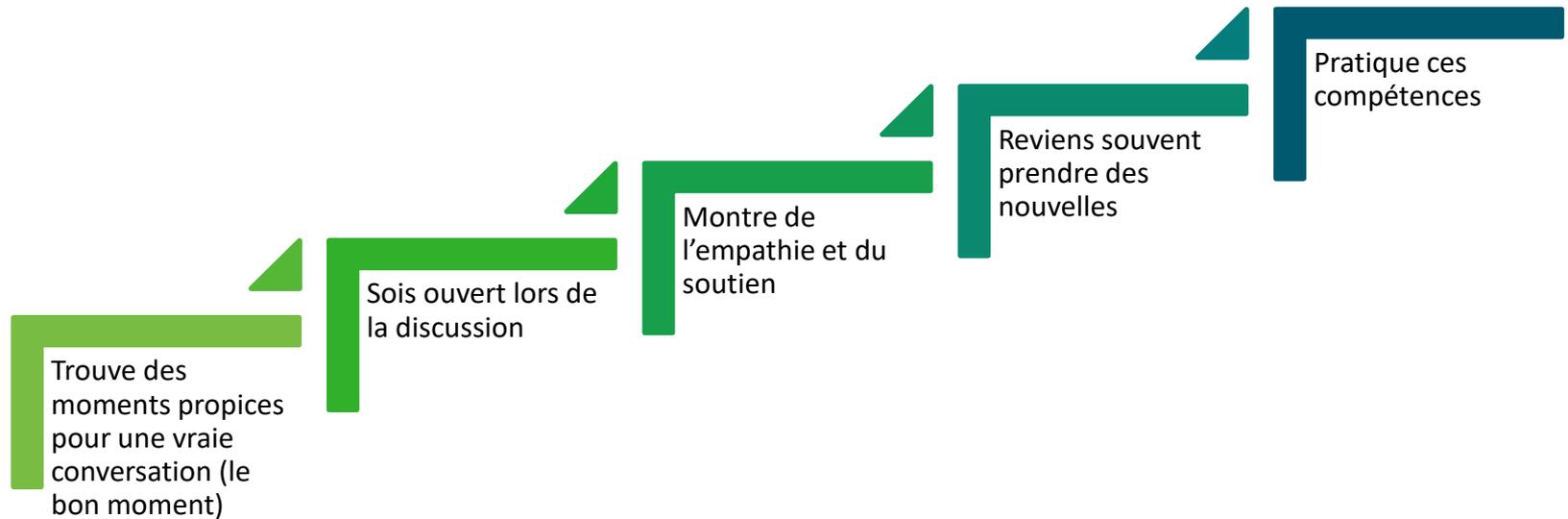
Sois présent et attentif

Écoute

# Tips For Talking to youth about substance use



# Conseils pour parler aux jeunes de la consommation de substances



# Did you know ?

Youth who have strong, supportive relationships with their parents are more likely to exhibit high self-esteem, which can help them navigate challenges, including substance and mental health issues (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020)



# Did you know ?

Les jeunes qui ont de bonnes relations avec leurs parents se sentent mieux dans leur peau. Ça les aide à faire face aux difficultés, comme les problèmes de substances ou de santé mentale. (Agence de la santé publique du Canada, 2020)



# Knowledge Check

Do you feel confident that you now know how to help youth avoid substance use and stay safe?

# Resources

- An app that allows youth to create personalized plans to help them become smoke or vape free

QUASH  
APP



- Program that offers targeted support to help youth ages 12 to 21 across Ontario develop healthy behaviours and access supports to manage substance use.

YOUTH-  
VAST



- Provide online and telephone counselling and text-based support in English and French to youth across Canada.

KIDS HELP  
PHONE



**In an  
emergency  
call 911,  
right away**

# References

1. Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. (2020). *Cannabis communication guide for youth allies*. Ottawa, ON: Author.  
<https://www.ccsa.ca/cannabis-communication-guide-youth-allies>
2. Craig, W. M., King, M., & Pickett, W. (2020). *The health of Canadian youth: Findings from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study*. Public Health Agency of Canada.
3. Health Canada. (2025). *Alcohol and drug use among students in Canada, 2023–24: Key findings from the Canadian Student Alcohol and Drugs Survey* [Internet]. Government of Canada.  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canadian-student-tobacco-alcohol-drugs-survey/2023-2024-key-findings>
4. Partnership to End Addiction. (n.d.). *Signs of drug use in teens*.  
<https://drugfree.org/article/signs-of-drug-use-in-teens/>
5. Partnership to End Addiction. (n.d.). *Connecting with your teenager*.  
<https://drugfree.org/article/connecting-with-your-teenager/#Find%20opportunities%20for%20real%20conversation>