

Addressing Substance Misuse Among Expectant Women

Text Version

Addressing Substance Misuse Among Expectant Women

An Interactive Learning Module for Home Visitors

Image: House Exterior

Button text: Continue

Welcome!

In this interactive module, you will have the chance to learn more about strength-based practices and partnering with families impacted by substance misuse.

Image: Angela (Pregnant Woman)

Button text: Continue

In this module, the term substance misuse refers to the inappropriate use of alcohol or drugs, whether the substances are legal or illegal.

This includes:

- 1) Using controlled drugs without a prescription;
- 2) Using drugs prescribed for someone else; or
- 3) If the individual has a doctor's prescription, using drugs in greater amounts, more often, or longer than prescribed.

Image: Angela (Pregnant Woman)

Button text: Continue

In this story, you will be the home visitor character.

The interactive module includes your first three visits with a pregnant woman named Angela.

Image: Angela (Pregnant Woman)

Button text: Continue

Notebook

You will see everything in the story from the point of view of your home visitor character.

Sometimes you will need to make a choice or answer a question. Select the "continue" button (lower right-hand side of the screen) to go to the first question.

Image: Open notebook, photo of Angela

Button text: Continue

Which of the following are ways that home visitors support families?
Please select an answer below.

Option A

Building trusting, respectful relationships .

Feedback

This is true. But is this the only way home visitors support families? Please choose again.

Option B

Sharing research-based information

Feedback

This is true. But is this the only way home visitors support families? Please choose again.

Option C

Helping families make healthy choices, including supporting the decision to address substance misuse in the family

Feedback

This is true. But is this the only way home visitors support families? Please choose again.

Option D

Connecting families to local services and programs that meet their unique needs

Feedback

This is true. But is this the only way home visitors support families? Please choose again.

Option E

All of the above (and more!)

Feedback

Correct! As a home visitor, your relationship with families supports parents and children in a range of ways. You may be in a unique position to identify substance misuse among expectant women—or among persons in their homes—and help connect them to community resources. By doing so in the context of a supportive, trusting relationship, you help to create a better outcome for both mother and baby.

This first question gave you a little practice on how this learning module works.

Most of the questions will focus on addressing substance misuse among expectant women.

Image: Prescription medicine bottle

Button text: Continue

You can download handouts on this topic from the module landing page and use them for review.

Handout: During the Home Visit: Substance Use Among Pregnant Women

Link: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/substance-use-during-home-visit.pdf>

Handout: What do Know Before You Go: Substance Use Among Pregnant Women

Link: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/substance-use-what-to-know-before-going-planning.pdf>

Handout: Additional Resources for Addressing Substance Use During Pregnancy and Handouts for Families

Link: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/substance-use-resources-families.pdf>

Substance misuse during pregnancy can cause serious problems for both mother and baby.

The story in this learning module will focus on opioid misuse during pregnancy, which can cause serious problems for the baby at birth, during infancy, and sometimes even later in life.

Image: Silhouette of pregnant woman

Button text: Continue

Which of the following problems is associated with opioid misuse during pregnancy?

Option A

Birth defects

Feedback

Yes, opioid misuse during pregnancy can cause birth defects. Is this the only possible problem? Please choose again.

Option B

Premature birth

Feedback

Yes, opioid misuse during pregnancy can cause premature birth. Is this the only possible problem? Please choose again.

Option C

Stillbirth

Feedback

Yes, opioid misuse during pregnancy can cause stillbirth. Is this the only possible problem? Please choose again.

Option D

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)

Feedback

Yes, opioid misuse during pregnancy can cause Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS). Please note that this scenario uses the term NAS, but you may also see the term NOWS (Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome) used interchangeably. Is this the only possible problem?

Option E

All of the above

Feedback

Correct. All the problems listed here are adverse effects of opioid exposure to a fetus. For more information, view this fact [sheet](#) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Link: https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/pregnancy_opioid_pain_factsheet-a.pdf

Let's begin your first visit.

You have just arrived at Angela's house.

Image: House Exterior

Button text: Continue

Visit 1

Angela is 12 weeks pregnant.

Image: House Exterior

Button text: Continue

Angela: “Good morning!! Nice to meet you in person. Come on in!”

Image: Angela greeting you on front porch.

Button text: Continue

Angela: “I hope it’s okay for our first visit, but my boyfriend Nicolas wanted to be here, too.”

Image: Angela in hallway, walking you to living room.

Button text: Continue

In reply, you say: “Thanks for asking! This is great. It is a pleasure for me to meet other members of your expectant family.”

Image: Angela in hallway, walking you to living room.

Button text: Continue

Nicolas: “Good to meet you. I took the morning off so I could say hello. Thanks for coming so early.”

Image: Angela, Nicolas, and Elizabeth (Angela’s mom) in living room.

Button text: Continue

Angela: “And this is my mom, Elizabeth. This is her house, and we’re just staying here until we can find a place in our price range.”

Image: Angela, Nicolas, and Elizabeth (Angela’s mom) in living room.

Button text: Continue

Elizabeth: “Thanks for coming. Things are a little hectic around here, but we are making it work. Now, why don’t you get settled in here and I’ll bring in some coffee and snacks for you three.”

Image: Angela, Nicolas, and Elizabeth (Angela’s mom) in living room.

Button text: Continue

Notebook

Angela’s mother gets coffee and snacks, you begin chatting with Angela and Nicolas. You wrote down three questions you want to ask at some point during the conversation.

- 1) How are you feeling in your pregnancy?
- 2) Are you seeing a health care provider?
- 3) Who do you have to support you during your pregnancy?

Image: Open notebook

Button text: Continue

Interactive note: In the interactive story, you are allowed to “ask” these questions in any order, but, ultimately, you will ask all three and you will be shown the following scene. The order of the scene will be different depending on the order you choose to “ask” the questions, but the content is the same, no matter the order.

1) How are you feeling in your pregnancy?

Angela: “So far, so good. Well, except for morning sickness pretty much all day, every day for maybe the past five weeks. Ugh, that is not pleasant.”

Image: Angela and Nicolas seating on couch, facing you.

Button text: Continue

Nicolas: “That’s been really hard for Angela, but she’s been feeling much better this week.”

Image: Angela and Nicolas seating on couch, facing you.

Button text: Continue

2) Are you seeing a health care provider?

Angela: “Yes, I went to the community health center last month. They gave me prenatal vitamins to take, but they were so huge!”

Image: Angela and Nicolas seating on couch, facing you.

Button text: Continue

Nicolas: “So, I went and found her a chewable kind that the doctor said was also okay.”

Image: Angela and Nicolas seating on couch, facing you.

Button text: Continue

3) Who do you have to support you during your pregnancy?

Angela: “My main support is Nicolas.”

Image: Angela and Nicolas seating on couch, facing you.

Button text: Continue

In reply, you say: “How’d you two meet?”

Angela: “We met last year playing softball against each other. I struck him out a couple times. And during the ninth inning, he got really frustrated and swung so hard that he fell.”

Image: Angela and Nicolas seating on couch, facing you.

Button text: Continue

Nicolas: “Yeah, I slipped a disc in my back. It was probably the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to me, and definitely the most painful! My back was messed up!”

Image: Angela and Nicolas seating on couch, facing you.

Button text: Continue

As a home visitor, you use some motivational interviewing techniques to keep the conversation going and get Nicolas to open up about this experience with pain and treatment for pain.

You say: “I hear that you were in pain and that it was embarrassing. Tell me more about that. What did you do to feel better?”

For more information on motivational interviewing, visit:

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/mental-health/article/motivational-interviewing-suite>

Nicolas: “That first week, I was in so much pain! My doctor prescribed me some really strong painkillers, but I only needed them for a week.”

Image: Angela and Nicolas seating on couch, facing you.

Button text: Continue

Angela: “And I felt so bad for him that I brought dinner over to him a couple times that week.”

Image: Angela and Nicolas seating on couch, facing you.

Button text: Continue

Nicolas: “Luckily with some physical therapy, and Angela, I was feeling better pretty quickly.”

Image: Angela and Nicolas seating on couch, facing you.

Button text: Continue

Angela: “After that, we started dating, and then, well, here we are.”

Image: Angela and Nicolas seating on couch, facing you.

Button text: Continue

You continue to chat with Angela and Nicolas.

You show them how their baby at 12 weeks is now about the size of a lime.

Eventually, it is time for you to go.

You say goodbye and schedule your next visit with Angela in a few weeks.

During this first visit with Angela, she included her mom and her boyfriend Nicolas in the visit.

Were you surprised to see these other people at the visit?

Option A

Yes, I was surprised.

Feedback

Sometimes families don't think to share who will be attending the visit, but getting to know everyone in their support system is a great opportunity for home visitors. At the same time, home visitors must be aware of their own safety. Whenever possible, you should avoid visiting homes at night and should consider whether a visit somewhere outside the home might be safer if you have concerns about specific individuals or possible illegal activity happening in the home.

Option B

No, I was not surprised.

Feedback

Getting to know the important members of a family's support system is a great opportunity for home visitors. At the same time, it's important to always know who is going to be in the home during your visit. Home visitors must be aware of their own safety. Whenever possible, you should avoid visiting homes at night and should consider whether a visit somewhere outside the home might be safer if you have concerns about specific individuals or possible illegal activity happening in the home.

Just like Nicolas, people sometimes receive medicine to help with pain.

Prescription opioids are medicines used to relieve pain after surgery or for an injury.

Which of the following choices list four common prescription opioids?

Option A

Codeine, Oxycodone, Lorazepam, Fentanyl

Feedback

Lorazepam is not an opioid. Please choose again.

Option B

Ativan, Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, Morphine

Feedback

Ativan is not an opioid. Please choose again.

Option C

Morphine, Oxycodone, Fentanyl, Codeine

Feedback

Correct. Morphine, Oxycodone (or Oxy), Hydrocodone, Fentanyl, and Codeine are all common prescription opioids. Carfentanyl, a synthetic variant of fentanyl, is also an opioid. For more information on opioids, view this [report](#) from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Lorazepam, Ativan, Xanax (Alprazolam), often prescribed for anxiety, are actually benzodiazepines.

Option D

Fentanyl, Xanax, Codeine, Hydrocodone

Feedback

Xanax is not an opioid. Please choose again.

Link: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/A-Collaborative-Approach-to-the-Treatment-of-Pregnant-Women-with-Opioid-Use-Disorders/SMA16-4978>

As a home visitor, you may be in a unique position to identify substance misuse among expectant women—or among persons in their homes—and help connect them to community resources, creating a better outcome for both mother and baby.

Image: Silhouette of pregnant woman

Button text: Continue

What is a reason that you might wait before addressing signs of substance misuse?

Option A

You should never wait to discuss signs of substance misuse.

Feedback

Please choose again.

Option B

You may want to build stronger relationship with the family first.

Feedback

Correct! It's hard—almost impossible—to have open conversations about sensitive topics until you have earned the trust of the family. Look for opportunities to build a relationship from the beginning. Home visitors can do this by:

- Noticing and commenting on the family's strengths
- Asking about the family's needs and responding with resources or assistance
- Offering community referrals if desired/warranted
- Listening to the expectant woman and offering emotional support

Consider waiting to broach certain topics until you have established a good rapport, if waiting is medically advisable.

For more information, view the During the Visit handout included in this module.

Option C

You don't want to offend the family by mistaking signs of substance misuse.

Feedback

Please choose again.

Option D

You should wait until the baby is born to discuss signs of substance misuse.

Feedback

Please choose again.

Visit 2

Angela is 15 weeks pregnant.

Image: House Exterior

Button text: Continue

Angela: "Hey! I'm sorry, I forgot you were coming this afternoon. I was just about to go for a walk. Would you mind if we walk and talk today?"

Image: Angela outside on sidewalk, greeting you.

Button text: Continue

Angela: “At the community health clinic, they reminded me to try to be active every day, so now I take a walk every afternoon. They say it’s good for the baby, and I always feel pretty good after I walk too.”

Image: Angela walking next to you on sidewalk.

Button text: Continue

Angela: “Sometimes, when I’m on the walk I imagine how it will be when I’m pushing the stroller, or even walking together with my toddler. I can’t wait.”

Image: Angela walking next to you on sidewalk.

Button text: Continue

Notebook

When you and Angela take a break at a park bench, you check your notebook for your plan for this visit with Angela: Learn more about how Angela is feeling as she starts her second trimester; Explore what her goals for a healthy pregnancy might be over the next few weeks; and Continue to build a strong working relationship. You ask her how she’s feeling.

Image: Open notebook

Button text: Continue

Angela: “I’m feeling good. Nicolas has been so wonderful. I feel so lucky. He’s going to be a great dad.”

Image: Angela sitting next to you park bench.

Button text: Continue

You respond to Angela using a motivational interviewing technique, saying: “It sounds like Nicolas has been really helpful. That’s fantastic. Tell me more—what has he been doing? And how does it make you feel?”

Angela: “He rubs my feet and talks to the baby. He’s just been checking up on me all the time and helping me with whatever I need.”

Image: Angela sitting next to you park bench.

Button text: Continue

Angela: “I’m also trying to eat healthier. My mom is even changing her diet, too. Although, she’s losing weight, and I’m gaining weight!”

Image: Angela sitting next to you park bench.

Button text: Continue

You and Angela finish the walk and arrive back at her mother’s house.

Before saying goodbye, you compliment Angela on all the different ways she is preparing for a healthy pregnancy and helping her baby grow well from the start. You schedule the next visit in a few weeks.

In between visits with Angela, take a moment to reflect on the strengths you have observed in this family. What strengths have you observed so far in two visits?

Check all that apply.

Option A

Social support from Angela’s mother and Nicolas

Feedback

(See interactive note below)

Option B

Making healthy choices with daily exercise and a healthier diet

Feedback

(See interactive note below)

Option C

Monitoring her blood sugar

Feedback

This would be a strength, but you haven’t observed Angela doing this. Please choose again.

Option D

Visiting a community health clinic and managing her pregnancy health

Feedback

(See interactive note below)

Option E

Taking prenatal vitamins

Feedback

(See interactive note below)

Option F

Doing prenatal yoga

Feedback

This would be a strength, but you haven't observed Angela doing this. Please choose again.

Interactive note: Once user chooses A, B, D, and E together, this message is displayed: Correct! Take a strengths-based approach. Families want healthy babies! Focus on the family's efforts to date and notice their strengths, resources, and hopes for the baby. Explore with the parent the choices she is willing to make to stay away from substances and continue to make healthy or healthier choices.

Visit 3

Angela is 18 weeks pregnant.

Angela: "Hi! I'm so glad you're here today. My friend Grace is helping me set up the baby's room. I can't wait to show you."

Image: Angela greeting you from porch.

Button text: Continue

Grace: "Hi, nice to meet you. I'm Grace."

Image: Angela and Grace in room they are preparing for the baby.

Button text: Continue

Angela: "Soon to be Auntie Grace! This is my best friend and she's been a huge help. I just want everything to be perfect when the baby arrives."

Image: Angela and Grace in room they are preparing for the baby.

Button text: Continue

Grace: "We just found out it's a boy, so I bought him this rocket mobile. He's going to be an astronaut!"

Image: Angela and Grace in room they are preparing for the baby.

Button text: Continue

Angela: "Well, based on how much he's kicking, I'm going to guess soccer player!"

Image: Angela and Grace in room they are preparing for the baby.

Button text: Continue

Grace: "Why don't you two go downstairs to talk. I'm going to paint this room..."

Image: Angela and Grace in room they are preparing for the baby.

Button text: Continue

Angela: "...and I don't want to breathe in these paint fumes."

Image: Angela and Grace in room they are preparing for the baby.

Button text: Continue

Notebook

As you begin chatting with Angela in the kitchen, you check your notes about what you want to say: Congratulate Angela on strengths observed so far; and Talk to her about how she's feeling physically and mentally. The first thing you do is notice all the strengths you have observed so far.

Image: Open notebook

Button text: Continue

Angela: "Oh, thank you for saying that. I am trying really hard to give this little guy the best start in life."

Image: Angela sitting at kitchen table, across from you.

Button text: Continue

You show Angela on the baby development chart that at 18 weeks, her baby is the size of a green pepper.

Angela: "Oh, so cute!"

Image: Angela sitting at kitchen table, across from you.

Button text: Continue

Angela: "Well, now that he's a little bigger, I'm starting to feel it in my back for sure. Some days, the pain is really hard to deal with."

Image: Angela sitting at kitchen table, across from you.

Button text: Continue

You remember that Nicolas had a back injury and was prescribed pain medication. You would like to learn more about how Angela is managing this discomfort and explore the possibility of substance misuse.

Which of these conversation starters would you like to use to explore these issues of pain relief and substance misuse?

Option A

How do you handle pregnancy aches and pains?

Feedback

Good choice. There is more than one correct conversation starter listed here. See if you can choose the others.

Option B

Are you currently on any medications?

Feedback

Good choice. There is more than one correct conversation starter listed here. See if you can choose the others.

Option C

Have you ever been prescribed painkillers for this back pain, or other pain?

Feedback

Good choice. There is more than one correct conversation starter listed here. See if you can choose the others.

Option D

Are you using the painkillers that Nicolas was prescribed for your back?

Feedback

Please choose again. When taking a strengths-based approach, avoid statements that blame the expectant woman or that are based on assumptions of poor decision-making. Instead, you might use open-ended questions about pain-relief strategies that the expectant woman is using or considering.

Interactive note: Once user has chosen A, B, and C, this message is displayed: Good choices! For a full list of suggested conversation starters, see the During the Visit [handout](#). And, of course, use your best judgement to decide which questions work best for each client.

Link: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/substance-use-during-home-visit.pdf>

Angela: “I had mostly been stretching to help with my back pain. But then a few days ago, Nicolas reminded me that he was prescribed painkillers for his back last year. There's almost a whole bottle left over.”

Image: Angela sitting at kitchen table, across from you.

Button text: Continue

Angela: “So, I tried one the other day. It worked like magic! I felt so much better. So, I took one more yesterday.”

Image: Angela sitting at kitchen table, across from you.

Button text: Continue

You empathize with Angela and normalize her experience.

Many women encounter back pain during the second and third trimesters. You also want her to be aware that many prescription painkillers are part of a drug family called opioids. You remind Angela that taking medication prescribed for someone else is never okay to do and can be especially dangerous during pregnancy. You ask if you can share some information with Angela about opioid painkiller misuse and pregnancy. She says yes.

Which message to you choose to share with Angela?

Option A

Pregnant women can sometimes take a medication prescribed for someone else, but only if the medication is designed to relieve the symptom they’re experiencing.

Feedback

Please choose again. Pregnant women should never take a medication prescribed for someone else. They also should only take medications that their doctor prescribes exactly as directed. For more information, review [What to Know Before You Go](#).

Option B

If an expectant woman uses an opioid exactly as prescribed on the bottle, it will not cause Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) in her baby.

Feedback

Please choose again. Even if an expectant woman uses an opioid exactly as prescribed by her health care provider, it may still cause Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) in her baby. For more information, review [What to Know Before You Go](#).

Option C

Opioids are powerful painkillers that should never be taken without talking to a health care provider first. There are many other ways of managing pregnancy discomfort that don’t involve opioids. Pregnant women who are currently using opioids should talk to their health care provider immediately. In addition, expectant women should never stop taking an opioid before talking to their health care provider.

Feedback

Correct. Expectant women should first explore all other pain relief strategies with their health care provider. They should always tell providers they are pregnant and ask if their prescriptions are safe for baby. When an expectant woman is misusing opioids, there are medications available that can help reduce addiction to opioids and that are safe for baby. Quitting opioids

cold turkey can cause serious problems for baby. For more information, review [What to Know Before You Go](#).

Link: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/substance-use-what-to-know-before-going-planning.pdf>

Angela: “Oh, I didn’t realize taking these medications could be bad for the baby. Since they came from the doctor, I thought they were okay to take. What do you think I should do?”

Image: Angela sitting at kitchen table, across from you.

Button text: Continue

You let Angela know that you would be happy to help her schedule a conversation with her health care provider to discuss relief for her back pain.

Angela: “Thank you. I’m planning to go back to the health clinic next week, but I promise to text you if I have trouble scheduling an appointment. Sometimes they get really backed up.”

Image: Angela sitting at kitchen table, across from you.

Button text: Continue

Grace: “All done! But don’t go up yet. The room is still airing out.”

Image: Grace standing in doorway.

Button text: Continue

Grace: “What are you two talking about?”

Image: Grace standing next to Angela.

Button text: Continue

Angela: “Oh, just talking about pregnancy... Kinda stressful, sometimes challenging, but really amazing.”

Image: Angela sitting at kitchen table, across from you.

Button text: Continue

You tell Angela and Grace that it’s time for you to go, and you thank Angela for taking the time to meet with you.

She says she’ll walk you out.

Image: Your watch.

Button text: Continue

Angela: “Thank you again. I’m looking forward to our next visit.”

Image: Angela standing at door, about to open it for you.

Button text: Continue

Do you know the names and contact information for local resources and programs serving pregnant women? Are you aware of community programs that support expectant women struggling with substance misuse? Select each category for which you know your local resource.

Interactive note: The user chooses any options they like. No feedback given. It’s just a check list for self-reflection.

- Community health centers
- Recovery support resources
- Mental health resources
- Child welfare resources
- Additional treatment resources

It is critical for home visitors to know what resources are available for expectant women and their families—especially programs that help them manage substance misuse.

Learn more about intake and eligibility requirements for programs so that you can answer a family’s questions if these services are needed. If you need to learn more about local resources, check with your home visitation program.

Congratulations!

You have completed the interactive story and helped Angela continue to make healthy choices during her pregnancy. Healthy families are important, and it’s skilled professionals like you who support healthy families. Now that you are finished with the story, take a moment to review the other resources listed in this module.

This resource was prepared under Grant No. 90HC0013-02-00, a cooperative agreement of the Office of Head Start, Office of Child Care, and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau.