

Substance Misuse During Pregnancy: How to Talk with Families



Home visitors play a special role in the health and well-being of pregnant women and babies!



You may...

- Connect with pregnant women and their families in ways other health care professionals don't.
- Get a unique view of a family's real-life circumstances.
- Build a trusting relationship at a time when many women and families are more open to making healthy changes.
- Get to know the family's strengths and skills over time.
- Identify problems with substance misuse **early**, improving outcomes for mom and baby.



Start with strengths.

Families want healthy babies!

Research shows that a strengths-based approach is highly effective when working with families.¹

Look for—and help families develop—strengths like:

- Resilience or the ability to manage and bounce back from challenges.
- Connections with family members, friends, and neighbors who can offer emotional support, help solve problems, and provide practical help.
- Knowledge about parenting, such as accurate information about healthy pregnancy and child development.

¹ <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/acloserlook/strengthsbased/strengthsbased1>



Substance misuse is a sensitive topic.



Conversation-starters can help:

What pregnancy aches and pains are you feeling?

How do you handle them?

Are you seeing any health professionals other than your pregnancy professional?

Do they know you're pregnant?

Are you taking any medications?

If so, does the doctor who prescribed them know you're pregnant now?

Have you ever been prescribed painkillers?

What was your experience like?

Are you taking them now?

Do you have concerns about anyone in your household using prescription painkillers or other drugs or alcohol?

The arrival of a new baby is exciting but can also be stressful!

What are some ways you unwind and relax now?

What do you think might help after baby arrives?

Many new parents feel overwhelmed at times. Let's talk about a plan for what you can do if life gets overwhelming once baby is here.

Be Prepared

- Build relationships first, before raising this topic.
- Know your program's policies and procedures.
- Understand the reporting laws in your state.
- Gather your community resources and understand intake requirements.
- Make a plan for your own support and safety.



More tips:

- Be sure parents have access to information in a language they know, at a reading level they understand.
- Ask permission to share information about substance use during pregnancy. If it's not a good time, come back to the topic later.
- Keep information you share short and actionable.
- Avoid statements that seem to blame or shame mom. Instead, talk about how drugs or substances can impact the baby, and frame pregnancy as an opportunity to make healthy life changes.
- Focus on the positive choices moms and families can make.

