



NATIONAL  
COUNCIL  
for Mental  
Wellbeing

## *Framing the Conversation with Youth: Substance Use in the Wake of COVID-19*

Pam Pietruszewski (she/her), Senior Advisor  
Emma Hayes (she/her), Project Coordinator  
[GettingCandid@TheNationalCouncil.org](mailto:GettingCandid@TheNationalCouncil.org)

1



NATIONAL  
COUNCIL  
for Mental  
Wellbeing

### *Our Vision:*

*To make mental **wellbeing**,  
including recovery from substance use challenges,  
**a reality for everyone.***

<https://thenationalcouncil.org>

2

## Today's Session

1. Youth assessment findings that helped inform substance use prevention messaging
2. Communication pathway for building trust, gathering insight and framing the conversation
3. Message guide and toolkit resources

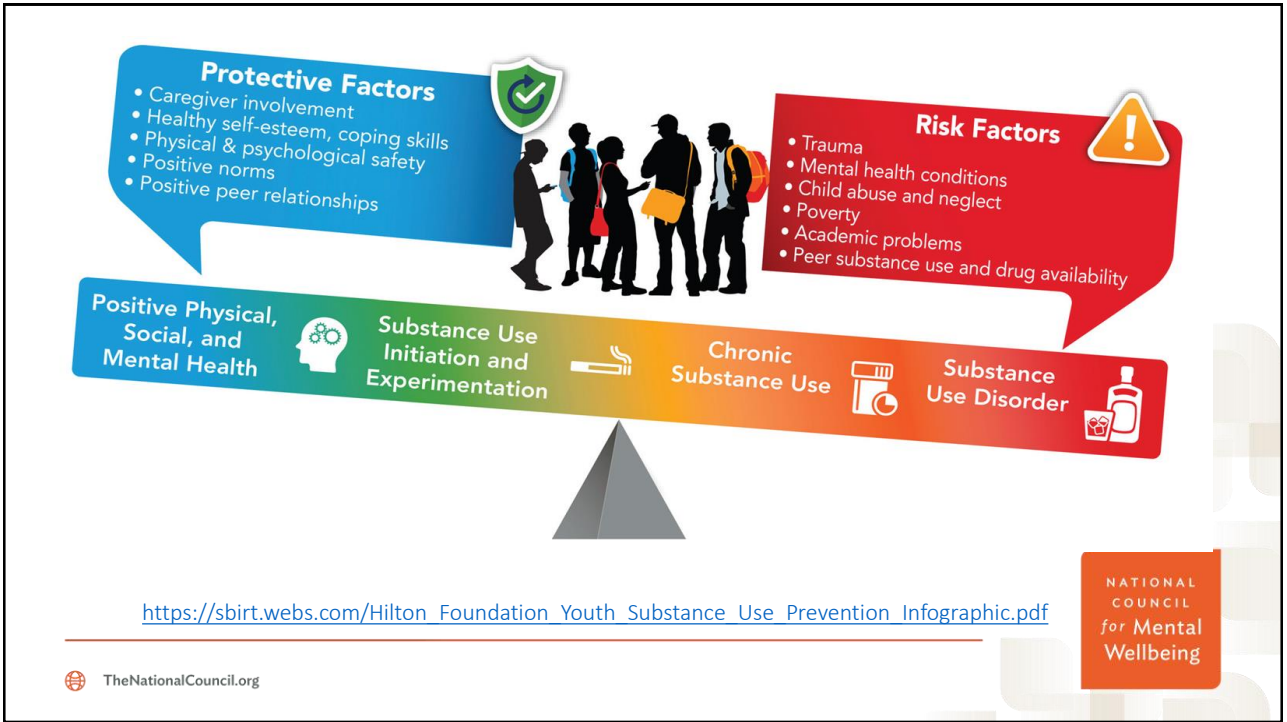
3



It is our **collective obligation** to create environments that keep the heat down for adolescents.

<https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/>

4



5

## Supporting adolescents leads to healthier and more connected communities

We need to reframe adolescence from eye roll to opportunity.

*Nat Kendal-Taylor, CEO of The Frameworks Institute*

TheNationalCouncil.org

NATIONAL COUNCIL for Mental Wellbeing

6

**Project Lead: National Council for Mental Wellbeing**

**Strategic Partner:** Metropolitan Group | **Data & Analysis:** Lake Research Partners

**Advisory Group**

- Behavioral Health Innovators
- Center for Addiction & Mental Health Research, Kaiser Permanente
- Collaborative to Advance Health Services, University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Nursing and Health Studies
- Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)
- DACCO Behavioral Health
- FrameWorks Institute
- Lifeway International
- Partnership to End Addiction
- Peers Enjoying a Sober Education (PEASE) Academy
- School-Based Health Alliance
- Truth Initiative
- White Bison
- William J. Ostiguy High School

**Youth Ambassadors**

Seblework Alemu	Iliana Lara	Ayden O'Connor	Samantha Richter	Hamid Torabzade
Tracy Das	Saint Luan	Isadora Paul	Elijah Seay	Jamie Ann Visconde
Reanna Felix	Isadora Paul	Riya Ramakrishnan	Anona Thomas	Jordan Young

 [www.TheNationalCouncil.org](http://www.TheNationalCouncil.org)



7

**About Getting Candid**



*This project is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$2,000,000 with 100% funded by CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS or the U.S. Government.*

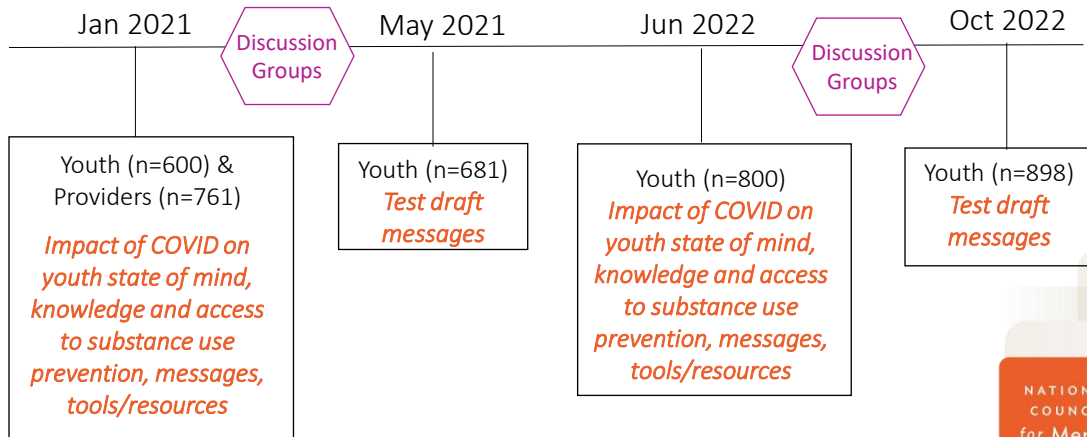
 [TheNationalCouncil.org](http://TheNationalCouncil.org)



8

# Assessments

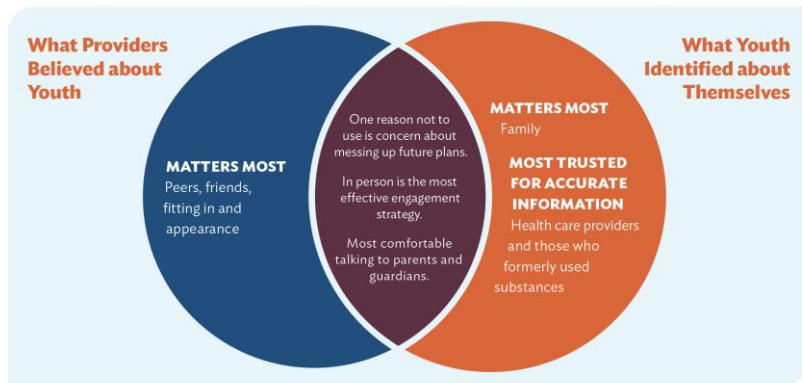
Commissioned from Lake Research Partners  
 by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, 2021-2022  
<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/resources/cdc-key-findings/>



TheNationalCouncil.org



# Key Finding: Youth vs. Provider Perceptions

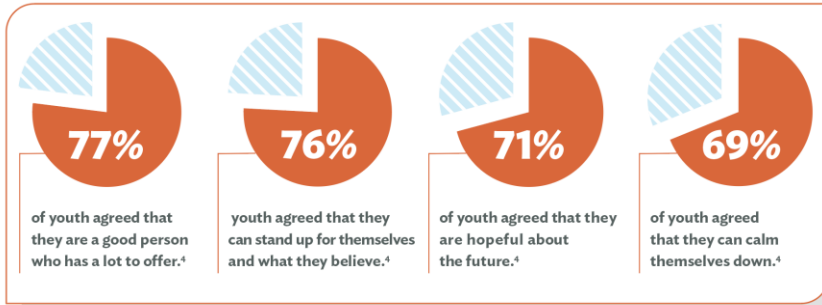


From Lake Research Partners, commissioned by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, 2021-2022  
<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/resources/cdc-key-findings/>

www.TheNationalCouncil.org



## Key Finding: Resiliency and Optimism



From Lake Research Partners, commissioned by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, 2021-2022  
<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/resources/cdc-key-findings/>

 [www.TheNationalCouncil.org](http://www.TheNationalCouncil.org)

NATIONAL COUNCIL  
for Mental Wellbeing

## Key Finding: Trust vs. Comfort

While youth said they trust doctors, nurses or other health care providers the most for accurate information about substance use, they are less comfortable actually speaking with them on the topic.



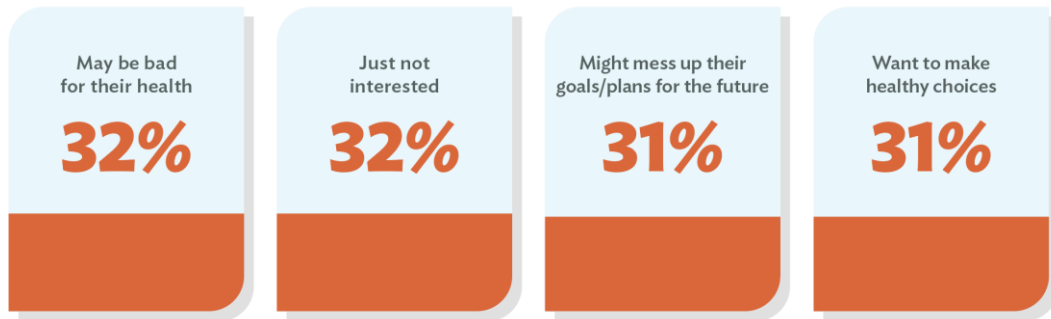
Rather, youth indicated that they feel most comfortable speaking with **parents/caregivers and friends/peers.**

From Lake Research Partners, commissioned by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, 2021-2022  
<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/resources/cdc-key-findings/>

 [www.TheNationalCouncil.org](http://www.TheNationalCouncil.org)

NATIONAL COUNCIL  
for Mental Wellbeing

## Key Finding: Top 4 Reasons Not To Use



From Lake Research Partners, commissioned by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, 2021-2022  
<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/resources/cdc-key-findings/>

NATIONAL  
COUNCIL  
for Mental  
Wellbeing

 www.TheNationalCouncil.org

13

## Knowledge and Perceptions of Fentanyl

A majority of youth are NOT concerned about alcohol and other drug use in their own lives.

But if someone they know was using drugs, **77%** report they would be concerned about fentanyl exposure.

However, **less than 50%** report knowing what fentanyl is and report that it would be one of the hardest substances for them to acquire.

Commissioned from Lake Research Partners by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, 2021-2022  
<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/resources/cdc-key-findings/>

NATIONAL  
COUNCIL  
for Mental  
Wellbeing

 www.TheNationalCouncil.org

14

## The Role of a Youth-Serving Provider

- Create a safe space to **normalize conversations** about substance use & connection to health, school, finances, & relationships
- Maximize **regular touch points & established relationships** to reinforce prevention messages & encourage healthy peer relationships
- Identify potential risk and **protective factors**



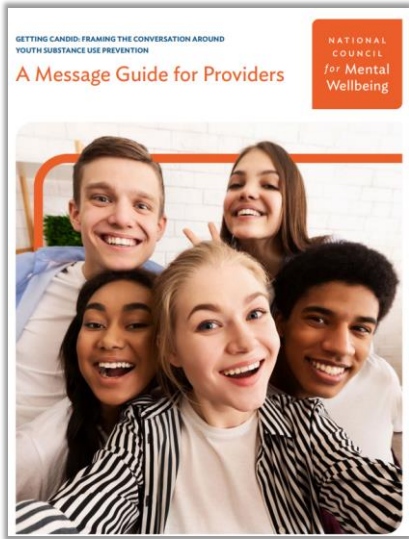
NATIONAL  
COUNCIL  
for Mental  
Wellbeing

## Video: What Youth Want Us to Know



NATIONAL  
COUNCIL  
for Mental  
Wellbeing





## Inside the Getting Candid Message Guide

<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/getting-candid>



TheNationalCouncil.org

17

## Communications Pathway



### ESTABLISH TRUST

Build rapport & establish trust.



### GATHER INSIGHTS

Seek guidance & input from youth on what matters to them.



### FRAME THE COMMUNICATION

Choose a frame to connect prevention message based on insights from youth.



### MAKE THE CASE

Select evidence to provide compelling reasons not to use drugs or alcohol.



### SUGGEST ACTION

Select one or more actions to suggest.



TheNationalCouncil.org

18



## ESTABLISH TRUST

- Ask permission before sharing info.
- Create a safe space.
- Be authentic.
- Approach the conversation informally.
- Do more listening than talking.
- Be transparent and trustworthy.
- Pay attention to body language.

## Youth Ambassador Tips for Building Trust & Rapport



Do not assume you understand **experiences and/or identities** of people from different cultures and/or religions.

Ask youth to briefly explain their **cultural and/or religious background** to include the meanings of traditions, some of the holidays and/or celebrations, and important people within the group.

Ask youth **how they would like** their sexual orientation, gender identity, cultural and/or religious background recognized and respected when receiving care and services.

Ask youth about any **doubts or concerns** and try to uncover any misconceptions they may have about seeking services. If possible, politely and respectfully help resolve any doubts and correct any misconceptions.



**ESTABLISH TRUST**



**GATHER INSIGHTS**

Seek guidance and input from youth on what matters to them.



- What matters most to you in your life and why?
- What do you look forward to most in the coming year (or after you graduate, or beyond) and why?
- When you're faced with making a tough choice or decision, what do you consider or think about most?

NATIONAL  
COUNCIL  
for Mental  
Wellbeing

## Communication Pathway



**ESTABLISH TRUST**



**GATHER INSIGHTS**



**FRAME THE  
COMMUNICATION**



**MAKE THE CASE**



**SUGGEST ACTION**

NATIONAL  
COUNCIL  
for Mental  
Wellbeing

## “What Matters” Becomes the Framework

What Matters...?		Message Frame
Plans for the coming year, for entering high school, college or for the future in general	⇒	The future
Physical or mental health	⇒	Risk of addiction
Relationships (e.g., parents/guardians, friends, teachers, coaches, mentors)	⇒	Relationships
Activities in or out of school (e.g., music, sports, volunteering)	⇒	Activities
Being respected for autonomy and being able to make one’s own choices	⇒	Self-affirmation

 www.TheNationalCouncil.org

NATIONAL COUNCIL  
for Mental Wellbeing

23



### ESTABLISH TRUST



### GATHER INSIGHTS



### FRAME THE COMMUNICATION

#### Most effective messages tested with youth:

**The future:** Don’t let drug and alcohol use change or control your plans for the future.

**Risk of addiction:** Drug and alcohol use change parts of your brain that impact how you think and act. The more you use them, the harder it can be to stop, even if you want to.


**Relationships:** There are people in your life who matter to you.  
*(For middle school)* And you try hard not to let them down.  
*(For high school)* And you try hard to make them proud.


**Activities:** Participating in sports, music, hobbies or other activities can help you build friendships, stay in shape, get into and receive scholarships for college and have fun.

**Self-affirmation:** You respect yourself and want to make decisions that are best for you. Trust yourself and your choice not to use drugs or alcohol.

NATIONAL COUNCIL  
for Mental Wellbeing


24


ESTABLISH TRUST



GATHER INSIGHTS

Examples of statements considered most convincing by youth:

- **People in recovery** from addiction often say one of the things they regret most about their addiction was the trust they lost from people who care about them.
- **Vape** companies regularly change up their chemical formulas to get around regulations and safety testing of their products.
- It only takes a pinprick-sized amount of **fentanyl** to be a deadly dose. And it's sometimes hidden in fake prescription pills.
- **Delta-8 THC** is not regulated so you don't really know what is in it. Some people end up having a medical emergency because the concentration was too high or they didn't realize delta-8 THC was psychoactive until it was too late.





FRAME THE COMMUNICATION




MAKE THE CASE


NATIONAL COUNCIL  
for Mental Wellbeing





ESTABLISH TRUST


GATHER INSIGHTS


Actions identified by youth as those they would most likely take:




Explore new ways of dealing with **stress**, like music, reading, art, getting outdoors, talking with friends you trust or just being by yourself.\*




Find someone you can **talk** to if you feel tempted or pressured to use alcohol, tobacco/nicotine, marijuana or other drugs.




Make your own personal **commitment** or pledge to avoid alcohol, tobacco/nicotine, marijuana and other drugs.\*




Talk to your **friends** and encourage them not to use alcohol, tobacco/nicotine, marijuana and other drugs.\*



FRAME THE COMMUNICATION




MAKE THE CASE



SUGGEST ACTION

NATIONAL COUNCIL  
for Mental Wellbeing



\*Resonated with middle school youth.

## Video: Navigating a Conversation



TheNationalCouncil.org

NATIONAL COUNCIL for Mental Wellbeing

27

## Getting Candid Toolkit

**Over 140 resources**

**A Message Guide for Providers**

**Six Recommendations to Create Safer Spaces for Young People**

Inclusivity is much more than inviting people into your space. It requires providers to check biases, have cultural humility, create norms and expectations, use inclusive language and adopt a trauma-informed, wellness-oriented lens. These guidelines contribute to creating a space that conveys safety, acceptance and belonging.

**1. CHECK YOUR BIAS**

- What is bias? Bias is a preference for or against people or things. There are many types of biases including on religion, race, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status. Everyone has biases, explicit or implicit.

**Risk and Protective Factors**

**MOTIVATIONAL CONVERSATIONS FOR YOUTH**

For youth to talk to other youth about alcohol and other drug use.

**TALKING WITH A FRIEND ABOUT ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUGS CAN SEEM TRICKY.**

Will they listen? Why are they doing it? Do they need it? How do you handle these with you without any thinking?

Despite the challenges, talking with your friends and peers about alcohol and other drug use is important.

Supporting change in friends does not mean that you are responsible for their choices. You are not.

**SO, HOW CAN YOU INTERVENE WITH A FRIEND IN A WAY THAT IS USEFUL?**

There are many ways to help your friend to get support.

<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/program/getting-candid/resource-toolkit/>

www.TheNationalCouncil.org

NATIONAL COUNCIL for Mental Wellbeing

28

# Substance Fact Sheets



Youth & Alcohol / la juventud y el alcohol



Youth & CBD / la juventud y el cannabidiol (CBD)



Youth & Fentanyl



Youth & Hemp



Youth & Kratom / los jóvenes y el kratom



Youth & Marijuana / la juventud y la marihuana



Youth & MDMA / los jóvenes y el MDMA



Youth & Opioids / los jóvenes y los opiáceos



Youth & Poly substance / la juventud y el consumo de polisustancias



Youth & Stimulants / la juventud y los estimulantes

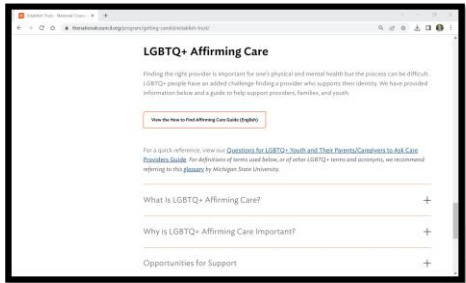


Youth & Tobacco / la juventud, el tabaco y la nicotina



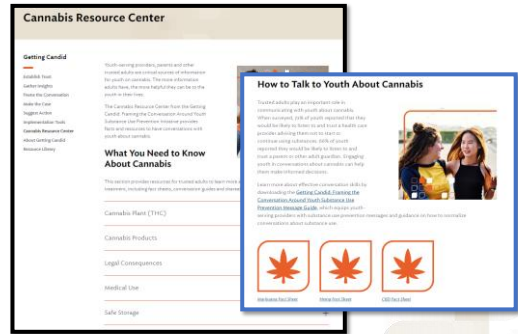
# LGBTQ+ Affirming Care

<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/program/getting-candid/establish-trust/>

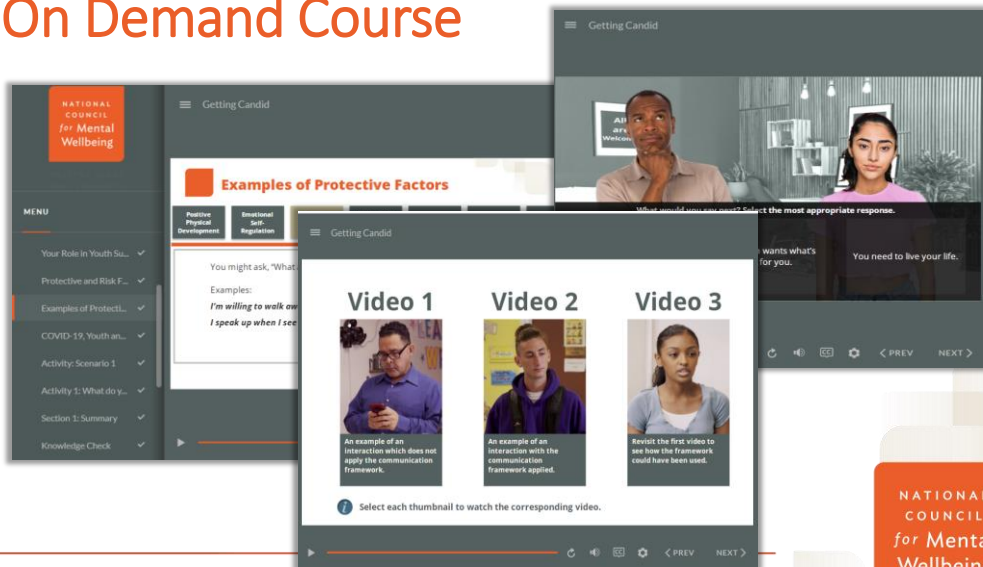


# Cannabis Resource Center

- State Fact Sheets on Cannabis
- Policy
- Prevention
- Mental Health and Substance Use Treatment
- Safe Storage
- Legal Consequences
- Medical Use
- Other Cannabis Products



# On Demand Course





## Youth-facing Content

- Social media influencers
- Youth-focused resources
- Youth Ambassador blogs

Our TikTok Influencers campaign [launched](#) in Feb!



<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/itsthelittlethings/>

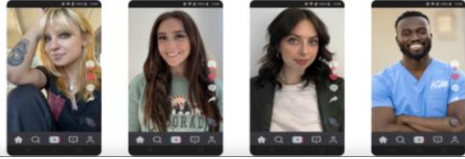


Justin Puder  
[@amoderntherapist](#)

Sammy Huerta  
[@sbercomefx](#)

Chris Olsen  
[@chris](#)

Ava Michelle  
[@avamichelleoz](#)



## Questions?



For more information or to inquire about these resources, please email [gettingcandid@thenationalcouncil.org](mailto:gettingcandid@thenationalcouncil.org)