

# SUPPORTING SUBSTANCE AFFECTED YOUNG PEOPLE

## *Overview*

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A dynamic approach to working with young people who are using drugs or alcohol



*This guide provides a framework for supporting young people who present substance affected. It outlines core steps and key practice approaches that focus on keeping young people safe and feeling valued and connected.*

Responding to young people who are substance affected can be challenging and sometimes confronting. Policies and procedures will often guide **what** actions we have to take in these situations but **how** we go about these actions can greatly impact the experience of the young person and our relationships with them.

**EACH INTERACTION WITH A YOUNG PERSON IN RELATION TO THEIR SUBSTANCE USE OFFERS A THERAPEUTIC OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND WITH UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE IN PLACE OF THE MORE COMMON EXPERIENCE OF STIGMA AND SHAME.**

## **PLAN**

### ***Develop a plan with the young person***

When we have a plan that is upfront, includes young people, collates information and tailors our response to their needs, young people feel valued and safe in knowing what to expect from us.

**Example:** "There are some things we need to do to keep you safe, so we were wondering what has been helpful for you previously when you've come home drunk?"

**Avoid:** "We know you have caused trouble in the past, when you've come home high. This is how it works here."

## **ASSESS**

### ***Greet with warmth and focus on safety***

We want young people to feel connected, valued and safe so they feel comfortable returning in any state.

**Example:** "Hey, great to see you and glad you are safe. Do you want a cup of tea or some food? How's your evening been?"

**Avoid:** "Where have you been? You look stoned. Have you been using again? Everyone has been really worried about you."



*Important -  
This guide has  
been designed  
to complement  
but not replace your  
organisational guidelines,  
policies and procedures –  
please refer to and follow them.*

## MONITOR

### ***Be overt, respectful and predictable***

Young people feel safe and valued when they are part of the process and understand what is happening and why.

**Example:** “Hey, we’re a bit worried about you, so we are just going to keep an eye on you tonight like we discussed.”

**Avoid:** “We’re going to have to check on you now because you’re high. If you don’t want us checking on you then you shouldn’t have used anything.”

## REVIEW

### ***Reflect on the plan with the young person***

To be most useful to young people, we need to check in regularly and adapt our plan as needed.

**Example:** “How did it go for you last night? Is there anything that can make things go smoother next time?”

**Avoid:** “If you don’t want people asking questions and checking on you, you need to stop taking drugs.”



## ABOUT YSAS

Youth Support + Advocacy Service (YSAS) is a leading youth health not-for-profit agency that enables young people experiencing serious disadvantage to access the resources and support they require to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

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*For further information  
call YoDAA 1800 458 685  
or visit [yodaa.org.au](http://yodaa.org.au)*