

Family Involvement in Youth Substance Use Care



This one page tip sheet presents some key considerations for **family involvement** in a young person's mental health and substance use care. Involving family members, with a young person's consent, can greatly improve outcomes and support youth in achieving their goals.

Note: The term "family" can be defined in various ways based on cultural, societal, and individual factors and experiences. Family members can include parents (biological, adopted, foster), siblings, friends, elders, extended family, partners/significant others, and any loved ones the youth considers to be in their circle of care.

Benefits of Family Involvement in Substance Use and Mental Health^{1,2,3}:

- improved relationships between family and youth
- greater likelihood that youth will feel supported and follow treatment plans
- increased understanding of what both youth and family members are experiencing
- validation of youth and family members that they are being heard and supported
- improved confidence to work together among youth and their family members
- decreased likelihood of treatment drop out
- enhanced family members knowledge on how to best support youth



Principles of Family Involvement

to keep mind when working with families and youth in the context of substance use

- collaboration in youth's care
- strength-based approaches
- reducing obstacles to family involvement
- cultural awareness
- meaningful engagement
- establishing a strong therapeutic alliance
- ensuring confidentiality

Family involvement in a youth's life can present both protective factors and risk factors for youth substance use and they can intersect with other individual, social, biological, and cultural factors that can contribute to the pathways of problematic youth substance use.

Considerations around family involvement:

- **Discuss confidentiality and consent** with youth before involving family in their care
- Service providers must **understand confidentiality** as defined by their professional standards, employer policies, and applicable legislation
- **Clearly explain confidentiality** so families understand what consent is required to access the youth's healthcare information
- **Reflect on personal biases and actively learn** about the family's culture and experiences to better understand their dynamics
- **Support families in developing skills** like problem-solving, coping, and relationship-building to reinforce youth goals
- **Highlight family strengths** to build confidence and foster their role as valued supporters of the youth
- **Identify and address barriers families face**, including transportation costs, stigma, and time constraints, by providing flexible and inclusive support



To learn more about Family Involvement and Youth Substance Use you can enroll in the open access course offered through Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario titled "Addressing Substance Use in Youth"

References:

- [1] Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health. (2016). Evidence in-sight: Best practices in engaging families in child and youth mental health. Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health.
- [2] Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health & Parent's for Children's Mental Health. (2019). *Family engagement resource guide*. Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health.
- [3] Ong, H. S., Fernandez, P. A., & Lim, H. K. (2021). Family engagement as part of managing patients with mental illness in primary care. *Singapore medical journal*, 62(5), 213.

Content adapted from Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario course titled "Addressing Substance Use in Youth"