

I Am Worried About Someone: Preparing a Conversation

Use this guide to prepare a caring conversation about substance use. Focus on what you have noticed, what the person wants to share, and a realistic offer of help.

Make room for their view

SAMHSA recommends speaking with kindness, asking open questions and listening without judgment. More than one conversation may be needed. You can summarize what you heard and ask whether you understood it correctly, then ask what support the person wants. [1]

Before you begin [1] [2]

- Choose a time and place where you can speak privately and listen. Ask whether now is a workable time.
- Use a concrete observation instead of assigning a diagnosis or guessing a motive.
- Offer a specific task you can genuinely do, such as sitting together during a call or helping find a provider.
- If they do not want to talk, say that you are willing to listen later and ask whether a follow-up is welcome. Do not promise that one conversation will change their use.

A conversation, not an interrogation

Hypothetical example – adapt to the relationship [1]

Moment	Possible words
Ask to talk	"I care about you. Is this a good time to talk about something I have noticed?"
Describe an observation	"You said you wanted to cut back, and the last two mornings you seemed worried about drinking. What has that been like for you?"
Reflect rather than argue	"It sounds as though you want things to change but are worried about treatment. Have I understood?"
Offer a chosen next step	"Would it help if I sat with you while you call someone, or is there another kind of support you would prefer?"

Safety can change the conversation

An emergency is different from a planned discussion

If there is immediate physical danger, seek safety and call 911. If someone cannot be awakened or is breathing slowly or with difficulty, treat it as possible overdose: give naloxone if opioids may be involved and it is available, call 911 and stay with them if you can do so safely. Do not delay emergency help to persuade them to discuss treatment. [3] [4]

For emotional distress or a mental-health, suicide or substance-use crisis in the U.S., you can call or text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org, including when you are concerned about another person. You can also seek support for your own wellbeing; caring for someone does not mean you must handle everything alone. [5] [6]

Keep notes private. Write or type short notes. Use another copy if you need more room. Save and reopen the PDF to check your answers.

My conversation notes

One or two observations

Describe what you directly noticed and why it concerns you; leave out labels and guessed motives.

My opening and an open question

Use your own words and leave room for a different perspective.

What I heard

Their view, questions, preferences and anything I need to clarify.

Help I can offer and limits I need

A realistic task; what I cannot safely or reliably take on.

What we agreed, if anything

Who will do what, whether follow-up is welcome, and when. No agreement is also an honest result to record.

Support for me

A trusted person, counselor or family support option I can contact.

Keep completed notes private. Share only what you choose with the people helping you. These are original educational and planning prompts, not a validated assessment.

Useful next steps

[SAMHSA conversation guidance](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help>

[988 support for yourself or someone else](https://988lifeline.org/)

<https://988lifeline.org/>

[Find treatment options](https://findtreatment.gov/)

<https://findtreatment.gov/>

Sources

[1] [SAMHSA: Talking with someone about help](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help) (samhsa.gov)

[2] [SAMHSA: Asking for help](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help) (samhsa.gov)

[3] [SAMHSA: 988 versus 911](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help) (samhsa.gov)

[4] [CDC: Preventing Opioid Overdose](https://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/opioid/preventing-overdose.html) (cdc.gov)

[5] [SAMHSA: 988 Frequently Asked Questions](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help) (samhsa.gov)

[6] [SAMHSA: Helping families cope](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help) (samhsa.gov)