

# TALK. LISTEN. LEARN.

One conversation can make a difference.



**A FAMILY'S GUIDE TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH  
& SUBSTANCE USE  
DUBLIN, OHIO**



A DUBLIN WELLNESS ALLIANCE INITIATIVE

## INSIDE THIS GUIDE

# You don't need all the answers.

## CONTENTS

- 01 Why this guide exists
- 02 Talk
- 03 Listen & Learn
- 04 Understanding today's risks
- 05 Where to go for help
- 06 Conversation tools for parents
- 07 What the research tells us
- 08 About the Dublin Wellness Alliance

## THE FIVE TOPICS INSIDE



ALCOHOL



VAPING & NICOTINE



MARIJUANA & THC



FENTANYL &  
COUNTERFEIT PILLS



MENTAL HEALTH

01 / WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

# Built by our community, for our families.

**Families Talk. Listen. Learn.** was created by the Dublin Wellness Alliance (DWA) in response to youth behavioral health needs identified across our community. Parents told us they want clearer information, trusted guidance, and practical tools around youth mental health and substance use.

This guide is one way the DWA is responding — helping parents build communication, recognize concerns early, and connect with trusted local resources for the most common substance use and mental health concerns in Dublin, Ohio.

|                                                                                              |                                                                                        |                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div>1 in 3</div> <div>high school students report persistent sadness or hopelessness.</div> | <div>#1</div> <div>alcohol remains the most commonly used substance among teens.</div> | <div>95%</div> <div>of opioid related overdose deaths in Ohio involve illicit fentanyl.</div> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Sources: CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey · Monitoring the Future (NIH / NIDA) · Ohio Department of Health, 2023 Ohio Unintentional Drug Overdose Report.

## 02 / TALK

# Start conversations that keep the door open

Talking early - and often - helps normalize conversations about mental health and substance use. They don't need to be formal or heavy. Small moments often matter most.

### QUICK START

---

Choose a calm, low pressure moment

---

Ask open-ended questions

---

Listen more than you speak

---

Stay curious, not confrontational

---

### CONVERSATION STARTERS

"I've noticed you seem stressed lately — how are things going?"

"What are kids at school talking about right now?"

"How are you feeling about everything lately?"

**The goal isn't a perfect conversation. It's keeping the door open.**

### 03 / LISTEN & LEARN

# What your teen may be trying to tell you

Listening is about more than hearing words. Teens often communicate through behavior, mood, and changes in routine.

#### QUICK START

|                                       |                                          |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Notice patterns, not one-time changes | Stay calm, even if what you hear is hard |
| Reflect on what you are hearing       | Avoid rushing to solutions               |

#### LEARN

## Understanding today's risks and why awareness matters

Higher-potency THC, vaping devices disguised as everyday items, and counterfeit pills containing fentanyl have changed the risk landscape. Substances are more accessible, more potent, and often intertwined with mental health, stress, and digital life.

Learning about these realities helps parents ask better questions, recognize early concerns, and respond with clarity and confidence.

# Five topics worth understanding

Explore detailed topic guides and trusted local resources in the Families Talk. Listen. Learn. information on our website at [dublinwellnessalliance.org](http://dublinwellnessalliance.org)



## ALCOHOL

The most-used substance among teens. Underage drinking can affect brain development, judgment, and emotional regulation, and early use is linked to increased risk of future substance misuse.

**Talking point:** Set expectations and talk about safety and decision-making before alcohol becomes a problem.



## VAPING & NICOTINE

Vaping devices are often small and easy to hide, and many contain high levels of nicotine. Nicotine can increase anxiety, disrupt sleep, and affect focus — especially in developing brains.

**Talking point:** Shift conversations away from punishment and toward health, stress, and coping.

# Five topics worth understanding

-continued



## MARIJUANA & THC

Today's marijuana products are often much stronger than in the past and may appear as gummies or vape cartridges. THC can affect memory, motivation, mood, and mental health, particularly for adolescents.

**Talking point:** Talk about risks and boundaries in ways that reflect what teens are actually encountering.



## FENTANYL & COUNTERFEIT PILLS

A powerful synthetic opioid increasingly found in counterfeit pills made to look like prescription medications. Even a small amount can be dangerous — especially when someone doesn't know it's present.

**Talking point:** Talk about medication safety and the risks of unknown substances to help prevent accidental harm.



## MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE

Mental health and substance use are often connected. Teens may turn to substances to cope with stress, anxiety, sleep challenges, or social pressure — and substance use can, in turn, worsen mental health concerns.

**Talking point:** Focus on support, communication, and early intervention.

# Changes worth noticing

## MOOD & EMOTIONS

More anxiety, irritability, or sadness than usual

Withdrawing, or new secrecy

Big shifts in energy or motivation

## ROUTINES & SLEEP

Noticeable changes in sleep or appetite

Dropping activities they used to love

Slipping grades or attendance

## SOCIAL & DIGITAL

A sudden new friend group

More secrecy around their phone or plans

Pulling away from family

## PHYSICAL & AT HOME

Unfamiliar items or smells you can't place

Money or medicine missing at home

Unexplained changes in appearance

### When is it worth a closer conversation?

If several of these show up together, or last more than a couple of weeks, trust your instinct and check in. You don't need certainty to start — and the resources on the following pages are there whenever you want support.



## A REMINDER FOR PARENTS

# You don't have to be an expert

What matters most is staying curious, keeping conversations open, and knowing where to turn if you have concerns.

Explore detailed topic guides in the full resource guide on our website.

IN IMMEDIATE CRISIS?

# 988

Call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. It's free, confidential and available 24/7

## A few safe-at-home habits

Most teens who misuse medicine get it at home. Small habits make a real difference.

### SECURE

Keep prescription medicines — especially opioids — in a locked cabinet or lockbox, out of reach.

### MONITOR

Know what's in your home, keep track of counts, and only take medicine as prescribed.

### DISPOSE

Drop unused or expired medicine at a take-back location or use an at-home disposal pouch.

## 05 / WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

# Trusted local resources

### DUBLIN CITY SCHOOLS - STUDENT WELLNESS

School-based supports for student mental health and safety, counseling, prevention education, and connections to resources.

**614-764-5913**

CLICK LOGO FOR LINK



### PRESS PAUSE-FINDING BALANCE

A Dublin City Schools initiative - short podcast episodes on sleep, stress, social-media pressure, and healthy digital habits.

**614-764-5913**

CLICK LOGO FOR LINK



### DUBLIN ACT COALITION

A community coalition focused on preventing and reducing youth substance use through education, collaboration, and local prevention.

**614-889-5722**

CLICK LOGO FOR LINK



### KIDS MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION

Free, research-informed tools to help parents start conversations with children and teens about mental health and substance use.

**855-902-5437**

CLICK LOGO FOR LINK



### NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Pediatric healthcare including mental health support, substance use treatment, and family-centered care.

**614-722-2000**

CLICK LOGO FOR LINK



### SYNTERO

Counseling, prevention, and early -intervention mental health services for children, teens, adults, and families across Central Ohio.

**614-889-5722**

CLICK LOGO FOR LINK



# Conversation tools for parents

These pages are here to support you — not to track, monitor, or evaluate your child. There's no right or wrong way to use them. If something feels helpful, use it. If it doesn't, skip it.

**You don't need perfect words. You just need presence.**

## CONVERSATION LOG

### A SIMPLE WAY TO REFLECT

Topics we talked about

What prompted the conversation

What my child shared or asked

What felt easy /and what felt hard

One thing I want to follow up on

## SHARED INTENTIONS

### HOW WE TRY TO TALK

What helps us feel heard

What makes conversations harder

How we handle mistakes or misunderstandings

What we do when emotions run high

Who else we can talk to if something feels too big

# Connection is protective

---

- 01** Strong family communication is a protective factor.
- 02** Early conversations reduce risk over time.
- 03** Awareness and connection matter more than fear-based messaging.

**Research consistently shows that open communication and trusted relationships reduce risk.**

## 08 / ABOUT THE DUBLIN WELLNESS ALLIANCE

# Responding to our community's needs



The Dublin Wellness Alliance was created in response to what families and residents shared through the City of Dublin's 2023 Community Health Needs Assessment.

The assessment identified youth behavioral health as a priority area — where families wanted more information, support, and connection to trusted resources.

DWA brings partners together to respond, helping families access reliable information, start important conversations, and find local support.

---

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & DATA

---

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DRUG ABUSE**

[nida.nih.gov](https://nida.nih.gov)

---

**DEA - ONE PILL CAN KILL**

[dea.gov/onepill](https://dea.gov/onepill)

---

**OHIO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

[odh.ohio.gov](https://odh.ohio.gov)

---

**SAMHSA**

[samhsa.gov](https://samhsa.gov)

---

**OHIO YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY**

[youthsurveys.ohio.gov](https://youthsurveys.ohio.gov)

---