

Talking To Patients About Substance Use

Techniques to introduce substance use screening to determine
type, quantity, and frequency of substances used

Normalizing



Use universal
statements
TRY THIS

"I ask all of my
patients about
substance use to learn
about their medical
history"

Transparency



Establish
relevance to care
TRY THIS

"I would like to ask
some specific
questions about your
substance use to
understand your
overall health"

Permission



Give option to
refuse
TRY THIS

"Would it be alright
if I asked you
questions about
your substance
use?"

"Many patients find it difficult to talk about their substance use, but asking a few very specific questions will help me get a better picture of your health. Is it okay if I ask some questions about your substance use?"

How You Ask

- Ask for facts, not opinions (behavioral incidents)
- Use specific, close-ended questions
- Offer response choices on the screening tool (ex. always, sometimes, never)
- Emphasize confidentiality
- Clarify time periods (ex. past 30 days, month, year, etc.)
- Use visual aids (ex. standard drink sizes)

Work Cited:

McBride, R. (2010). *Talking to Patients about Sensitive Topics: Techniques for Increasing the Reliability of Patient Self-report* [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved from: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/nidamed/centers-excellence/resources/talking-to-patients-about-sensitive-topics-communication-screening-techniques-increasing>