

SBIRT in Schools: Responding to Negative Screens

An important part of the SBIRT process is to facilitate a one-on-one conversation with each student in an effort to prevent or delay the start of substance use such as alcohol and marijuana. SBIRT focuses on reinforcing healthy decisions and addressing concerning behaviors around substance use with the goal of improving health, safety and success in school.

Students who report no substance use in the past 12 months:

In these cases, you will provide positive reinforcement for the student's healthy decisions using the REACT model. REACT is a three-step process that stands for Reinforce, Educate, and Anticipate Challenges of Tomorrow. This brief conversation provides the basis for the primary prevention goal of universal substance use screening in schools. It is best to include each component of this model in the conversation.

Reinforce:

Acknowledge and affirm healthy decisions. Be genuine and specific about what the student is doing well. Encourage continued abstinence by using open ended questions to ask about the student's choices to refrain from using substances. You might say:

“You've decided not to use alcohol and other drugs, which is one way to protect your health and safety. Tell me what helps you make those choices?”

Affirm or reflect the student's response.

Educate:

Share information about the health and safety risks of substance use during adolescent years. Maintain a conversational tone and select 1-2 talking points based on the interests and activities of the individual student. Always ask permission before providing information. You might say:

Elicit: “What do you know about the risks of substance use?”

“Would it be okay if I share some information with you?”

Provide: Share 1-2 factual and relevant points related to substance use.

Elicit: “What are your thoughts about that?”

Anticipate Challenges of Tomorrow:

Use open ended questions that explore future barriers to remaining substance free. Briefly ask about potential solutions or alternatives to those barriers. Thank the student. You might say:

“What situations could make it difficult for you to continue to avoid alcohol and other drug use? How might you handle that?”

“What would you do if you were in a situation where you were offered alcohol or other drugs?”

“Thank you for being open to speaking with me today!”