



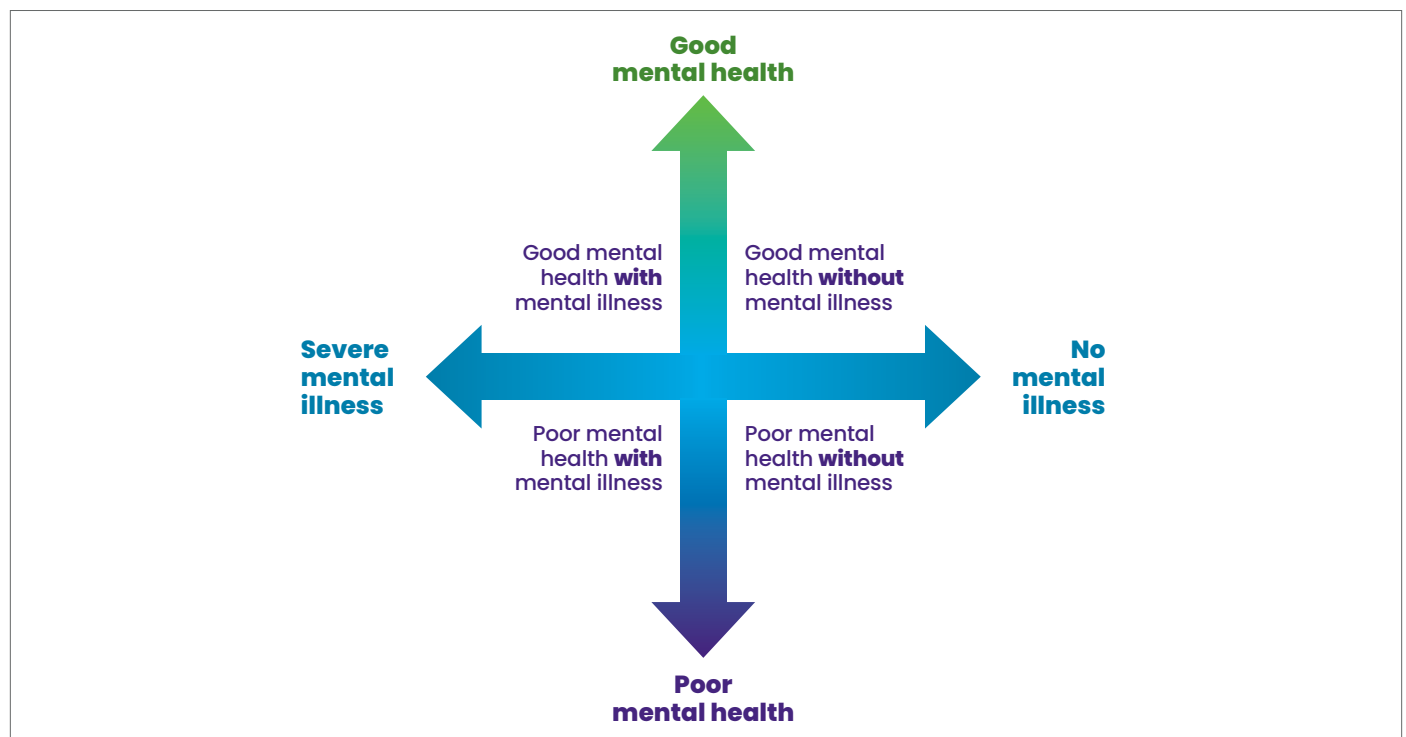
Mental Health + Substance Use: What Parents and Caregivers Need to Know

Key Takeaways from Addictions Prevention Literacy Webinar #1 – The Intersection of Mental Health and Substance Use from School Mental Health Ontario

The following information is drawn from the webinar offered by Dr. Jillian Halladay at the McMaster School of Nursing and the Peter Boris Center for Addictions Research. Supplementary information has been added, including answers to additional questions submitted by Ontario parents and caregivers.

Mental health changes over time

- Just like physical health, mental health also changes throughout our lives.
- We all move along a mental health continuum and may experience mental health challenges at some point.



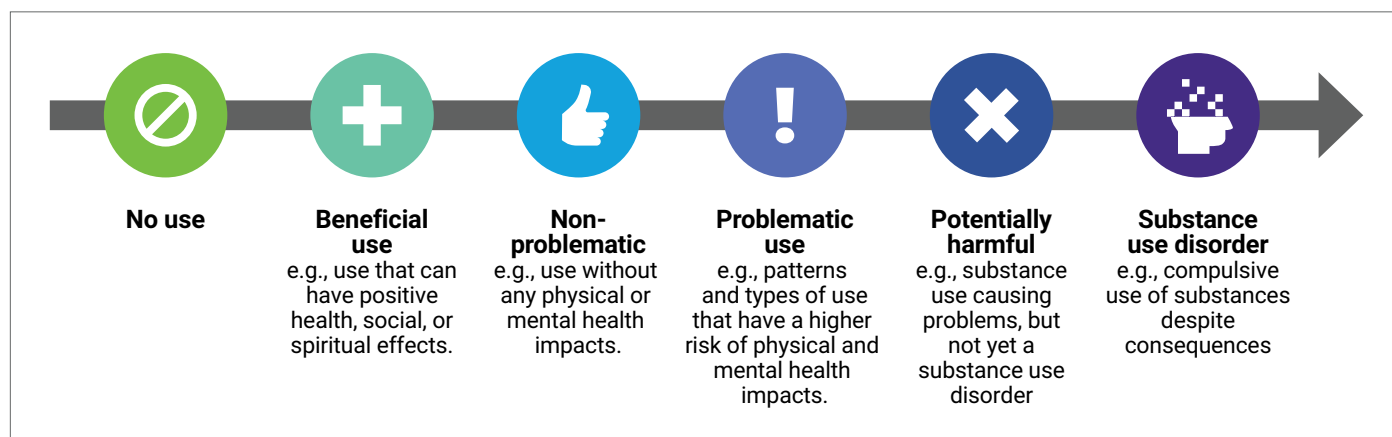
Substance use often starts in adolescence

- Ages 12–17 = the typical age range to start trying substances.
- Ages 18–25 = when substance use disorders are more likely to appear.
- A substance use disorder is a treatable medical condition where a person's use of a substance (e.g., alcohol) leads to compulsive and continuous use despite negative impacts on their health, relationships or responsibilities.
- The most common substances used are alcohol, cannabis and tobacco.

Why youth use substances

- to feel good
- to cope or feel better
- to fit in
- to try something new

Not every young person who uses substances will experience problems. Substance use occurs on a continuum, with varying stages of benefits and harms.



Mental health + substance use are interconnected

- Mental health and substance use often show up together and can impact one another.
- Mental health problems can lead to the onset or worsening of substance use. For example, a young person who experiences anxiety might use substances to cope.
- Ongoing and problematic substance use can lead to, or worsen, mental health problems. For example, a young person using substances in a problematic way may lose friendships, leading to social isolation or depression.
- Substance use and mental health problems share similar risk and protective factors.
 - **Risk factors** raise the chance that mental health or substance use problems will occur. Shared risk factors can be social (e.g., experiences of discrimination or a lack of social/community connection), environmental (e.g., housing instability) or biological (e.g., family history).
 - **Protective factors** reduce the chance that either mental health or substance use problems will occur. Shared protective factors can include positive relationships with family and friends, connection with culture, faith and/or spirituality, and a sense of belonging at school and within the community.



Your questions, answered

QUESTION	ANSWER
If my child has a mental health disorder and is using substances, will it affect them in a different way than for young people who use substances but are not experiencing mental health problems?	<p>If your child is experiencing a mental health disorder, it may put them at higher risk of developing problematic substance use patterns.</p> <p>Your child's reasons for using substances may also be different than those of their peers. Youth with mental health problems may be more likely to use substances to cope with distress (e.g., using substances to help with anxiety management), while a peer without a mental health problem may be using substances to fit in or to experiment.</p> <p>It's important to note that young people with mental health disorders do not always use substances in a problematic way. They may, however, be at higher risk for substance use than their peers so it is important to monitor and provide support.</p>
What signs should I look for to indicate that my child is engaging in problematic substance use? Would they be different than the signs of a mental health problem?	<p>Many of the signs of problematic substance use overlap with signs of a mental health disorder. Some of these overlapping signs can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• outbursts of anger or distress• frequent irritability• anxiety or feeling down/depressed• refusing to go to school and/or academic difficulties (e.g., decline in grades or teachers expressing concerns)• changes to sleeping and eating patterns• social isolation <p>As a parent/caregiver the most important thing is to notice persistent changes in your child's emotions or behaviour and seek help if you are concerned. Mental health and substance use problems commonly co-occur in youth, and mental health professionals are trained to assess and provide intervention and support for both.</p>
If I have concerns about my child's substance use and mental health, who can I talk to at school?	<p>You can speak to your school principal to learn more about school mental health services that are available. Schools in Ontario offer assessment and brief counselling intervention services from social work and psychology staff. These school mental health professionals have training and expertise in screening for substance use and providing brief intervention for students.</p> <p>School mental health professionals may determine that your child needs specialized treatment for their substance use. If you/your child provides consent to a community-based referral, this may result in a recommendation or referral to mental health and addictions services in the community.</p>



Looking for support for a child or young person who is facing challenges related to substance use?

SUPPORT	
YOUTH-VAST Program (CAMH)	Support for youth (12–21) facing substance use, vaping or technology overuse concerns Visit: https://www.wehearyou.ca/
ConnexOntario	24/7 helpline with free support + info on mental health + addictions services Visit: connexontario.ca
Indigenous mental health and addictions services in Ontario	Visit: https://www.ontario.ca/page/mental-health-and-addiction-services-indigenous-individuals-and-families
CMHA Ontario	Learn more about addiction services for children and youth in Ontario Visit: https://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/finding-and-navigating-addiction-services-for-children-and-youth/

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