

## **Accessing Supports for Substance Misuse and Behavioral Health Needs**

The DCF Substance Use Practice Guide provides outlines guidance for DCF staff in meeting agency expectations to screen for and plan for youth and family substance use problems to make informed and timely decisions about safety, risk and needed services intended to safeguard children. DCF Policy 21-7 provides guidance for agency staff in screening and testing for substance disorders. Substance misuse is correlated to adverse effects and/or outcomes in a person's life and the Department strives to provide quality intervention and services to address a person's substance misuse. Access to substance misuse services are a critical component in the efforts to address the misuse. Adolescents being served by DCF should be provided with services and resources to address identified substance misuse as we strive to maximize their individual outcomes as they prepare to transition from DCF services. This guide provides resources to ensure that staff have readily accessible information and clients are afforded the opportunity to access services to treat their misuse. Beyond this guide, the above noted DCF. V.I.T.A.L. Resource website, Regional Resource Group Practice Guide, and the DCF Office on Intimate Partner Violence and Substance Use Treatment and Recovery Homepage include sources of information and guidance related to working with a person with substance misuse including the adolescents we serve.

### **Risk Specific to Adolescents and Young Adults**

Adolescents and young adults face significant risks specific to substance misuse in their health, well-being, development, and learning. The human brain is not fully developed until 25 years of age; the frontal cortex is still maturing through adolescent and young adulthood. Brain development research shows that the maturing brain may be particularly vulnerable to substance misuse. Research also indicates that learning in adolescents may be adversely affected by substance misuse during adolescence, particularly when it is frequent and heavy. There are areas identified where the impact of substance misuse can be permanent, including the structure and functioning of different brain areas. Delaying the onset of substance use is critically important to minimize these potential negative impacts. Research shows that the initiating substance use in adolescence increases the risk of developing a chronic substance use disorder later. Substance misuse in Connecticut in adolescents is significant and with at least 9.5% of Connecticut adolescents self-reported using illicit drugs in the previous month. Adolescence also brings increased stress, anxiety, and depression. In March, 2021 nearly half of parents surveyed in a national poll indicated that their teens faced new or worsening mental health since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the stage of development when youth are primed to seek independence, restrictions had a negative impact on their ability to interact with others. 31% of adolescent girls reported anxiety and 36% reported depression; 18% of adolescent males reported anxiety and 19% reported depression (Mott Poll report, 2021).

### **Addressing Substance Misuse and Mitigating Adverse Outcomes Resulting from Substance Misuse**

We often hear from many of our youth about the positive impact their Transitional Specialist and other DCF staff have had in their lives. DCF strives to maximize the outcomes for our adolescents and young adults, and for this population this includes ensuring that there are no barriers that can deter their ability to be prepared to capitalize on their full potential. The research about substance misuse in adolescents and young adults indicates that, if unaddressed, there may be lifelong adverse outcomes resulting from the effects on brain development, learning, and health/mental health among many other areas.

Building on the established connection between a youth and their Transitional Specialists to open or continue a dialogue is key to supporting they are provided with quality information, resources, guidance, and access to services related to substance misuse when indicated. Delaying or avoiding substance use shortens the length of time the developing brain is exposed to the harmful effects of substance use, and it may help to avoid a substance use disorder from developing the. The resources noted in this guide are available to support Transitional Specialists in these conversations and to have ready access to information that can be provided to a youth.

### **Access to Services**

The reasons for substance misuse are unique to the individual. Use and addiction in the adolescents and young adults we work with are areas that a Transitional Specialists should assess for regularly and can address as indicated. RRG support and input is a valuable tool in ensuring an in identification of appropriate services. Access to services that are appropriate, culturally informed, and provided in the client's dominant language is critical in addressing substance misuse. Interventions for substance misuse, and follow-up, should be developed individually and designed with the client as the focus. The client - the adolescent/young adult should have, whenever possible, a voice in the planning for services to address their identified substance misuse. **In addition to the service providers connected to area office towns, additional providers are noted on the V.I.T.A.L. Resources webpage.**

Resources to address barriers to access to services should be addressed and resolved ensuring that services are provided when indicated or requested. The Area Office chain of command and the subject matter experts in the RRG and the DCF Office of Intimate Partner Violence and Substance Use Treatment and Recovery staff listed here are available to assist in removing barriers to services.

### **Access Support for Substance Misuse and Behavioral Health Needs**

Recognizing the connection between substance misuse and the increased risks for transitioning adolescent youth, which include but are not limited to anxiety, depression, self-harm, etc., ensuring that when indicated staff access support in this area is important. Requesting an RRG consult using the DCF-2126 form will ensure that the youth's individualized needs are assessed and included as appropriate in treatment planning, permanency work, and appropriate support is provided through the RRG to address any assessment and treatment needs. DCF's Clinical and Community Consultation and Support Team Substance Use information, including resources and services can be viewed here.

This material is largely from: The DCF Substance Use Practice Guide which is available at the following website: <https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/Policy/Legal/V12>

### **Links:**

Behavioral Health Trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) [https://www.samhsa.gov/data/all-reports?keys=Behavioral+health+trends+in+the+United+States%3A+Results+from+the+2014+National+Survey+on+Drug+Use+and+Health&items\\_per\\_page=15&sort\\_bef\\_combine=search\\_api\\_relevance\\_DESC](https://www.samhsa.gov/data/all-reports?keys=Behavioral+health+trends+in+the+United+States%3A+Results+from+the+2014+National+Survey+on+Drug+Use+and+Health&items_per_page=15&sort_bef_combine=search_api_relevance_DESC)

Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2015). Behavioral health trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. SMA 15-4927, NSDUH Series H-50). Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

Indicators as measured through the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health - Connecticut Barometer [https://www.samhsa.gov/data/all-reports?keys=Behavioral+health+trends+in+the+United+States%3A+Results+from+the+2014+National+Survey+on+Drug+Use+and+Health&items\\_per\\_page=15&sort\\_bef\\_combine=search\\_api\\_relevance\\_DESC](https://www.samhsa.gov/data/all-reports?keys=Behavioral+health+trends+in+the+United+States%3A+Results+from+the+2014+National+Survey+on+Drug+Use+and+Health&items_per_page=15&sort_bef_combine=search_api_relevance_DESC)

Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2015). Behavioral health trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. SMA 15-4927, NSDUH Series H-50). Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

Mott Poll Report: How the Pandemic Has Impacted Teen Mental Health. March 15, 2021. 38(2)  
Retrieved from <https://mottpoll.org/>