

## How Do I Manage My Emotions?

It can be very frustrating, disappointing, and worrisome to learn that your teen or young adult child is drinking or using drugs. It's counter to everything you want for them. Your mind may race through many thoughts:

- How did this start? How long have they been doing this?
- How do I get them to stop?
- What will happen if "X" (e.g. other family members, my child's friends and their parents, the school, their job) finds out?
- Where did I go wrong?

Discovering beer bottle caps in a backpack, finding a JUUL or vape pen, missing money, seeing glassy red eyes, finding out your child is in trouble with the law - and other signs of substance use - can trigger reactions in parents that make things worse. And even when you aren't confronted by a trigger, you may find yourself thinking about your child's situation and worrying about how to deal with it.

With this struggle in mind, it's important to take a breath, keep things in perspective and stay focused on what's important and constructive. This topic is designed to help you be mindful in situations where you're confronted with negative thoughts and emotions like anxiety, fear and anger, or feel like yelling, or responding in a way that isn't helpful.

The acronym **STOP** is designed to help you become more effective at responding rather than reacting. STOP stands for:

- Stop and hit the pause button
- Take a deep breath
- Observe what's happening and how the situation is affecting you
- Proceed with actions that are consistent with who you want to be as a parent



### Stop and Hit the Pause Button

It can be really challenging to stop and pause when you feel overwhelmed with emotions and feelings but inserting a pause can help set the stage for a more effective response.

Some parents find it helpful to envision a big red stop sign when they feel triggered by a child's words or actions.

### Take a Deep Breath

Once you've hit the pause button, taking a deep breath can help calm down and give you time to think. In addition to taking a breath, you may ground yourself by:

- Continuing to use the breathing exercise we do in check in
- Leaving for a walk
- Talking to a friend
- Having a snack if hungry
- Taking a bath or short nap
- Writing down your thoughts
- Listening to soothing music

## Observe What's Happening and How the Situation is Affecting You

It's important to be aware of what is happening to you... what thoughts are running through your head, how your body feels and the emotions you're experiencing.

### Physical Sensations:

- Increased heart rate
- Clenching your jaw
- Pit in your stomach
- Tension headache
- Not sleeping
- Inability to concentrate/focus

### Emotions:

- Fearful
- Angry
- Worried
- Embarrassed
- Hopeless

### Thoughts:

- What do I have to do to make them stop? Why are they hurting me like this?!
- I'm so angry by what they said, and I feel I'm going to lose it!
- I can't believe what I've found. I didn't raise them to be this way!
- I'm fed up and I'm going to show them who runs this house!

## Proceed with Actions that are Consistent with Who You Want to be as a Parent.

You and your child benefit most when you are in a calm, grounded place, rather than "reacting to emergencies and emotions" place. As you develop your **STOP** button and have a way to *be aware* of what's happening in your head and heart, you get an incredibly important thing in return. The calm grounded YOU can show up more often. You can use your insights and wisdom to decide what you will do next.

### What's the Best Response Under the Circumstances? Some considerations are:

- Can I try to put myself in my child's shoes?
- Can I listen to what my child has to say?
- What tone of voice and choice of words do I want to use?
- Is now a good time to have a discussion or take some action?
- If I choose to impose a consequence, is it reasonable and can I follow through on it?

## Practice, Practice, Practice

In the face of a difficult situation, it can be hard to use the **STOP** skill. It requires practice, just as any other skill you have developed. The upside is that you will not only be in a better position to address situations in a thoughtful way, but you will be modeling how to handle stressful events in your life for your child.