SMART Choices stands for Screening, Motivational Interviewing and Referral to Treatment. Your child’s treatment providers use the SMART Choices approach to identify adolescents who are using substances and provide those adolescents with the help they need. Many adolescents benefit from simply talking to their treatment providers about their substance use and coming up with a plan.

Substance use typically begins in childhood or adolescence. Research shows that the earlier a person begins using substances, the more likely he or she is to develop serious problems. Since prevention and early intervention are so important, your child will receive substance use questionnaires from their treatment providers starting at age 11. Children and adolescents begin using substances for a number of reasons. Some reasons may include:

• To feel more powerful or self-confident, relaxed or satisfied.
• To feel better and less anxious and/or depressed.
• To improve performance either cognitively or athletically.
• To fit in after being peer pressured or socializing with friends.

If you suspect your child is using substances, these are some common signs to watch out for.

• Skipping class
• Declining grades
• Hostility

• Physical changes (red eyes, runny nose)
• Borrowing money
• Mood changes

• Changes in friend groups
• Secrecy about actions or possessions
What Can Parents Do?

Let your child know that they can talk to you and their treatment providers about substance use. Try to remain calm and non-judgmental when having these conversations. If your child is not using substances, provide positive reinforcement for their decision not to use. If your child is using substances, contact his or her treatment providers to help you develop a plan for addressing and responding to the substance use.

In addition to talking to your child’s treatment team, you should also stay up-to-date on what your child is doing. Keep track of his or her activities and who they’re hanging out with. Other resources are available if you need help immediately:

- For emergencies: 911 or your local county crisis hotline
- For treatment options in your area: findtreatment.samhsa.gov
- For treatment referrals and information: National Substance Abuse Helpline (1-800-662-HELP/4357)