

“In The Mix” With AOD

“In The Mix” With AOD Episode Nine- Peer Intervention

Hey everyone what's up! I'm Bethann Long and welcome back to another episode of “In The Mix” With AOD, a podcast provided by the Alcohol and Other Drug Services right here at Grandy Valley. How has this semester been going for you all? I know for me it's definitely been an adjustment to get back into the swing of things after such a long break away, but it's been a lot of fun having my weekends out with all of my friends since the semester started up again. However, as the second semester kicks into full swing, it's important to be looking out for your friends whose substance use may start to be concerning. In this episode we will be discussing the physical and psychological symptoms to be looking out for, when it's time to intervene, how to prepare for this conversation, and some options of what could be said. Always remember that family and friends can play an important role in helping someone understand the impact of their substance use.

First, it's important to understand what exactly the symptoms are to be on the lookout for if you believe a friend's substance use is becoming concerning. There are two types of symptoms that occur when a dependence on substances is developing which include psychological and physical symptoms. When a person has a psychological or emotional craving for a substance, you may see certain symptoms like:

- Seeing drugs or alcohol as a solution, not the problem
- Taking drugs or alcohol in larger and larger amounts or over a longer period of time
- Being preoccupied with getting drugs or drinking alcohol
- Stealing or selling their belongings to buy drugs or alcohol
- Feeling anxious, grumpy, or depressed
- Withdrawing from contact with friends and family
- Socializing with others who abuse drugs or drink excessively
- Having trouble with relationships
- Displaying mood swings
- Experiencing other problems at work and at home

There will also be some prominent physical symptoms when a person's body becomes dependent on a substance such as:

- Sleeping problems
- Needing more substances to feel the same effects, also known as an increased tolerance
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Physical withdrawal symptoms when not using their substances of choice

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Now it can be a really hard decision to make when trying to decide if you are going to approach a close friend or even family member about their substance use. It may feel as though you are crossing a line or going to cause issues within the friendship, but understand that you are acting in the best interest of someone you care about and their well being. You may believe that someone else will step in and say something, however, it's important to not wait for someone else to step up. Not only will voicing your concerns in a caring way help the person struggling with their substance use, but it may also help others who have been impacted by their behaviors, and you too!

There are some steps you can take to make this difficult conversation go as smoothly as possible. First, prepare yourself for the conversation ahead of time! One of the most important things that friends and family members can do when they want to help someone showing signs of concerning substance use is to educate themselves on substance abuse and addiction. This can include speaking to a professional on campus or even going out into the community to find someone who can help you plan what you might say and how to say it to ensure your point is communicated correctly. The AOD office is always available to consult with you about any of your concerns. Next, make sure to gather a list of specific incidents of when your friend's substance use has concerned you. This could be a variety of things such as skipping studying for an exam to drink, staying out all night to use substances multiple times a week, using alcohol or other drugs to cope with mental health concerns, or noticing that their substance use is increasing greatly everytime you go out with friends. When you are deciding when and where to have this conversation, make sure to choose an appropriate, private location where you won't be interrupted. It is also best to ensure that your friend is sober during this important conversation. To increase your impact, capitalize on moments when this person may have noticed the negative consequences of their use rather than waiting long after the moment has passed.

With these preparations put in place, you are in a really good position to have a caring and thoughtful discussion laying out all of your concerns. Make sure to let your friend know how much you care about them, and explain to them how you feel about their substance use. Keep the conversation focused on your observations and do not use second-hand information such as stories that other friends may tell you but you were not present to witness. Go into mentioning the negative effects that you have seen on your friend's life after their increase in substance use which may include alcohol-related health problems, blackouts or memory loss, poor grades, missing class or work, consequences with the law such as MIPs, or even declining relationships with family and friends. Chances are it will not be easy for your friend to admit that they have a problem with substance use, so expect denial from them initially.

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Whether or not your friend agrees that there is a problem, they may be unable or unwilling to act as quickly or directly as you would like. Remember that substance-related habits are hard to end or control! Recognize the effort that your friend puts into even small attempts to limit substance use, and show them that you are remaining supportive. You can continue to have your nights out together on weekends, but encourage more non-drinking behaviors by planning activities not related to alcohol and by limiting your own drinking when you are around them. They may not even be aware of the recovery resources that are available for them on campus or out in the community, so keeping them informed or even offering to walk with them to the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services office can provide them with some much needed support.

Personally, I have had to make this difficult decision to have a sit down conversation with someone close to me about their substance use, and how it was affecting their life and our friendship. It truly is a hard conversation to have but I can assure you that it's very important and you are not alone with this! The Alcohol and Other Drugs Services at GVSU are here to help make this easier on you and the people you care about. It can be scary but you are doing what is best for your friend and your friendship. This has been the ninth episode of “In The Mix” With AOD, I'll be back soon for more episodes with you all!