



Breaking the Cycle: Preventing Violence and Substance Use

Interpersonal violence (IPV) is an umbrella term that includes domestic violence, sexual violence and dating violence. Individuals who experience or witness IPV have a higher risk of substance use, which can create a continuous cycle of IPV and substance use. The effects of this cycle can impact children, families and communities and continue through generations. Understanding the connection between IPV and substance use is key to keeping yourself and the people you care about safe.

The Connection

How can substance use increase the risk of violence?

- Alcohol and drug use can impair judgement, lower inhibitions and increase aggressive behaviors.
- As a result, substance use can intensify conflict and reduce an individual's ability to de-escalate tense situations.
- Individuals who use substances are at a higher risk to perpetrate or experience violence.

How can violence increase the risk of substance use?

- Survivors of abuse and/or violence may use alcohol or other substances to cope with trauma, stress or fear.
- Exposure to violence — especially in childhood — can put individuals at a higher risk of developing substance use concerns. For more information on Positive or Adverse Childhood Experiences, visit rwjbh.org/DARTresources.

Who is at Risk?

Individuals with an increased risk of IPV and substance use include those who have experienced:

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or other childhood trauma
- Social isolation or lack of support — both can impact a person's ability to leave an unsafe situation or seek help
- Poverty and housing instability — both can make accessing care and support difficult or even unattainable
- Untreated or undiagnosed mental illness

Preventing interpersonal violence and substance use means addressing the root causes of both issues. Educational strategies that utilize a person-first approach for preventing IPV and substance use include:

- **Teaching young people about the foundations of safe and supportive relationships.**
- **Teaching healthy coping and conflict resolution skills.** When young people are given the tools to regulate themselves, they are more likely to recognize unsafe situations and respond appropriately.
- **Promoting and maintaining safe social norms.** Rejecting violence, supporting responsible choices and speaking up when you see wrong being done.
- **Strengthening protective factors.** Focusing on school engagement, ensuring youth have safe and varied supports and creating and maintaining a community that promotes belonging.
- **Having conversations about healthy relationships:** what they look like, how to intervene if needed and what supports are available is a person needs help.
- **Recognizing and educating about the warning signs.** IPV and substance use don't happen overnight, there are warning signs and moments when a person can intervene to assist — talk about them!
- **Challenging the stigma around seeking help!**



If you or someone you know is experiencing IPV, help is available. RWJBarnabas Health has support and resources, **scan the QR code to learn more.**

For support in reducing or eliminating your substance use, contact RWJBarnabas Health Institute for Prevention and Recovery's Peer Recovery Program at **848-303-0008** to speak with a certified recovery specialist.

If you are in crisis, call 911.