

STARTING THE CONVERSATION



STARTING A CONVERSATION ABOUT ICE USE

If you are concerned about a loved one's crystal methamphetamine ('ice') use, keeping the lines of communication open is an important way of keeping them connected to you, even at the most challenging of times. But, starting this conversation about a loved one's ice use can be tricky. Having that initial conversation may not meet all of your expectations and resolve everything, but it can be critical in setting the scene for further, ongoing conversations in which you are considered a trusted **confidant**.

Below are some tips about how to prepare for a conversation and what to do during a conversation with someone you suspect is using ice.

TIPS FOR PREPARING TO HAVE A CONVERSATION

Here are some tips to getting started:

- **Gather information** to make sure you understand what ice is and its effects. Relate this information to what you are observing in your loved one and see whether it applies to their situation. Have a clear idea of what it is that concerns you about their ice use.
- **Arrange a suitable time to talk** where you will have some privacy and won't be interrupted. You might have to do this in a location that your loved one feels comfortable in, rather than expecting them to come to where you feel comfortable. For some people, talking whilst looking into each other's faces can feel very confronting, so think about whether you can walk and talk, talk whilst you are driving, or sit side-by side.
- Only start the conversation with someone when they are not currently under the influence of drugs. If this is difficult try to pick a time when they seem less **intoxicated** than others (for example, in the morning). Try to avoid starting conversations when they are on their way out of the house.
- It is OK to ask directly about their ice use; but **don't make assumptions** that they are using the drug, how often, or why they use it. Use this as an opportunity to find out what it's like in the life of your loved one. Aim to make the conversation relaxed and give the person a chance to express their views. A good way to start is with something like:

"I've noticed a few changes in you lately, and I'm a bit worried that you aren't all that happy...what's going on in your life at the moment?", or

“How are your friends going? ...I haven't seen them in a while”, or

“I haven't heard you talking much about uni or work at the moment...how's that going?”

Have some specific examples ready that demonstrate the behaviours/issues that you are worried about, in case you get a “*like what?*” in response. **Choose examples that also demonstrate your suspicions about their ice use.**

WHAT TO DO DURING THE CONVERSATION

- **Don't tell them what to do and try not to be judgemental.** When people are having a hard time, the last thing they need is a lecture.
- **Be sure to listen** and express your concerns in a supportive and **non-confrontational** manner. Evidence suggests that “motivational” approaches are really helpful in starting these difficult conversations. Often encouraging a person to talk about the things that they “like” about their use is a good way to open up the dialogue between you. Remember, as devastating as ice use is, it is performing a function for the person using the drug (see [Why do people use ice?](#)).
- Understanding what this function is will be important in understanding how to help the person still get that need met, without using ice. Once they have spoken about this, you can change tact by saying “does ice always do these things for you or are there times when it's not something to like?”.
- **Remain aware of the type of language you are using.** Don't label the person an “addict” or other negative terms as this is only going to make them feel worse and less likely to open up to you. Learn more about [appropriate terms for people who use drugs](#).
- **Try to use statements which include “I”** as this doesn't put the blame on them. Instead of saying “You make me feel worried when you use ice” say something like “I feel worried about your ice use”.
- **Let them know you care about them.** People will be more likely to listen and take advice on board if they feel valued and respected.
- **Be trustworthy and supportive** so they know that they can rely on you in a time of need. Make sure they know your conversation will be kept confidential, and that you are there to talk to again at any time.
- **Your loved one may not believe that their drug use is dangerous.** Be prepared for this possibility, and the fact that they may become upset with the things that you are saying. At this point, it is important to stay on the topic of their drug use and related behaviours, rather than bring up other aspects of their character or any disagreements you may have had in the past.
- If someone does not want to change, encourage them to learn how to reduce their risk of harm until they're ready to stop using ice.
- Let them know that although it may take time, change is possible. Don't try to set deadlines for them. If they feel forced, they will be less likely to change.
- **Reinforce that there is [effective help available to help people reduce or stop their ice use](#),** and that you will support them to find and access the right services when they are ready.
- **Let them know you are available to talk in the future.** Adjust any expectation that this first conversation will cover all of the above points or give you the opportunity to air all of your concerns. This first conversation can serve as an important first step in an ongoing conversation about ice use, and it is important to make sure the person knows that you are keeping the door open for future discussions. Ask “permission” to check in with the person again in a week, or a fortnight, etc., to see how they are going.
- **Recovery is often a long and difficult process.** It would be unreasonable to expect changes to the person's behaviour straight away. However, you have taken the important first step by starting a conversation with them.

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WHO MAY BE HAVING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

If you are concerned your loved one might be having suicidal thoughts, there are resources available to support this type of conversation too.

[#YouCanTalk](#) is a national suicide prevention campaign aimed at giving people the confidence to respond to friends and family when they need help and guide them to the right support services. Read [#YouCanTalk's tips for talking to someone about suicide](#).

WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEONE YOU CARE ABOUT WON'T SEEK SUPPORT

It can be hard to see someone you care using ice, especially if it negatively affects their life, work or relationships. So, what do you do when you've raised your concerns but your loved one chooses not to seek support?

Although the responsibility for seeking help lies with the person who is using ice, you can play an important role in letting them know about your worries, keeping the communication channels open and letting them know what help options are available.

Learn more about [how to help a loved one who won't seek support](#).

WHERE CAN I GET SUPPORT?

Supporting a loved one can be extremely challenging, and it is important to look after yourself too.

- Remember you can't fix the person.
- Only they can take steps to cut down or stop their use.
- Take time out for your own needs and activities.
- Attend local education events in your community to increase your knowledge about ice and get support.

If you're worried about a loved one who may be using ice, you can get support. It can be difficult to seek help, but in most cases the sooner you reach out for support, the better. You may want to discuss your concerns with a friend that you can trust. Your General Practitioner or family doctor can also be a good starting point – they can confidentially discuss your concerns with you and refer you on to other services if you need additional support.

For more information on support services and how to get help for yourself or a loved one, visit the [What type of help is available?](#) and [When and where to get help](#) sections of *Cracks in the Ice*.

If you need **emergency support**, please call **Lifeline (13 11 14)** which is a 24-hour crisis helpline or **dial '000'** for the police or an ambulance.

KEY SOURCES

Positive Choices. (2016). [How to help a friend or family member with a drug problem](#). National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales.



Crystal Methamphetamine
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GET THE FACTS ABOUT ICE

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF ICE?

STAYING SAFE

www.cracksintheice.org.au

Positive Choices. (2016). [Starting the conversation about drug use.](#) National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales.



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