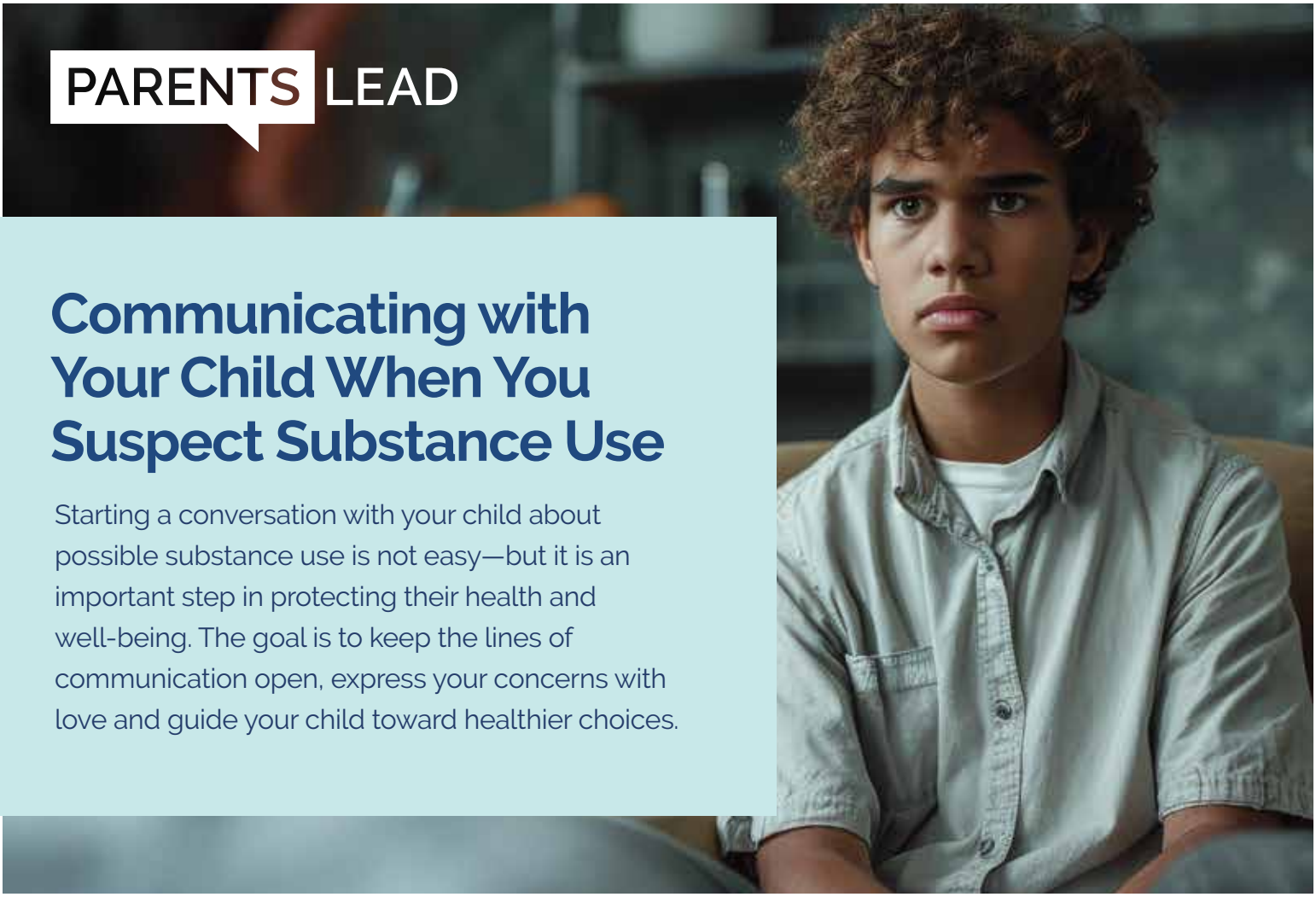
PARENTS LEAD



Communicating with Your Child When You Suspect Substance Use

Starting a conversation with your child about possible substance use is not easy—but it is an important step in protecting their health and well-being. The goal is to keep the lines of communication open, express your concerns with love and guide your child toward healthier choices.

Tips for a Successful Conversation

Let your child know you are concerned.

Be clear about what you've noticed and why it worries you. Emphasize that while you are disappointed in the behavior, you do not think they are a "bad" person.

Show love and highlight the positive.

Offer encouragement and praise when they are honest or make healthy choices. Young people need to hear the "good stuff" as much as the corrections.

Expect strong emotions.

Your child may say things that feel hurtful. Try not to take these words personally. Listen carefully, acknowledge their feelings and remind them that you care about their health and safety.

Speak calmly and respectfully.

Use a relaxed voice and body language. Staying calm can prevent your child from shutting down, storming off or becoming defensive.

How Your Child Might Respond

It's normal for kids to react strongly when confronted. You may hear things like:

- "I would never do that!"
- "I can't believe you are accusing me!"
- "You never believe me."
- "I've just tried it a couple times."
- "It's not that big of a deal."
- "I bet you tried it when you were younger."

If your child struggles to talk face-to-face, offer alternatives—such as writing you a letter, sending a message or involving a trusted third person to help mediate the conversation. This gives them a safe way to be heard.

Consider offering a fresh start.

If your child feels stuck in a web of lies, you might give them the chance to be truthful without immediate punishment. Explain that honesty now means no immediate consequences—but that future actions will determine accountability.

Involve the whole family.

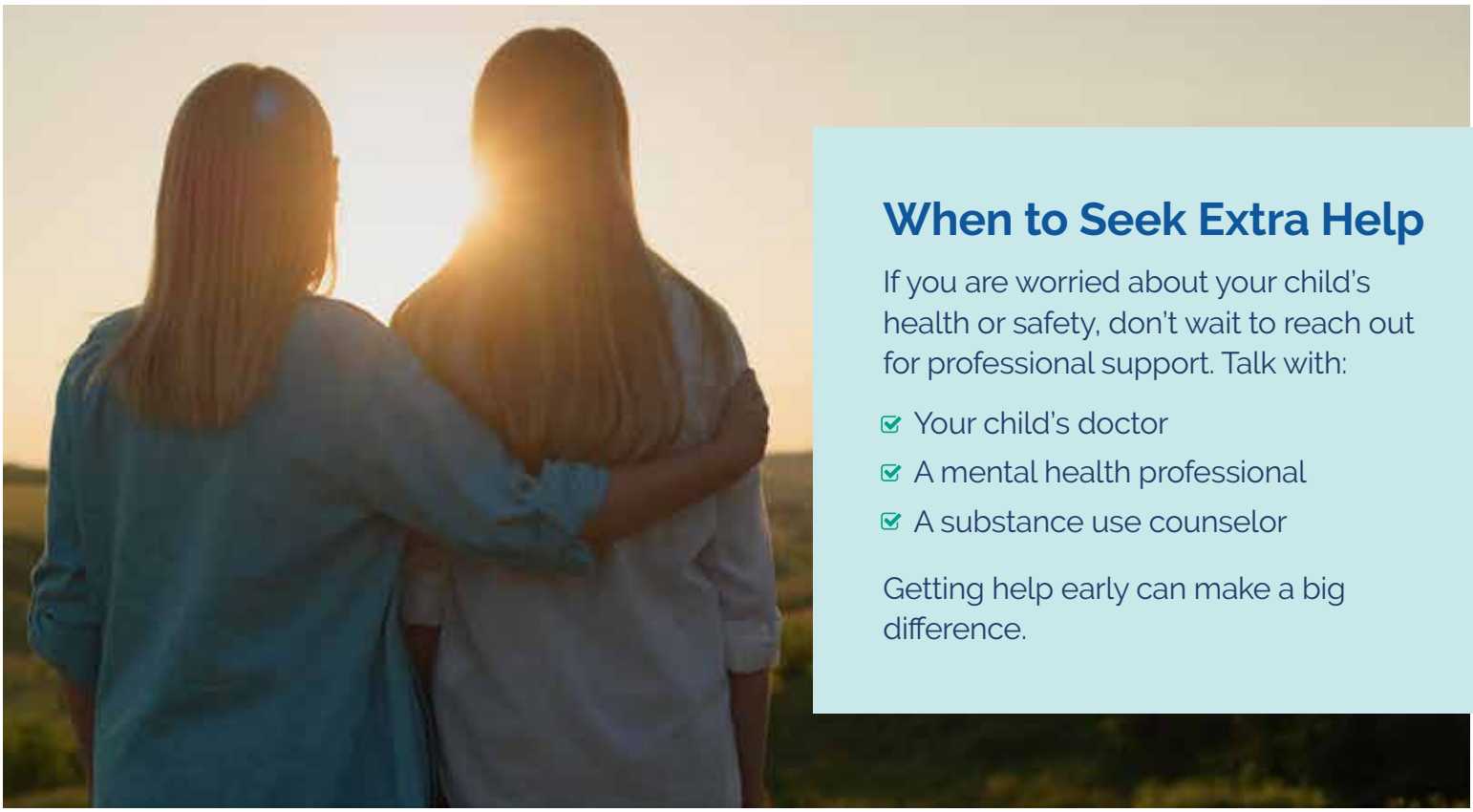
Family meetings can help establish rules, curfews and consequences together. When kids feel heard and included, they are more likely to respect the agreements and less likely to argue about fairness.

Allow time to cool down.

If emotions run high, take a break and return to the conversation later. Always follow up so your child knows the issue is important and can't simply be avoided.

Set clear boundaries and consequences.

If substance use continues, be ready to follow through on fair and consistent consequences.



When to Seek Extra Help

If you are worried about your child's health or safety, don't wait to reach out for professional support. Talk with:

- Your child's doctor
- A mental health professional
- A substance use counselor

Getting help early can make a big difference.