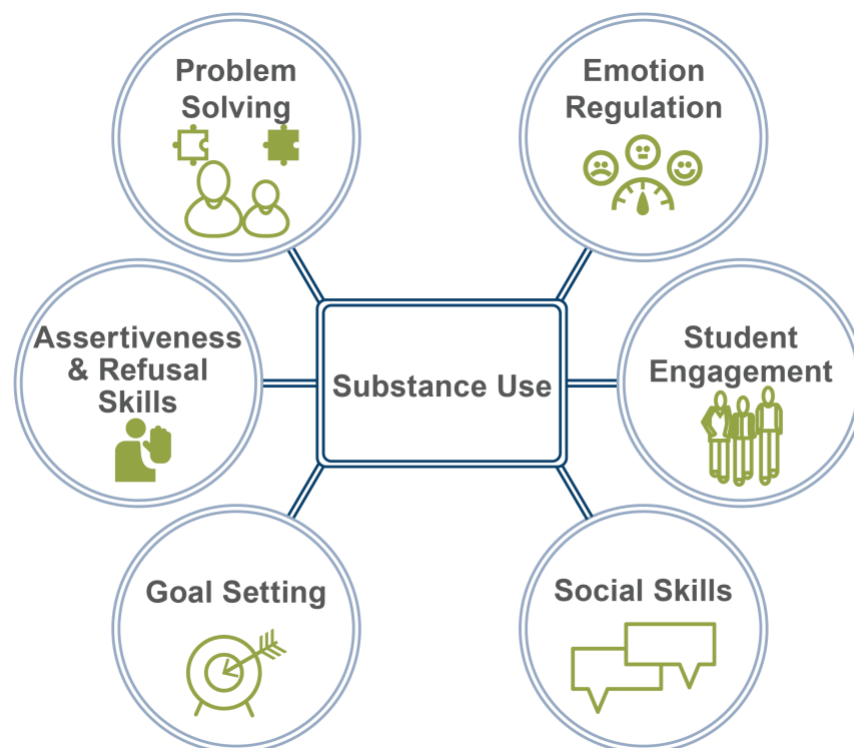




## Strategies for Supporting Students: Substance Use

Students may use substances for a variety of reasons. While experimentation with substances is common in adolescence, problematic substance use impairs a student's ability to engage in daily activities, such as school and work, and may contribute to relationship problems.



### PREVENTION

**Goal Setting** – Teach students how to set their own goals and track their progress, including goals specifically related to reducing or eliminating substance use and goals to engage with positive peers and in meaningful activities.

**Assertiveness and Refusal Skills** – Students can avoid substance use by asserting themselves with peers and practicing refusal skills. Teachers can lead discussions about the effectiveness of refusal skills and can facilitate role play activities in which students practice various scenarios, such as saying no, making assertive requests, and using nonverbal communication techniques.

**Problem Solving** – Teach students the steps involved in solving a problem whether it be a problem related to relationships, academics, or other areas in a student’s life. A basic problem-solving technique could include the following steps: Define the problem; Brainstorm possible solutions; Identify pros and cons of each possible solution, including consideration of risk or potential for harm; Choose a solution and try it out; and Reflect on whether the solution solved the problem. If not, try another option.

## STRATEGIES

**Emotion Regulation Skills** – Students may use substances to cope with stress or feelings of sadness. Students who are struggling to regulate their emotions, or who may be feeling very sad, anxious, or worried, may benefit from relaxation, cognitive coping, daily mood monitoring, and establishing a safe space or safe person to support calming.

**Promote Engagement** – Consider whether the student is isolated or engaging in unhealthy relationships and activities. Do they have any positive relationships with peers or adults in the school? Support the development of positive relationships by partnering the student with students with shared interests on group projects or in school seating arrangements. Identify an adult in the school to spend time developing a positive relationship with the student. Encourage the student to get involved in a school club, sport, or another extracurricular activity. You can promote student engagement by taking interest in getting to know the student and learn about their interests. Additionally, being available for students, both academically and emotionally, helps to show you care about more than just their performance in your classroom. It can be comforting for students to know that you are easily accessible and willing to listen when they need you.

**Social Skills** – For some students, isolation can be due to limited social skills. If so, the student could likely benefit from social skills instruction. It can be helpful to explicitly teach and practice basic social skills with students, such as initiating a conversation, asking questions, understanding nonverbal cues, making requests, and avoiding misunderstandings.

