

# Screening Techniques

- Start with general questions about use of prescribed drugs, then use of drugs, then self-prescribed drugs (caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, other drugs).
- Move to the current situation with use of Brief MAST or CAGE and CAGE-AID.
- Follow-up a positive screen with specific questions on use. Examples:
  - What do you use?
  - How much, and how often?
  - When do you drink?
  - Where do you drink?
  - Under what circumstances do you drink?
  - What are the payoffs or benefits from your drinking?
  - What are the costs — the adverse effects — of your drinking?
- Use open-ended questions. Ask questions that are difficult to answer evasively or with a simple yes or no.
- Use probing questions — be persistent; rephrase questions. Don't assume anything.
- Confront avoidance and discrepancies in a nonjudgmental, supportive manner.
- Express empathy for the clients' feelings about his or her problems and let him or her know you are there to help.
- Expect the client to use more than one substance. Ask about all alcohol and other drug abuse.
- Observe the client's behavior during interview. Denial or false information may be indicated by client's body language: uncomfortable posture; avoidance of eye contact; long pauses before answering; fidgety and restless movements; and hostile gestures.
- Paraphrase the client's concerns and viewpoints and let him or her know you understand his or her perspective.
- Corroborate data given by client with data provided through multiple sources, such as family/significant others, physical exam, lab tests, observations of client, and clues in client's history.