

Understanding the Dimensions of Substance Use

Experiences of substance use often vary and are influenced by three key factors (Zinberg, 1984). Recognizing these dimensions of substance use experiences not only supports our understanding of the factors that may be contributing to ongoing use but also help to support individuals in their process of self-exploration and in their consideration of multiple potential pathways for enhancing their safety and well-being.

Drug: The substance itself, route of administration, the amount used, and ultimately the chemical action it has on an individual's body (including their brain).

Set: The person's mindset and disposition prior to and during use, physical health conditions, cultural attitudes about use, rituals surrounding use, as well as their expectations of the substance use experience.

Setting: Environmental factors surrounding use, including time of day, location of use, how substances are obtained, social context of use, whether use needs to be hidden, socio-cultural factors, and more.

