

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE, INCLUDING FENTANYL



BOTTOM LINE

- ▶ Opioid misuse can be very dangerous, and even deadly.
- ▶ With fentanyl, even small amounts can kill, and because it is sometimes mixed into other street drugs, young people may not be aware they are putting themselves at great risk.
- ▶ The risk of overdose is high.
- ▶ Different people need different supports and solutions.
- ▶ We must remember that people who “use” substances are people first and we must be mindful to not stigmatize them further.

HUMANIZING NOT STIGMATIZING: SUBSTANCE USE & HOMELESSNESS

The relationship between substance use and experiences of homelessness is complex. While rates of substance use are disproportionately high among those experiencing homelessness, homelessness cannot be explained by substance use alone.

The use of substances alone does not necessarily signal addiction or a harmful/problematic lifestyle. In addition, many people who are addicted to substances never experience homelessness, but an individual that is experiencing housing instability, often due to low income, has an increased risk of losing their housing if they use substances. Once on the streets, an individual with substance use issues has little chance of getting housing as they face insurmountable barriers to obtaining health care, including substance use treatment services and recovery supports.

The term “substance use” refers to all types of drug and alcohol use. It is used in place of the traditional label of “drug abuse” which perpetuates social stigma and judgment, and can marginalize and alienate people from the supports they need. The term “use” signals a push to reduce the harms for all users - from the person who uses drugs or alcohol occasionally, to someone who has a serious addiction. The term “substance”, rather than drugs, better reflects the full range of psychoactive substances including alcohol,



cigarettes, illegal drugs, prescription drugs, solvents, and inhalants that are habit-forming. (Information obtained from www.homelesshub.ca)

WHAT IS HARM REDUCTION:

Harm reduction is an approach or strategy aimed at reducing the risks and harmful effects associated with substance use and addictive behaviours for the individual, the community and society as a whole. It is deemed a realistic, pragmatic, humane and successful approach to addressing issues of substance use. Recognizing that abstinence may be neither a realistic or a desirable goal for some users (especially in the short term), the use of substances is accepted as a fact and the main focus is placed on reducing harm while use continues.

Why harm reduction and not abstinence only? It is important to acknowledge that for many people, substance use is not necessarily harmful. For others, addictions can be debilitating, and can undermine relationships, health and survival. However, considerable research on addictions points to the fact that when you put people in treatment who do NOT want to quit, or are in the 'precontemplative' stage of change, the success rates are very low. Different people need different supports and solutions. The key here is to work with a person where they are at, and to give them choices and options (Information obtained from <http://homelesshub.ca>)

WHAT ARE PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS?

When used appropriately, prescription opioids can be very effective in treating severe pain. There are two types of opioid medications:

1. Over-the-counter opioids, which include drugs containing codeine, such as Tylenol 1 or some cough syrups.
2. Opioids that must be prescribed by a doctor or dentist, which include stronger versions of codeine (Tylenol 2, 3 and 4); oxycodone; hydromorphone; morphine; Demerol; pentazocine (Talwin); tramadol (Ultram); fentanyl.


WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE ILLEGAL DRUG OVERDOSE CRISIS?

As you are likely aware, British Columbia is currently experiencing an illegal drug overdose crisis. Since January 2016, more than 1,400 people have lost their lives. While youth aged 14-18 are not considered high risk for an overdose death, school-aged youth are not untouched by tragedy, either directly or through family and friends and media awareness. Nineteen youth between the ages of 14 and 18 years old were reported by the Coroner's Office to have died from an illicit drug overdose since January 2016.

The school district hopes that with your help in speaking to the youth in your life that we can avoid preventable tragedies.

HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT PROBLEMS?

While it's never too early or too late to talk about substance use with your children, the recent rash of fentanyl related incidents is a reminder of just how important this conversation is. It may be tempting to focus on stats and fears; however, research shows scare-based, lecture-like tactics don't work with our youth and may actually lead to a loss of trust and reduce opportunities for good conversations.



Please talk openly with your children from an early age about all drugs—including prescription drugs, alcohol, tobacco, caffeine and illicit drugs—to help them to understand what they are. As children become young adults, help them to make healthy choices by maintaining good relationships and having conversations that encourage healthy behaviour. This includes conversations about their decisions around substance use, including alcohol, medications and other drugs.

SOME TIPS ON HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION:

- ▶ Know the facts about the drug(s) you plan to discuss in advance.
- ▶ Understand and address your fears first. Don't let irrational fears create undue anxiety while talking with your child(ren).
- ▶ Approach the conversation with a sense of curiosity and interest, rather than accusation and fear. Some experimentation is normal—discuss what that means and where to draw the line.
- ▶ Ask them for their opinions about what is happening. What do they think of the current crisis? How do they think they can address their own wellness and safety in the current context? Really listen, then discuss and address those issues together.
- ▶ Focus on your concerns for their safety and a deep regard for their wellness (versus right/wrong, good/bad, obey/punish).

Open conversations create trust, reduce fear and make it possible for us to learn from one another. Talking about drugs with your child provides more tips on how best to address substance use with your children.

HOW DO I RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS OF A PROBLEM WITH MY CHILD?

Signs of a problem with opioids or other substances may include:

- ▶ Mood changes (e.g. irritability, depression or agitation)
- ▶ Personality changes
- ▶ Dropping grades or failing classes
- ▶ Lack of interest in school or other activities
- ▶ Changes in energy, sleep or appetite
- ▶ Change in friends or hangout locations
- ▶ Secretiveness
- ▶ Borrowing money or having extra cash.

Around the house, watch for missing pills or unfamiliar pills. If your child has a prescription, keep control of the bottle and be aware if they run out of pills too quickly, lose pills or request refills.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT PRESCRIPTION OPIOID MISUSE?

- ▶ If a child is showing signs of a problem, approach the child to share what you have noticed and open the conversation.
- ▶ Listen and support, with compassion, and without judgement.
- ▶ Be aware of the potential harm of “scare” tactics.
- ▶ Provide the child with accurate, factual information about prescription opioid misuse.

- ▶ Avoid offering anecdotal evidence or personal opinion.
- ▶ Discuss the importance of getting help, including talking with a Discovery counsellor. (See resources and contacts)
- ▶ Become familiar with your school and District resources for supporting students who appear to be struggling with substance misuse, and with procedures for dealing with children who appear to be intoxicated or under the influence of substances.
- ▶ Work with your school team to determine ways to best support your child. This may include accessing District or community resources.
- ▶ Seek direction from your school leadership team if you have questions about what to do.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF AN OVERDOSE?

Opioids slow down the part of the brain that controls breathing. Signs of overdose include:

- ▶ Person can't be woken up
- ▶ Breathing is slow or has stopped
- ▶ Snoring or gurgling sounds
- ▶ Fingernails and lips turn blue or purple
- ▶ Pupils are tiny (pinned) or eyes are rolled back
- ▶ Body is limp.

WHY STUDENTS CHOOSE TO USE DRUGS

- ▶ Curiosity - usually only once or twice – typical with alcohol or marijuana
- ▶ Escape - usually from emotional pain
- ▶ Peer pressure
- ▶ Adult examples
- ▶ To feel grown up

- ▶ For kicks
- ▶ Older siblings do
- ▶ Become more creative
- ▶ Deal with negative feelings
- ▶ Look for spirituality
- ▶ Relate to others better
- ▶ Low self-esteem
- ▶ On a dare

RESOURCES & CONTACTS:

Discovery Youth and Family Substance Use Services (provided by Island Health) provides services for youth ages 13 to 19 who are experiencing difficulties related to their own or someone else's alcohol or drug use. Services include assessment, treatment, individual and family counselling, education, early intervention and prevention initiatives, and referral to supported residential services, withdrawal management services, and other community resources. Open referral. Hours are 8:30 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday.

Discovery Youth and Family Substance Use Services, 206-96 Cavan St. Nanaimo, BC.
250-739-5790

For everything that's community health (Nanaimo region): www.fetchbc.ca

Child & Youth Mental Health,
301 – 190 Wallace Street, Nanaimo BC.
Phone: 250-741-5701