



A toolkit for keeping
friends close in
conversations about
substance use

WITH OPEN ARMS

SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATIONS AMONG FRIENDS



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

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Scan the QR code for
access to all the resources
mentioned in this
document, and more:



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ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT



With Open Arms: Supportive Conversations Among Friends is designed to provide tips for supportive conversations around substance use and harm reduction for First Nations youth and young adults in BC.



Youth hold a special place in First Nations families and communities. FNHA supports and promotes youth to be healthy, safe and well. We've created this document for you to support you on your journeys.

It is critical that First Nations youth and young adults have the tools and resources to support them in caring and advocating for each other. This toolkit resource is intended to address the need for accessible information on substance use prevention, harm reduction and wholistic wellness.

Throughout this toolkit, there are examples of hypothetical conversations between peers about substance use. These conversations are provided to illustrate the different situations that can come up when talking to friends or loved ones about substance use, and to show the conversational skills that a person can build and use to support people in their own life.





PROMOTING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES



Everyone's journey with substance use is different. This section explores the reasons why people use substances, the potential harms from substances and the diverse journeys when it comes to substance use and wholistic wellness.

WHAT IS SUBSTANCE USE?

People use many different substances that alter their minds and bodies for different reasons. Some substances (like alcohol, cannabis, tobacco or prescription medications) are legal and regulated, while other substances (like cocaine, methamphetamine, fentanyl or LSD) are illegal and not regulated.

While some people may be able to use substances without experiencing significant harms, some people may experience ongoing substance-related problems.

WHY DO PEOPLE USE SUBSTANCES?

- To unwind or relax
- To manage stress
- To cope with trauma
- Boredom
- Curiosity
- Experimenting
- To manage pain
- For fun
- Dealing with colonialism
- Self-medication
- Dealing with racism
- Dealing with trauma caused by Residential Schools
- Bullying
- Coping with abuse
- Dealing with childhood experiences
- Medicinal use
- Cultural or ceremonial use
- To cope with stigma
- Trouble sleeping
- To focus
- Social pressure
- No access to other support

People use substances for many different reasons, and the decision to use substances is often shaped by unique and personal experiences that may not be known to others. Each person's situation is distinct, reminding us that understanding and compassion are essential as we support one another.

ALL PATHS LEAD TO WELLNESS

Each person's journey with substances is unique. There are many paths that lead to wellness.

SPECTRUM OF SUBSTANCE USE

There is a spectrum of substance use that ranges from not using (abstinence), beneficial use, lower-risk use, higher-risk use, and addiction or substance use disorder. Different substances are also used for traditional ceremony and other cultural practices.

A person may move back and forth between the stages over time. No matter where a person is on the substance use spectrum, they can be moving towards wellness.



Remember, all substances—including over-the-counter medications—can be harmful, but some have a higher level of risk than others.

"Wellness encompasses so many different aspects of relationships with substance use—your wellness journey might look different depending on who you are."

- Naneek, Cowessess First Nation



SUBSTANCE USE RISK FACTORS

There are factors that increase the chances that a person will misuse substances in a harmful way. These factors include things like trauma, what our parents or adult mentors' relationships with substance use looks like, a lack of connectedness with family or community, and experiences with abuse, stigma and more.

When substances are our only tools to manage issues like bullying, discrimination, abuse or poverty, things can become unhealthy. Friends can make a big difference in providing positive support and healthy relationships to help us cope with these challenges.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL HARMS OF USING SUBSTANCES?

PHYSICAL HARMS OF SUBSTANCE USE

- Toxic drug poisoning AKA "overdose"
- Negative health problems from long-term substance use like heart problems, psychosis, organ problems or other health problems
- Accidental injury while under the influence of substances
- Withdrawal symptoms when you stop using a substance
- Toxicity from mixing substances
- Changing how your brain develops before the age of 25 years old

STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH SUBSTANCE USE

- Inability to rent or secure housing
- Strained relationships with people you care about
- Social isolation from hiding substance use or being judged for using substances
- Leaving school or work or being fired due to substance use
- Drug tests that discriminate against people who use substances, making it difficult to get jobs or access social services

FINANCIAL HARMS

- Taking on debt or promising favours to buy or trade for substances

SUBSTANCE USE RESILIENCY

Resilience is a person's ability to overcome challenges and stress in their life, using their support systems and coping tools. There are ways to promote resilience in people, wherever they may be on the spectrum of substance use.

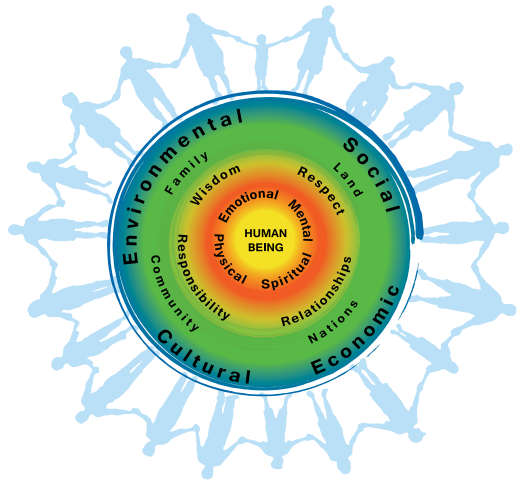
Some ways to promote resilience include receiving support from parents, family or friends; being engaged in school and in your community; and being connected to culture. Inviting people in and promoting wellness at the personal and community levels is an important way to support people.

Connecting to culture can be an important way to care for your mind, body and spirit and to keep yourself resilient no matter where you are on the substance use spectrum.

Elders and knowledge-keepers in your community, or in places like Friendship Centres can help you figure out how to keep your culture close to you and support you in difficult times.

FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVE ON HEALTH AND WELLNESS

A First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness is a visual depiction of wholistic wellness. The image is a snapshot of a fluid concept of wellness and can be adapted freely. Finding your path to wellness can help you be resilient through times of difficulty and can help you support your friends and loved ones on their journey as well.





HARM REDUCTION: SUPPORTING SAFER SUBSTANCE USE

Whether you are considering trying a substance yourself or want to be informed to help your friends stay safe, learning about harm reduction is important for lowering the risks of substance use. This section explores harm reduction principles that include education, safer use and how to navigate problems that arise when using substances.



WHAT IS HARM REDUCTION?

Harm reduction is an approach that tries to reduce the negative consequences, health impacts and deaths that can come with using substances. A holistic approach to harm reduction recognizes that some people use substances—and that wellness goals can include safer use and managed use in addition to abstinence. This inclusive approach creates the safety and freedom for people to ask questions about substances and get accurate information.

Understand the side effects: Be aware of how substances might impact you physically and mentally and learn how to recognize the signs that you may be reaching your limit. Consider setting boundaries to prevent overuse and prepare for how you'll care for yourself afterward.

Understand the health impacts: Some substances can damage our bodies and minds if we take too much of them or use them often. Some of these health impacts can be permanent, and they can happen even if it is your first time using a substance or you only use it occasionally.

Know when (and if) substance use is right for you: If you are already struggling with mental health issues, using substances can make these issues worse, not better. You might also make riskier decisions when you are using substances than you normally would.

Practice safer substance use: You can take steps to use substances in a safer way and reduce negative impacts. These steps can include avoiding taking certain types of substances at the same time, not sharing certain kinds of tools and doing things as simple as drinking lots of water when taking certain substances. It is extremely dangerous to take substances that haven't been tested or using them when you are alone.

While we can never guarantee that substance use will be completely safe, you can make decisions to reduce the chances of harm. More than anything, it's important to make decisions about substance use that honour yourself and your body.

CONVERSATION SKILLS: LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGMENT

Remain calm and explore what happens next

Sam: Hey, do you have a sec to chat?

Ari: Sure, what's up?

Sam: I have kind of a weird question.
I'm not sure who to talk to about it.

Ari: Okay, what's going on?

Sam: Well, you know how I've been
dating Bailey for a bit?

Ari: Yeah, Bailey seems nice!

Sam: They are, but I found out they party kind of hard on
the weekends. I was hanging with them on Saturday, and
they started doing coke with their friends.

Ari: Oh—I had no clue.

Sam: Yeah, I was kind of surprised too. I guess I thought
it would be more obvious or something, but they all
seem pretty chill about it.

Ari: Does that change how you feel?

Ask open-ended questions

Sam: I'm not sure. If I'm being totally honest, it looked kind of fun.
They offered me some and I almost said yes, but I chickened out.

Ari: I don't know what I would do in that situation either.

Validate their experience

Sam: Do you think it would be bad if I tried it? They all seemed relaxed about it.

Ari: Do you know if they had it tested?

Sam: Oh, I have no clue. I didn't even know that was a thing.

Ari: Yeah, I don't want to freak you out, but drugs can be pretty scary these days. You should ask them if they know about testing and harm reduction and stuff like that.

*Share concerns
without judging*

Sam: I don't want them to think I'm weird or lame, though.

Ari: But isn't it better to have an awkward conversation than for something really bad to happen? Especially if you like them and they're friends.

Sam: I guess you're right. I don't even know how to bring that up though.

Ari: I remember seeing some posters about it at school. Let's try to find them tomorrow and look some stuff up? We can do it together.

Sam: Yeah, that sounds good. Thanks for being chill about this—I had no idea that you could get drugs tested like that.

Ari: I don't know much about it either, but let's figure it out together!

*You don't need to
be an expert*

Sam: Sounds good.

EXAMPLES OF HARM REDUCTION



Identify your circle of support: Knowing who you can turn to can make a big difference when it comes to staying safe and reducing harms from substance use. Your supports can be anyone—friends, family, Elders, health workers or just someone who gets what you're going through. Adding them to your care plan isn't just helpful—it can be lifesaving. Find your team, and let them support you.



Test your substances: There are many ways to test your substances, from mail-in services to local drug-checking machines and test strips. Knowing what is in your substances can change the way you use them and the precautions you take. Remember, even substances from a known source can have unknown and potentially deadly additives. Learn more about drug checking in the section below, or at drugcheckingbc.ca.



Choose safe places: Choose to use in places where help is easily reachable, with people you trust and where there are no hazards to injure yourself on.



Never use alone: Always have a buddy or visit an overdose prevention site to use if available. Using where people are aware of what you're using greatly reduces the risk of a fatal outcome in case of toxic drug poisoning or overdose. Consider safety apps like LIFEGUARD, BRAVE or Be Safe if you have a phone available.

LIFEGUARD



GET IT ON
Google Play



Download on the
App Store



BeSafe



GET IT ON
Google Play



Download on the
App Store



Brave





Have an overdose plan: Make sure you know how to identify a toxic drug poisoning or overdose of the substance being used. Create a response plan and aftercare plan in case of an emergency. Having a plan in place significantly lowers the risk of associated harms from using substances. For example,

- know the address of where you are using if you have to call 9-1-1,
- know who is carrying naloxone and
- know an emergency contact you can call if you need help or support.



Carry naloxone: Toxic drug poisonings can happen anywhere. Carrying naloxone and knowing how to use it saves lives. If you are at a party, make sure to have a few naloxone kits on hand, and tell people where to find them. Naloxone can be accessed at pharmacies, medical centres, Friendship centres and through peer support networks.



Be aware of your tolerance: If you are new to using a substance or have taken a break from using substances, your tolerance will be lower than you think. Consider taking it slow for a few days at least and use less than you normally would.



Start low, go slow: Starting with a small amount of a substance and taking breaks to monitor the effects before using more can significantly reduce your risk of overdose or poisoning. This can also help you understand how certain substances affect you, so you can make more informed choices in the future.



Use one drug at a time: Substances can have different effects depending on what they are mixed with. Mixing substances, including alcohol, can increase the risk of overdose or toxic drug poisoning. When using substances, 1+1 does not equal 2. If you think you might take more than one substance, try the “harder” one first to see how it makes you feel. This can help to reduce the chance of taking too much, or making other risky decisions.



Wait to use after using naloxone: If you have experienced an overdose or poisoning episode it may increase your risk of experiencing another, especially if you are trying to use while naloxone is still active in your body. Wait at least 30 to 90 minutes before using again.



Not using substances: For some people, abstinence is harm reduction. By not using substances, you avoid the risks and the harms that can come with them.

It's important to remember that people are still deserving of support and care, even if they have made decisions that we don't understand. Supporting harm reduction can save lives.

CULTURE AS HARM REDUCTION

Culture can be an important source of strength and resilience no matter where you are on the substance use spectrum - whether you are not using substances at all, or whether you are using substances more than you want to be doing.

Culture is for everyone. Although some ceremonies require abstinence from substances to participate in, there are other things you can do to be near culture and ceremony. If you can't attend the sweat, you might be able to gather the rocks, or to gather cedar boughs for a brushing. You can always talk with Elders or knowledge-keepers in your community, or in a place like a Friendship Centre or other urban Indigenous organizations.



NANEK'S STORY

"Even though my dad used substances, he still showed me how to pray and smudge; he taught me about the sacredness of medicines like tobacco, sage, cedar, and sweet grass and brought me to sweat lodges, pipe ceremonies, drumming, singing and taught me protocol. These teachings and this time with my dad have stuck with me my whole life, because even though I was using substances like my dad, I knew that I was still sacred. I knew that my ancestors still loved me and even though I was using I knew that I deserved to heal and deserved ceremony. It's in our blood, it's our inherent right."

- Naneek, Cowessess First Nation

KNOW YOUR SUBSTANCES

Every substance has unique effects and risks. It is important to learn about any substance you or your friends are considering using so that you can make informed choices and care for each other responsibly.

Information on different substances can be found at DanceSafe.org.



For specific facts about mixing medicine, alcohol and other substances, see drugcocktails.ca.



DRUG CHECKING

Drug checking is a harm reduction service that helps people check their substances for fentanyl and other contaminants to help reduce the risk of toxic drug poisoning. Although drug checking provides you with more information to make informed decisions about substances, it can't completely guarantee that a substance is safe to use.

WHAT CAN DRUG CHECKING TELL YOU?

Drug checking can tell you what substances are in a sample, the percentages of certain substances in, if a sample contains fentanyl or fentanyl analogues (prohibited, and often deadly, alterations of the medically prescribed drug version of fentanyl) and if a sample has benzodiazepines or benzodiazepine-like substances in it.

WHAT CAN DRUG CHECKING MISS?

Drug checking can miss low levels of a substance or new drugs or cutting agents that are not yet in the databases. Drug checking also can't say for certain that the entire amount of a substance is free from other substances. For example, the parts of the sample that weren't tested might include contaminants.



WHERE TO ACCESS DRUG CHECKING

Many different organizations—including health authorities, non-profit harm reduction organizations and other community organizations—offer drug-checking services.

You can find in-person or mail-in drug-checking services and regional drug checking resources. If you are accessing drug-checking services in person, test results can be ready in about five to 10 minutes. If you are mailing in substances to be tested, you will generally receive a text or email or be able to check the results using an online portal.

It's important to know that drug-checking services will not seize your substances, even if the test results reveal that the substances have poisonous levels of contaminants within them.

Visit getyourdrugtested.com
for more information on mail-
in testing services.



HARM REDUCTION SERVICES FOR YOUTH AGED 18 AND UNDER

If you are under the age of 18 you can access basic harm reduction services without needing a guardian's consent. Although some services might say that they are for individuals 18 and older, you can always ask to use the service if you are underage. Examples of basic harm reduction services include:

- Receiving safer substance use information, education and coaching
- Receiving take-home naloxone kits, safer use supplies and training
- Access to drug checking services
- Using supervised consumption sites and overdose prevention sites (places where you can use substances around trained health care staff who can respond if something goes wrong)
- Having a health care provider or trained harm reduction worker witness you using substances

If a younger person is experiencing drug poisoning, a person can respond to the emergency (including using naloxone) without guardian consent.

Some harm reduction services must be given by a regulated health care provider like a doctor or nurse practitioner. They must make sure that the service is in the person's best interest, and that the young person can understand and consent to the service and understand its risks and impacts. In BC, there is no set age when a person can consent. **This means that there is no set age for youth to get health care support for substance use.** Advanced harm reduction services that need a health care provider assessment include:

- Prescribing safer supply
- Prescribing opioid agonist therapy (OAT)

RESPONDING TO A TOXIC DRUG POISONING

In BC, there is an ongoing public health emergency because much of the drug supply is contaminated with fentanyl, carfentanil or benzodiazepines. This has vastly increased the number of toxic drug poisonings, because people are consuming substances that are far more dangerous than they were expecting.

WHAT IS TOXIC DRUG POISONING?

A toxic drug poisoning is an emergency that happens when someone takes a substance so toxic that their body can't handle it. Without immediate treatment, like naloxone, the poisoning can be fatal. All toxic drug poisonings are serious and require medical attention.

CAN YOU AVOID TOXIC DRUG POISONINGS?

Even if you follow harm reduction practices while using substances, there is always the risk of a toxic drug poisoning. It is important to always be ready to respond to a toxic drug poisoning if you or the people you are with are choosing to use substances.

Any substances received from any source other than directly from a pharmacy have the risk of being made with toxic materials or contaminated with substances. Many of these substances are easy to counterfeit, so even when buying prescription medications off someone there is a risk of a toxic drug poisoning.

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF TOXIC DRUG POISONINGS

It's important to be able to recognize when you or somebody you're with is experiencing a possible toxic drug poisoning. The effects are different for different types of substances.

DRUG ALERTS

Toxic drug and health alerts are a free, real-time text messaging service for anyone wishing to receive toxic drug alerts or information about toxic drugs in their community. This service is anonymous. People can get other information by text message or email, such as where to find naloxone or how to get drugs tested.

To sign up, text the word **JOIN** to 253787 (ALERTS) or visit towardtheheart.com/alerts.

OPIOID POISONING

These are the most common types of drug poisonings we see in BC. They are caused when someone takes too many “opioids” (pain-relieving drugs that slow down our body functions). It is common for opioids to be added to drugs even if we don’t expect them to be there.

Signs include:

- Slow or irregular breathing (including choking or gurgling)
- Unconscious or in and out of consciousness
- Unconsciousness and unresponsive
- Blue lips and nails
- Cold and clammy skin

STIMULANT OVERAMPING

“Overamping” can happen when someone takes too many stimulants (like cocaine, amphetamines, MDMA, or common ADHD medications like Vyvanse or Ritalin). Stimulants increase our heart rate and can feel intense or overwhelming.

Signs include:

- Rigid, jerking limbs or seizures
- Fast or irregular pulse or chest pains
- Unconscious or in-and-out
- Skin feels hot, sweating or severe headaches
- Anxiety, paranoia, confusion, agitation or hallucinations

It is important to know that Naloxone does NOT work on stimulants. Call 9-1-1.

BENZO POISONING

More recently in BC, “benzos” (aka benzodiazepines like Xanax) are being added to the illicit drug supply. Benzos can make you feel sleepy and dream-like. They can also make you forget things that have happened while using drugs, which could put you at increased risk of harm

If they are mixed with opioids, benzos can make a person unconscious, sometimes for hours. Naloxone will not reverse the effects of benzodiazepines, so someone may start to breathe again but stay unconscious for a long time.

You should STILL USE NALOXONE even if you suspect someone has taken drugs that are mixed with benzos. You may have to give more than usual.

ALCOHOL POISONING

Alcohol poisoning: Alcohol poisoning can happen when you drink too much alcohol. Signs include:

- Difficulty remaining conscious
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Slow heart rate
- Trouble breathing

If a person is unresponsive call 911. Follow the SAVE ME steps on page 25 (stimulate, airway, ventilate, evaluate, medication, evaluate and support) to assess what’s happening and provide support while you are waiting for emergency response. It is always safe to give naloxone, even if you are not sure what the person has taken or what is causing the overdose.

WITHDRAWAL FROM SUBSTANCE USE

When a person stops using a substance, they can experience withdrawal symptoms that can make them feel sick. Withdrawal is your body's process of getting used to being without the substance or substances it was used to.

The intensity of the symptoms depends on how long they were using that substance for, how much they regularly took and things like age, general health and other factors.

Attempting to quit using substances like alcohol, opioids and benzodiazepines without support from a health care provider can be dangerous or even life threatening. It is recommended to talk with someone like a health care provider to help you safely manage withdrawal symptoms by providing support or prescribing you medications to manage symptoms.

Withdrawal symptoms are different depending on what substances you used to take. They can include:

- nausea and/or vomiting
- loss of appetite
- difficulty sleeping and feeling restless
- toilet changes like constipation or diarrhea
- stomach pains
- headaches
- sweating or feeling very cold
- watery eyes and runny nose
- muscle and bone pains



- shaking a lot and unable to stop - known as tremors (*medical emergency - call 911*)
- seizures or hallucinations (*medical emergency - call 911*)

HEALTH EMERGENCIES WHEN WITHDRAWING

It's important to get information to help you understand when it's safe to detox at home, withdrawal symptoms, and when and where to get medical help.

If someone is withdrawing from substances and they experience any of the symptoms listed below, this is a medical emergency and they need medical supports to help them through withdrawal.

- have a history of seizures or delirium tremens AKA "the DTs" (confusion caused by alcohol withdrawal)
- are shaking a lot and unable to stop (tremors)
- are hallucinating (seeing or hearing things that aren't there)
- are having a seizure or seizures
- are pregnant - withdrawal can be very stressful on the parent and the fetus

LEGAL LIABILITY: THE GOOD SAMARITAN ACT

The *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* protects people who are seeking emergency support during an overdose from being charged for simple possession of drugs (personal use) or violation of a pre-trial release, prohibition order, conditional sentence or parole related to simple possession. This means you won't get in trouble for simply having drugs on you if you call 9-1-1. The most important thing is to keep your friends alive.



CALLING 911

Call 911 if you suspect an overdose. If you live somewhere where 911 is not available, call your local after-hours emergency line.

If you find yourself in an emergency situation, such as somebody experiencing an overdose or serious withdrawal symptoms, or if a person is having a mental health crisis, please call 911 or your local after-hours emergency line. You could be saving a life.

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN CALLING

1

First, give the exact address or a description of the location with as much detail as possible. If you are in a building, or somewhere without a specific address (like on a public trail or in a parking lot) tell the 911 operator how to get to you (what door to enter through, any stairs or elevators to navigate).

- *I'm calling from 1234 Victoria Street in Vancouver. I'm in the back suite of the house, up the stairs.*
- *I'm at Centennial Square in Victoria, near the front entrance of the theater.*

2

Describe what is happening. If you know what substances the person has taken, tell the call-taker. The call-taker may ask questions like:

- Is the patient conscious?
- Is the patient breathing?
- Does the patient have chest pain?
- Is there any severe bleeding?

"I'm calling because my friend, aged 16, snorted MDMA and they fell asleep. They are not responding to me, and they aren't really breathing. I have naloxone with me and I'm going to prepare it while we're on the call...."

3

Make space for the responders to arrive. If you can, send someone to wait by the closest door or path to your location to guide emergency responders to you.

- Clear a path (move furniture or obstacles) and if you have pets, put them in another room if possible.

4

Follow the SAVE ME steps on the next page until responders arrive.

5

If you are alone and you have to leave the person to call 911 or get naloxone, place the person in the recovery position: put the person on their side, with their top leg bent to keep them in place so they can't roll forward, and with their arms supporting them to stay on their side.

SAVE ME STEPS

The SAVE ME steps provide clear guidance on how to respond to an opioid overdose. Follow each step until the person experiencing an overdose returns to wakefulness or until emergency services arrive.

S

Stimulate. Check if the person is responsive. Can you wake them up? If they are unresponsive, call 911. The sooner you call, the better the chance of recovery.

A

Airway. Make sure there is nothing in the person's mouth blocking their airway or stopping them from breathing. Remove anything that is blocking their airway.

V

Ventilate. Help them breathe. Plug their nose, tilt their head back and give one breath every five seconds.

E

Evaluate. Do you see any improvement? Are they breathing on their own? If not, prepare naloxone.

M

Medication. Inject one dose (1cc) of naloxone into a muscle or administer the nasal spray.

E

Evaluate and support. Is the person breathing? Naloxone usually takes effect in three to five minutes. If the person is not awake in three minutes, give another 1cc dose of naloxone.

It's important to stay with the person until they have woken up or emergency services have arrived.

NALOXONE: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

Naloxone (also known as Narcan) is a medication that reverses the effects of an overdose from opioids such as heroin, methadone, fentanyl and morphine. Naloxone is safe to give, even if you are not sure which substance the person has taken.

If you or your friends or loved ones use substances, it is important to have naloxone nearby. Naloxone is available in BC without a prescription—it can be requested at a pharmacy for free if you have a First Nations Status Card. Many harm reduction organizations and community organizations, like Friendship Centres, also have naloxone to give out. If you are using substances or supporting people who are using substances, let people know that you have naloxone as part of your safety plan.

NALOXONE TRAINING

The FNHA's [Not Just Naloxone](#) program offers virtual, facilitator-led training that provides in-depth naloxone education through an Indigenous lens. Standard naloxone training can be found through pharmacies and other community partners or online at [Toward the Heart](#).

ADMINISTERING NALOXONE

Naloxone can be given as an injection into a muscle or as a nasal spray into the nose. Naloxone lasts for about 20 to 90 minutes. Since opioids may remain in the person's system for longer than that, the person's symptoms may return and, they might need an additional naloxone dose.

One dose of naloxone can be given every three minutes until the person is taking 12 breaths or more per minute on their own. You should call 911 even if you have administered naloxone to someone experiencing an overdose.



TOXIC DRUG POISONING AFTERCARE

Aftercare describes the actions taken to care for a person after they are revived by emergency naloxone support during a toxic drug poisoning or overdose. It helps ensure that the person who experienced the poisoning is now safe.

Giving naloxone can cause withdrawal symptoms in someone who takes opioids regularly. After giving someone naloxone they may want to use again right away to avoid experiencing withdrawal symptoms. It is very important to not use substances again until the naloxone wears off so that another overdose does not happen.

People who are given naloxone may become confused, angry or upset as they wake up, or may become sick and vomit or have diarrhea. They may need comfort and support to get through the withdrawal symptoms they experience.

If the person wakes up before emergency services arrive:

- Tell them what happened and that you have given them naloxone. Tell them that naloxone will wear off in 30 to 90 minutes. Opioids can last longer in the body than naloxone, so, if possible, stay with them for that period to ensure that they stay awake and alert. You may need to give naloxone again if they go back into unconsciousness.
- Attempt to prevent or delay them from taking more substances to keep them safe. Naloxone can temporarily reverse the effects of opioids, but the drugs stay in the body. When the Naloxone wears off, the person is at risk of another poisoning or overdose if they consume more of the opioid while the naloxone is working.
- Ask how you can support them to be more comfortable—someone may be emotional, angry or scared after waking up and may need reassurance and support.

CARING FOR RESPONDERS TO TOXIC DRUG POISONINGS

If you responded to a toxic drug poisoning, it is important to care for yourself as well. Responding to a toxic drug poisoning can be a difficult experience that may cause distressing feelings that stay with you for a long time.

Your feelings may be unexpected, or come after time has passed. That is ok. After an experience like this, it's important to reach out to supportive people to help you with these feelings as soon as you can. Trained professionals can help you to process the experience and feelings in a safe way.

TIPS TO CARE FOR YOURSELF:

Reach out to others and ask them to listen.

Seek support from other people who have experienced the same thing.

Share your feelings with someone who can help you process them in a healthy way.

Make time to do things you enjoy.

Allow yourself to feel your feelings.

Connect to your wellness practices for healing and support.

Seek out cultural supports like Elders or knowledge keepers to support you.

Practice ceremony like smudging, brushing off, or other practices from your Nation.

HAVING SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE



Stigma, fear and misinformation often surrounds substance use, particularly for young people. This can prevent people from seeking help, accessing harm reduction or sharing their experiences around substance use. Being able to talk about substance use in a safe way is essential to breaking down these barriers creating a safer space for mutual care and support. Supportive conversations between friends and loved ones provide support, connection, understanding and resilience.



Learning supportive skills to have conversations about substance use can empower you to take on the role of a supporter, advocate and ally. This section is intended to help you along that path, so that you feel prepared to have these conversations in a safe, compassionate and informed way.

1

RECOGNIZING WHEN TO TALK

You know your friends and loved ones best. If you notice changes in their behaviour, it's normal to feel concerned. Behaviour changes can be caused by many different things that a person may be dealing with. They could be struggling with their mental health, experiencing a lot of stress or be struggling with their relationship with substances.

SOME CHANGES YOU MIGHT BE CONCERNED ABOUT INCLUDE:

- Trouble remembering things
- Difficulty staying alert
- Loss of interest in activities they once enjoyed
- Trouble with concentration, memory and the ability to think and make decisions
- A change in hygiene
- Mood changes
- Seeming cranky or angry
- Withdrawing from friends/family
- Financial or legal trouble
- Using substances first thing in the morning or at school or work
- Using substances alone
- Turning to substances to manage stress or mood
- Seeming physically unwell - shaking, sweating, spacing out

SHIFTS IN SUBSTANCE USE

Everyone's relationship with substances is unique and can change or stay the same over time. Changes in a person's substance use can run the full spectrum from stopping using substances completely, reducing their use of substances or increasing their use of substances.

Some changes may be riskier than others. Some examples of high-risk changes may include:

- Binge drinking
- Impaired driving
- Using illegal substances
- Taking more substances than before
- Using more frequently
- Mixing multiple substances
- Not practising harm reduction when using
- Using alone

If you notice any of these changes, don't hesitate to check in. You know your friend best, and your support can make a difference.

2

SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

No matter how much we care for our friends and loved ones and want to support them, we don't have to accept unkind or dangerous behaviour when they're using substances. It's important to set boundaries to keep ourselves safe and make sure that our friends' substance use isn't putting us in dangerous situations.

You are entitled to draw the line. Knowing your boundaries is a strength that can help you to detect when a conversation about substance use is not safe for you to have now, or ever. It can be challenging to disengage at times when friends need your support, but it is even more challenging to give your all when you have nothing left to give.

Some problems are too big to handle by yourself. Knowing when you need to step away from assuming a supportive role for your own health is important. Setting healthy personal boundaries can protect you from being pushed to your limits or exceeding your capacity.

If your friend seems to be getting worse, ask if they are okay or if there is something you can do. If you are concerned about their safety, speak to a trusted adult.



3

PREPARING FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Prepare your medicines

You may consider preparing medicines to clear your mind and the space before and after your conversation. Keep your medicines close, smudge yourself and space, and have them on hand to support your friend during the conversation, if needed.

Prepare your message

Think about what you want to talk about before you start the conversation. You can write down your thoughts to organize them, or practise saying what you want to say if you feel nervous or uncomfortable.

Select a location

Choose a space that feels comfortable for both of you to speak where you won't be disrupted and where others can't overhear your conversation.

Eliminate distractions

To demonstrate that you are giving them your full attention, try to remove or set aside anything that can distract you.

Expect different reactions

Your friend might not respond the way you think they will. Conversations about substance use can stir up emotions. Your friend may feel relieved and grateful, neutral and unfazed, or aggravated and defensive. It's important to remember that people may be defensive as a coping mechanism to protect themselves from discomfort.

Be patient

Don't push the conversation on someone who isn't ready. Let them know you are there for them if or when they want someone to talk to. Trying to force or shame someone into doing what we want isn't the most effective way to support someone.

Prepare for difficult information

Some information may surprise you. Your reaction may be difficult to predict or control but try your best to maintain your composure and refocus on your message if the conversation derails.



HAVING THE CONVERSATION

Here are some key skills to help you have supportive conversations. Be on the look out for them in the model conversations in this toolkit to see them in action!

Honour boundaries and autonomy: Respect your friend's right to privacy and autonomy to make their own decisions. If they do not want to discuss a certain topic or answer certain questions, respect their boundaries - they are entitled to their privacy. They may not want to be rushed or may want to proceed on their journey at their own pace.

Be honest and supportive: Share your concerns in an honest, kind and supportive way. If you are worried that a friend might not be in the right state of mind to use substances, or if you feel like they don't have all the information they need to make safer decisions, you can let them know how you feel.

Start with feelings and observations: Tell your friend how you feel and what you've noticed about their behaviour that makes you want to talk with them about it. Try to avoid using judgmental language or blaming them. Instead, tell them what you've noticed and why you are worried about it. This might look like:

- "I'm worried about your safety because I noticed that you've started partying with a lot of older people that you just met."
- "I'm concerned that you've been missing class a lot lately. Is anything going on?"

Ask for confirmation and clarity: Reframe what they have said to make sure that you are both on the same page. If you don't understand something, ask for more details to help you understand. Some examples might sound like:

- "It sounds like you are saying _____, is that what you mean?"
- "I want to totally understand this — can you explain to me how that made you feel?"
- "That sounds really upsetting — did you feel upset at this?"

Listen to their responses and validate them: Give them the time and space to share as much or as little as they feel comfortable with. Let them know you want to understand and accept their feelings. Even if you don't completely agree with them, it's important to show that you care and want to understand their actions and feelings. Some ways to say this might be:

- "I can understand why you would feel that way."
- "I can tell this is really important to you."
- "I really appreciate your effort to share this with me."



Reaffirm that you care about them: Remind your friend that you care about them and their well-being, and that you are there to support them if they need it.

Explore what happens next: Ask them what they need and if they would benefit from your support. Avoid jumping to solutions. Follow their lead instead.

You don't need to have all the answers: It's okay if you don't understand or can't relate to what your friend is going through or if you don't know what to say. By simply listening, you're giving them space to express themselves and showing them that they don't have to go through this alone.

"It's okay to be proud of where you are at in your healing journey in the way you determined it—being able to encourage your friends in where they are in their wellness and how you can do it together. It doesn't have to be a lonely journey."

— Naneek, Cowessess First Nation

5

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Be mindful of your body language: Attitudes, emotions and intentions can be revealed through body language. Try positioning your body to be more receptive and open—like facing towards your friend, unfolding your arms, uncrossing your legs and turning your body towards them.

Give plenty of encouragement and positive cues: Being vulnerable can cause people to worry about saying the wrong thing or oversharing. Show them you're listening with consistent head nods, and the occasional "uh huh" to reassure them. Don't forget to thank them for sharing.

Be mindful of your tone and the language you use: Avoid blaming or being judgemental. These types of questions usually start with "why". Some examples of this are:

Why wouldn't you just... • Why can't you... • Why won't you... • Why do you...

Avoid using stigmatizing language: Stigma is often used to look down on and shame people who use substances. Slang terms like druggie, junkie, drug abuser, addict, pothead, crackhead, fiend, tweaker and strung-out can be offensive and should be avoided.

Avoid making assumptions or diagnosing: You might not have all the facts or there might be information to consider that your friend hasn't told you yet. Approach the conversation with curiosity instead of blame or accusations.

TIPS

6

CONVERSATION SKILLS: CHECKING IN AND SHARING CONCERN

Sam: I wanted to talk to you about something that's been on my mind. I consider us to be good friends, so I feel like it's worth mentioning to you.

Sequoia: Sure, what's going on?

Sam: Well, I've noticed for a few weeks now that you seem distant. I haven't seen you much, and when I have, you seemed to be high.

Sequoia: I just haven't been feeling the best lately and getting high makes me feel better.

Share your observations and concerns

Sam: Do you want to talk about it?

Sequoia: I guess I just have a lot going on that I don't feel like dealing with right now, and when I'm high I feel like I can focus on other things.

Respect your friend's autonomy

Sam: That makes sense. I guess I just wanted to make sure you're okay because it feels like I haven't seen you in a while and if I'm honest seeing you that way kind of scared me. I just want to make sure you're okay.

Sequoia: Yeah, I've been spending a lot of time alone lately. I'm not really in the mood to see people. I know you're asking because you care. Thank you, I will be okay. I appreciate you checking in with me.

Reaffirm you care



AFTER THE CONVERSATION

Leave the door open: Let them know that you are there for them if they ever want to continue the conversation.

Remind your friend you care about them: A simple text, online message or note can be a great way to keep connected without your friend feeling like they need to respond if they are not ready.

Maintain your friendship: Check in about things other than substance use. Your friend is still the same person they have always been, so it is important to treat them as you always have. This may help them to get well. Keep doing the things you love to do together!

Remind them that they are valued: Talk to them when you are upset about something or when you want to vent. Trust them with things that you would not tell just anyone else.

Try not to be critical of them: People are often hard on themselves when they are dealing with substance use challenges. They may think others feel the same way. Instead, find times when you can point out their courage and successes.

Practise patience: Although it's possible, cutting down or stopping substance use can be hard. Meeting people where they are at prevents placing unrealistic expectations on them or pushing them to take steps they aren't ready for. Let your friend set the pace and support them on their journey.

Do other things together: Suggest activities together that don't involve substances. You could try:

- Hosting a games or crafts night
- Doing a cultural activity together, like beading, making a drum or something else from your Nation
- Joining a rec sports team
- Cooking together
- Starting a book club
- Doing something outdoors, like fishing, hiking, snowshoeing or tobogganing
- Taking an art class
- Playing games together online

Respect their autonomy: Don't shame or criticize them if you don't notice a change in their behaviour. The decision to change their relationship with substances is their choice. Although you might believe you know what the best course of action is, their decisions are ultimately their own.

8

PRACTISE SELF-CARE

Having these conversations can be difficult. When you feel compassion and empathy for your friends when they are having a hard time, it can be hard for you too. It can be difficult to see your friend or loved one going through a hard time and sharing emotionally heavy topics. It takes time and energy, and can leave you feeling sad, worried or upset. Regardless of the path you decide to take as a supportive friend, engaging in self-care can help you manage your own emotions, and stay balanced and able to support your friend.

YOU CANNOT POUR FROM AN EMPTY CUP

Take intentional steps to give your mind, body and spirit what they need to relax and have fun in ways that make you happy. Take time to care for yourself in whatever ways work best for you.

SELF-CARE ACTIVITIES MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

- Meditating
- Journaling
- Doing physical activities
- Reading
- Pampering yourself
- Participating in culture or ceremony
- Spending time in nature or with your pets
- Going for counselling or therapy
- Going on a medicine walk
- Playing games with your siblings
- Cooking your favourite meal
- Spending time with Elders

FIND STRENGTH THROUGH CULTURE

Leaning into culture can provide comfort and connection for many during uncertain or lonely times. You might spend time out on the land, seek out the guidance of an Elder or Knowledge Keeper, or participate in ceremony.

Your community may have resources or programs for you to learn about your culture. If you do not live in your home community, you may consider contacting your local Friendship Centre to ask about cultural supports. Friendship Centres can offer a range of programming and resources to keep culture accessible to those living in urban areas or away from their home communities.

DOWNLOAD: *FNHA Mental Health and Wellness Supports for First Nations people*



9

SEEKING SUPPORT FROM A SAFE PERSON

Involving another safe person can be a difficult decision when you are supporting someone. It may feel like you are letting your friend down by sharing their difficulties with someone else. However, it's important to remember that you are doing your best to care for your friend, and that you are looking for help because you care about them and want them to be safe and healthy.

You don't have to carry the weight of this all on your own. Confiding in another safe person about your feelings may help ease the mental load you're carrying.

YOU MAY WANT TO SEEK SUPPORT IF YOU ARE:

- Concerned about your friend's safety
- Struggling with your own relationship with substances
- Worried your friend may harm themselves or someone else
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Worried your friend is experiencing withdrawal symptoms
- Noticing a lot of changes in a short time in their behaviour or actions
- Noticing they are hanging out with new older people
- Noticing they are promising favours or money in exchange for substances or other things

Seeking support from a safe person is **urgent** if:

- Your friend is talking about inflicting harm on themselves, or anyone else—especially if they have a plan and a method of doing so. The more specific their plan is, the more urgent it is for you to talk with a safe person.
- You believe there is realistic and immediate danger to their life.

If your friend is sharing risky or dangerous thoughts or is behaving in risky and dangerous ways, speaking up could save their life, even though it might strain your friendship. If you find yourself in this situation, remember to seek support for yourself and prioritize your own self-care.

"Ultimately sometimes you have to choose between your friendship and your friend's life, and when it comes down to it, I want my friend to be safe even if it means I'm not in their life. Its better to know your friend is alive rather than dealing with the anniversary of their death."

— Leaf, Youth Advisory Committee

10

IDENTIFYING A SAFE PERSON

A safe person can be anyone in your life—it can be your parent, a peer, an older sibling or cousin, an Elder in your community, a teacher at your school or someone else you know.

Ask your friend if they already have any safe people in mind that you could talk to if you need to. Sometimes they may have a person who is already helping them, and you can be included to make a shared care plan for supporting your friend through difficult times.

If you need to find a safe person, there are a few different ways to identify them. Safe people can be identified by how they treat others around them. They are:

Respectful: They don't make you feel inferior or less important than anyone else. They help you feel accepted and safe regardless of any differing opinions or beliefs. They respect the boundaries you put in place and try to understand where you are coming from.

Non-judgmental: They don't criticize or judge you based on your past choices, current situation, decisions or beliefs. They don't project their biases onto you or shame you for having opposing views.

Trustworthy: They work to build a rapport and give you the confidence to open up to them about something important to you. They value your privacy, safety and emotional well-being.

Helpful: They act when you ask for their help by providing guidance, helping you think of solutions or by listening to you.

Thoughtful: They consider your needs. They choose to be purposeful and always caring toward you. They are attentive, cautious and mindful of who they are speaking to and the circumstances.

Unselfish: They don't expect anything in return from you: they are helping because they want to help.

Remember, it is important to get help or support from adults when things seem too big for you. If you are worried about sharing you can start out sharing only what you choose to while you build a trusting relationship where you feel you can share more. If you are worried about telling your trusted adult who you are concerned about, you can still ask for support or advice while keeping your friend's identity private.

Keep it general: Only share information relevant to the point you are trying to convey. To ensure your friend's identity will not be uncovered, change a few identifying details about their situation, such as creating an alias.

Share in a safe location: Wait until you arrive at a safe location where you can have a private conversation before you phone your safe person. Alternately, meet with them in a space away from others to avoid others overhearing you and finding out information that you wanted to keep to yourself. This could be like a park, a quiet place at school, your home or your friend's home. Anywhere you both feel safe and comfortable.

Ask what they might need to share with others: You have the right to ask about their obligations to tell others, and to clarify what types of things they would need to report, before choosing to have that conversation with them.

Having the skills to navigate safe and supportive conversations about substance use can provide your friends and loved ones with support and connection. Building and maintaining relationships to support friends during challenges can help them as they travel along their path towards wellness.



MAKING CHANGES TO YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH SUBSTANCE USE

Changing your relationship with substances is a personal journey that varies for everyone. For example, some people find peer support helpful, while others benefit from counselling, detox programs or treatment. Your unique strengths and challenges will shape your path forward. This section is intended for people who are looking to change their own relationships to substance use. It is also for people supporting their friends, who want to understand the different support options available for First Nations in BC, and the ways they can support their friends navigate this process.



CONVERSATION SKILLS: SUPPORTING A FRIEND WITH PATIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING

Jill: Hey, do you have the mental space to talk about something? I'm hoping we can talk about something I've been keeping to myself.

Derek: Yeah, of course. What's on your mind?

Jill: Well, I've been thinking a lot about my healing journey lately and I've been considering going to treatment but... I'm kinda nervous about it.

Derek: Wow yeah, that's a big step—I'm really proud of you for taking care of yourself like this. What do you feel nervous about?

Jill: Well, I'm not sure if I'm even using enough to need to go. I feel like there are people who need help way more than me. I've been trying for a while to cut down, and it's been hard, but I don't know if I really need to go to a program or anything. I don't want to take space away from someone who really needs it.

Derek: You deserve support as much as anyone. I don't think you should minimize what you're going through if it's on your mind like this. It doesn't matter what other people think—it only matters if it helps you.

Listen and validate

Derek: Is there anything I can do to help you feel less nervous?

Explore what happens next

Jill: ...I'm not sure.

Derek: You know, if you want to talk to someone about what a program might look like, or what you might need to get in, I can help you figure it out. My auntie went to treatment a while ago, I can see if she'd be willing to talk about it with you if you'd like?

Jill: I just don't know... can I think about it and let you know?

Derek: For sure, reach out whenever!

STARTING YOUR JOURNEY

There are many ways to begin changing your relationship with substance use. These may include:

- Asking for help
- Accepting treatment
- Adopting better ways of coping
- Finding a good support system
- Finding other ways to manage distress

No matter where you choose to start, it can help to think about where you are now and where you want to get to. The list at the end of this document provides resources and links to help you with this.



IDENTIFY YOUR MOTIVATIONS AND YOUR CONFIDENCE

MOTIVATION

Motivations are the factors that drive you to change your relationship with substance use. These can shift over time, but it's important to stay focused on what drives the change you are looking to make. This helps you maintain a clear vision of your goals and stay on track when challenges arise.

THINGS THAT MAY MOTIVATE YOU INCLUDE:

- Wanting to stop using to care for your pet
- Wanting to reduce your use to set an example for your younger cousins
- Wanting to reduce your use to save money
- Anything else that personally motivates you

Take some time to think about what motivates you to want to change your relationship with substance use and write it down. Keep it where you can see it and remember it. Motivation can change over time, so keeping a list can show you all the different motivations you have when you are going through a challenging time.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU?

CONFIDENCE

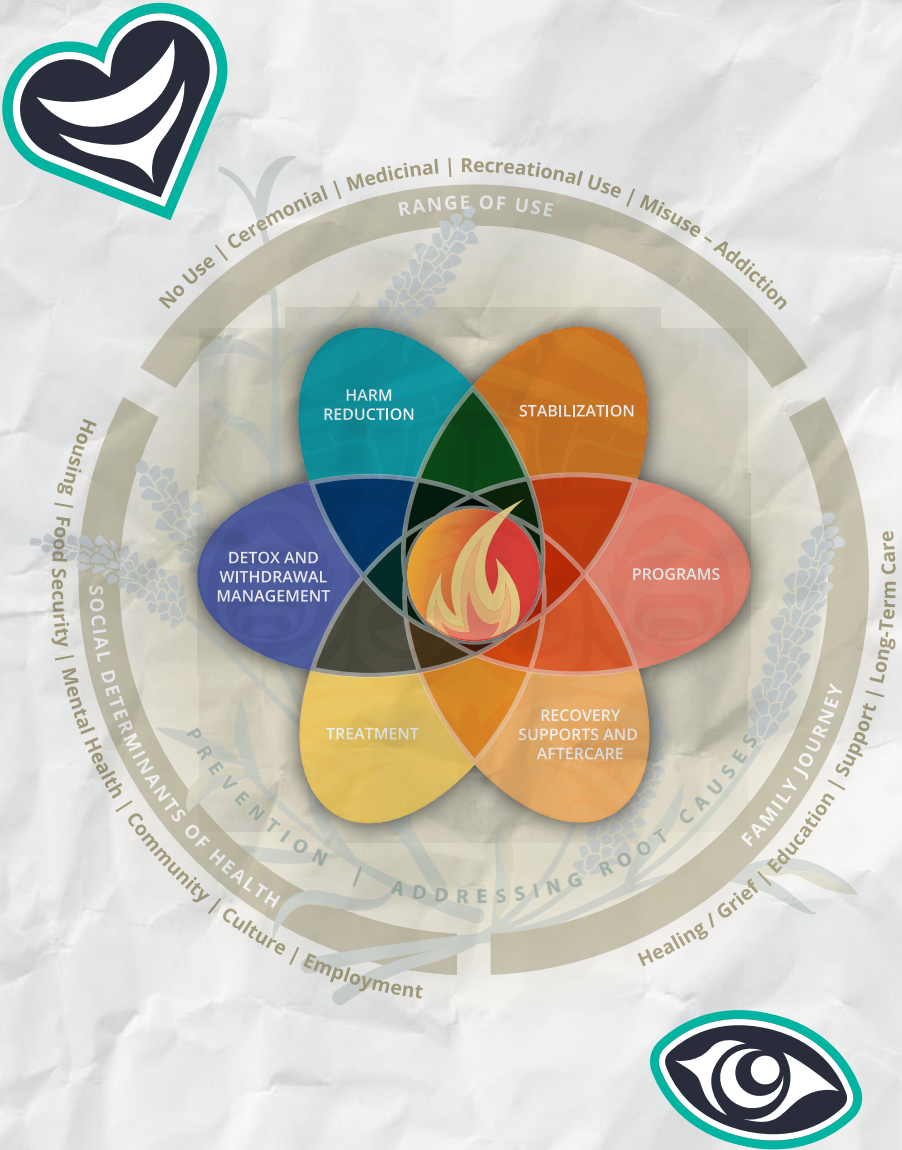
Confidence is your belief in your ability to maintain changes in your relationship with substance use and handle stressors and triggers. You can build confidence through therapy, connecting with your culture and community, or relying on friends for support during tough times. Identify your strengths and use them to stay confident during challenges.

Confidence can also be your belief in your ability to recover from a slip up, or a time when you do not live up to your goals around changing your relationship with substance use. Each time you return to your journey, you come back with new skills, a better understanding of your strengths and challenges, and new motivation to keep you going.



ALL PATHS LEAD TO WELLNESS

What each person needs to support their wellness can look different. The image below is meant to show the whole picture of what kind of supports are available for people who use substances. This expands on our knowledge beyond the typical detox and treatment, upholding First Nations harm reduction and self-determination. On our healing journey we may choose to use one or many of these options and at different times.



HARM REDUCTION

Harm reduction was covered previously in this toolkit. Includes things like drug checking, supervised consumption sites, not using alone, carrying naloxone, abstinence from substance use, culture and more.

STABILIZATION

Stabilization starts with direct mental health and medical supports in the early stages of detox. It can continue on to aftercare like long term therapy, ceremony, cultural connection and regular doctors visits, and to wrap around supports like housing support or accessing education.

DETOX AND WITHDRAWAL MANAGEMENT

Detox and Withdrawal Management supports help people safely stop using substances. Stopping using different substances has different effects, and medical support is important. Detox and withdrawal management can happen at a medical detox facility, in a home or community-based detox, or at a cultural or land-based healing detox. These options provide support to get a person through the period where their body adjusts.

TREATMENT CENTERS

Treatment centers can offer people a safe place for people to stay and to heal, learn and reflect about substance use in a culturally safe way. Many treatment centers focus on helping a person stop using substances completely. Sometimes people can't go away or stay in treatment facilities. In these cases, day treatment may be an option. Day-treatment programs are intensive out-patient services that help people understand their substance use and help support pathways to healing and improving a person's quality of life.

RECOVERY SUPPORTS AND AFTERCARE

These options support a person to maintain changes they have made to their relationship with substance use. This might include things like Alcoholics/Narcotics Anonymous, Wellbriety, inclusive ceremony, Elder supports, talking circles, community activities or teachings, and peer programs.

PROGRAMS

Programs help to connect people with supports. Some programs are abstinence-based, and some use harm-reduction principles to welcome everyone on the substance use spectrum. They focus on teaching new skills, tips and tools to support people as they grow and connect. This includes things like Land Based Healing, support groups, peer programs, health services and more.

TOOLS IN YOUR KIT

Reducing or stopping substance use can be a journey that takes time. There will likely be challenges and barriers on the journey—planning how to cope with these can help you stay on the right path.



Examining your relationship with substance use.



Making a wellness journey and setting goals.



Meeting with friends and family.



Talking openly about where you're at with substance use.



Getting through the tough parts.



Connecting with culture.



Celebrating successes as they come.

Reaching out to get support is a courageous step. There are several ways to find support, including on the phone, online or in your community. Refer to resources listed at the end of this document for a full list of available supports.

NAVIGATING WAITLISTS

Program waitlists can be long and programs may have entry requirements to navigate. Support from friends and loved ones can make the wait easier. Ask how you can help them stay safe—whether by keeping them company or joining them at appointments.

Ask if they would like support or encouragement to connect with their community's mental health team, addictions workers, traditional or cultural supports, or peer support groups.

WHILE WAITING FOR A PROGRAM OR TREATMENT SPACE, YOUR FRIEND MIGHT CONSIDER:

- Collaborating with their referral partner (doctor, community counsellor, health nurse, addictions worker or First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day) to explore coping strategies
- Making a plan with an addictions medicine doctor through the FNHA Virtual Substance Use and Psychiatry Service
- Talking with a counsellor, available through the mental health benefits program or organizations like Foundry, Friendship Centres or Nation-based counselling services



CULTURALLY-SAFE CARE AND SUPPORT

People who use substances often face stigma, discrimination and judgment, which can lead to isolation and poor treatment throughout their daily lives. This stigma can make it harder to access services or be taken seriously when seeking help, even from doctors or medical professionals. **This is wrong—everyone deserves support and compassion, regardless of their circumstances.**

There are supports available to help you navigate the health care system more safely. Indigenous patient navigators, as well as some peer support and addictions workers, can accompany you and help you advocate for yourself. You can also ask to bring a friend or trusted adult for support while accessing services.

PROVIDING SUPPORT AFTER A NEGATIVE HEALTH CARE EXPERIENCE

If you experience racism or stigma while accessing health care services, you might feel angry, powerless or defeated. These are all normal responses to injustice.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF:

1

Be kind to yourself. It's normal to feel sad or angry if you have experienced racism or stigma.

2

It's not your fault. Remind yourself that it is not your fault if you experience racist or stigmatizing behaviours.

3

Don't believe it. Sometimes, if you hear or experience something often enough, you start to believe it yourself. Try not to let other people's ignorance influence the way you feel about yourself. Mental illness and substance use is not a sign of weakness and is rarely something you can deal with on your own.

4

It's not personal. Other people's judgments often come from a lack of understanding rather than anything else. These judgments are made before they get to know you, so don't think that their views have anything to do with you personally.

5

Practise your self-care behaviours. Remind yourself that you are worthy of care.

6

Limit triggering activities. For some people, social media and the news can make them feel sadder or angrier. If this is true for you, try limiting the amount of time you spend on these activities.

7

Connect with others. The opposite of shame and stigma is care and connection. Reaching out to people you trust, like family, friends, Elders, traditional healers or others, can mean you get the support you need.

REPORTING BAD BEHAVIOUR

If you or someone you are supporting wants to share a specific story of experiencing bad care, discrimination or stigma when accessing health care, you can report it.

Contact the FNHA's Quality Care and Safety Office at quality@fnha.ca, or call our toll-free line at: 1-844-935-1044. For more information, visit www.FNHA.ca/compliments-and-complaints

If you experience racism in the BC health care system, you can also call the BC government investigation team toll-free at 1-888-600-3078 or email them at Addressing_Racism@bcombudsperson.ca.

You can also [report a physician](#) through the website of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC.



STAYING ON TRACK

If you're in an inpatient program, healing camp or outpatient program, you'll receive support to help you quit using substances. After leaving the program, it's important to have a plan in place to maintain the progress you've made. Ongoing support and strategies will help you stay on track. Planning for triggers and challenges can better prepare you to cope with them.

CONNECT TO CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Resilience and connection are part of the many inherent strengths demonstrated in First Nations communities every day. Connecting to your culture is one way to strengthen your sense of identity and confidence. Culture and community are medicine, and by participating in cultural activities you will have opportunities to build more relationships where you can support others and be supported.

Different First Nations peoples and Nations have different traditional ways to uplift people and support them in difficult times. This can include community, land-based activities, ceremonies, medicines, stories, songs, teachings and more. Finding someone in your community for traditional supports can help, especially when accessing a "system" is not possible or does not feel safe for you.

There are also many grassroots Indigenous youth organizations like the Urban Native Youth Association, and the Friendship centers throughout the province that may have programs to connect you or your friends to culture and community.

MAKING A COPING PLAN

A coping plan can help you get through hard times. To start, think about the things that would trigger you to use substances in the past. This could be stressful situations, boredom, peer pressure, difficult emotions or anything else unique to your situation. Then, plan for another way you can try to cope with these triggers.

Some ideas for questions you might ask yourself as part of a coping plan are:

- What are the warning signs that you might be in crisis or stress?
- What are some ways you can manage your stress or other negative emotions?
- What places are safe for you?
- Who can you call for help?
- What are some ways your support system can help keep you safe?
- What are some personal strengths and gifts you possess to help support you through hard times?

You can work on this plan with a friend, counsellor, Elder or other trusted adult. Once you feel confident in your plan, ask them for help putting it into action.

ADJUSTING YOUR PLAN

You may have to adjust your plan if you try a method of coping that doesn't meet your needs. If your coping plan doesn't work and you find yourself using substances outside of how you'd like, it doesn't mean you have failed. Learning what skills and needs you have, and what coping methods work and do not work for you, will help you learn to cope more effectively down the road.



KEEP YOUR CIRCLE STRONG

Recovering from substance use doesn't end with a six-week treatment program. It's a lifelong process. Many people find that joining a support group — Alcoholics/Narcotics Anonymous, Wellbriety, a local program in their community — can help them maintain their changes. You can also continue to attend programs like outpatient treatment, or land-based healing camps if you feel you need extra support to stay on your path.

There are support groups specifically for teens and younger people. You'll meet people who have gone through the same experiences, and you can have real-life discussions about drugs that you won't hear in your school's health class.

Many people find that helping others is also the best way to help themselves. Your understanding of how hard the recovery process can be will help you to support others who are changing their relationships with substance use.

JOINING OR STARTING A PEER NETWORK

People with lived and living experience (PWLLE) of substance use in community can be supported to develop a peer network that will allow them to build relationships, skills and support.

Funding opportunities are available for communities who would like to incorporate PWLLE into harm reduction programming, or to support the development of a peer network. To learn more about collaborating with PWLLE and for information and support on establishing a peer network contact tdr@fnha.ca





CELEBRATE YOUR WINS

Celebrating wins is a huge part of changing your relationship with substance use. Making shifts in your lifestyle and habits is difficult, and starting a new habit or maintaining a change is amazing! Choosing wins that are valuable and important to you and celebrating when you achieve those wins can give you motivation and the confidence to keep going when things are difficult.

Success does not only have to be measured by abstinence from substance use. You could choose other things important to you like caring for your physical, mental, spiritual and emotional health; building or rebuilding meaningful relationships; choosing to reach out in a tough moment; or anything else meaningful for you that is good for your spirit.

MORE RESOURCES

We can help you find your path! Visit the resources section at the QR code below to get in touch with our team

Scan the QR code for
access to all the resources
mentioned in this
document, and more:



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