

It's always a good time to talk with your kids about drugs

While it's never too early or too late to talk about substance use with your kids, the recent rash of fentanyl related incidents is a reminder of just how important it is to do so. While it may be tempting to focus on facts, stats and fears, **research shows scare-based, lecture-like tactics do not work, and may actually lead to a loss of trust and reduce opportunities for more helpful conversations.**

“Engaging kids to understand drug use and manage risks can help,” offers Dan Reist, from the Centre for Addictions Research of BC at the University of Victoria. “We want our kids to avoid these drugs, but we know that some kids will use them¹, so let’s talk about it.” The current media buzz provides ample opportunities for conversations.

“The more open the conversation the better,” according to Dan, “Ask them for their opinions about what is happening. What do they think of the current crisis? Why do they think people are overdosing more often? How do they think they can address their own wellness and safety in the current context? We want our kids to feel safe talking with us about their thoughts. Besides, they might teach us something.” In asking these questions with real curiosity about what they think and feel, we have an opportunity to also express what we think and feel.

Kids can benefit from the things we can teach them too – like how to help a friend going through a rough patch, how to recognize the signs of a fentanyl overdose, how to respond in a crisis, and how to be true to themselves. But we need to take care not to preach. Open conversations create trust, reduce fear and make it possible for us to learn from one another. “Parenting: The Drugs Question” provides more tips on how best to help address substance use with your children. It’s online at:

<http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/assets/docs/hs-parents-list.pdf>

In case you’re wondering ... what is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is a lot more toxic than most other opioids. Opioids are a class of drug or medication which includes heroin, morphine, fentanyl, methadone and codeine. They are most often prescribed for pain relief. Fentanyl is around 50 to 100 times more toxic than morphine, which makes the risk of accidental overdose higher. Fentanyl has medical uses and can be prescribed by a physician to help control severe pain, but in recent years there have been reports that it is also being produced in illegal labs and sold on the streets, often mixed with other drugs.

¹ Based on BC’s Adolescent Health Survey of grades 7-12 students (2013), overall, 17% of youth had at some time in their life, tried at least one substance other than alcohol or marijuana. Only 1% of youth had ever injected an illegal drug, with males more likely than females to have done so. This was a slight decrease from 2008, but was slightly above the rate in 2003.

When fentanyl is combined with other opioids (like heroin, morphine, methadone or codeine), alcohol, benzodiazepines, or stimulants like cocaine, it can further increase the risk of accidental overdose. To date fentanyl has been detected in cocaine, crack, MDMA (ecstasy), crystal meth, heroin, fake oxy, and fake Percocet. With any drug use, serious harm or death is a very real possibility every time and it's not just people who use regularly that are being affected by fentanyl. No matter how many times someone has used a drug, drugs don't discriminate – any drug can contain a lethal amount of fentanyl. Check out www.knowyoursource.ca for tips and resources geared to helping reduce the harm among those who choose to use illicit drugs.

Toward the Heart (www.towardtheheart.com), a project of the provincial harm reduction program, has a variety of resources related to reducing the harms of drug use. For example, a [PDF poster](#) outlining the early signs of an opioid overdose and [tips to saving a life](#).