



Facilitation Guide to Common Questions about Drugs from Youth for individuals working with youth



This document can be used to help guide a conversation with youth around substance misuse. Common questions, youth have, are listed below with some suggestions on how to engage youth in a meaningful conversation surrounding drug use. Due to the current opioids concerns, more information specific to these drugs are also provided.

What's the big deal about drugs?

- It is natural to be curious. But drugs are not worth the risk.
- Drugs change a person and can affect relationships and destroy friendships. Using drugs often leads to: conflicts with family and friends, poor performance at school and at work, and problems with money and the law.
- Drugs can affect judgment and decision-making skills, which could lead to doing something dangerous or risky you normally wouldn't do.
- You do not know how you or somebody else will react to a drug. You might suffer from an **overdose** which can lead to death. An overdose is when a person uses more of a drug, or a combination of drugs than the body can handle. The brain is no longer able to control basic life functions like breathing.
- You could become addicted and discover it may be really difficult to stop. Stopping can trigger withdrawal symptoms, which may be very unpleasant. People often begin to use drugs again in order to avoid these unpleasant symptoms.

Drugs can affect your mental health

- Drugs are not the way to deal with stress or emotional pain. They change the way your brain works. This can lead to depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses.
- If you already have a mental health issue, drugs can worsen your condition.
- The best way to deal with stress or emotional pain is to confront it using a positive coping strategy. Try to identify what is causing your stress, and find a healthier way to handle it. Some good options are:
 - o hanging out with your friends who do not use drugs
 - o doing something you enjoy doing like exercise or sports, art, music, meditation or yoga
 - o watching television, surfing the web, or reading a book
- Sometimes seeking support and the help of others can help with the stress. Talk to someone you can trust, such as:
 - o your parents,
 - o a school guidance counsellor, a teacher or coach,
 - o your best friend,
 - o a therapist (or other mental health professional), or
 - o a telephone helpline such as the Kids Help Phone.

What do I do and say if someone offers me drugs?

Have an exit strategy with your parents or someone you trust who can help you get out of a risky situation. That person agrees to pick you up, no questions asked, knowing you made a good decision to leave safely.

Know how to say no and practice refusal skills. Here are some examples:

- Use the “no thanks” technique or **just say no**, plainly and confidently. Just saying no without a lot of arguing and explaining is often the best and easiest response.
- **The broken record** meaning repeat yourself as necessary. Sometimes it takes more than once and on more than one occasion. “I’m still not interested...” Just because someone asks more than once doesn’t mean you have to give in.
- **Reverse the pressure.** Ask the person still pressuring you why they can’t respect your choice. “I said no, why aren’t you listening to me?” or “Please respect my choice like I’m respecting yours”.
- **Suggest a different activity.** By thinking of something better to do, you’re offering everyone an “out.” You might be surprised who might take you up on it.
- Use humour or **make a joke.** Sometimes a witty one-liner or well timed joke can lighten a serious mood and help deflect the attention.
- **The cold shoulder.** Pretend you didn’t hear it, and change the topic to something else. “Hey, I’m going to go play DJ for a bit, this music is brutal” Act like you don’t think the idea is even worth discussing.
- **Walk away.** Don’t stay in a risky situation or where you feel uncomfortable instead just leave. Say “I wasn’t planning on it!” and walk away while saying it. Find other people to talk to or call someone to pick you up. It might seem risky, but with you leading the way, others who really don’t want to do it either may follow you.
- **Avoid the situation.** If you know or see places where people often cause trouble, stay away from those places or go another way.
- **Strength in numbers.** Go places in a group and hang around with people you trust. Knowing your friends will back you up can help you feel more comfortable at being assertive. Sometimes “we” feels stronger than “I”.
- **Make an excuse or give a reason why you can’t.** Sometimes backing up the “no” with evidence can give it more power. For example, you can state a health problem, like I’m actually allergic or I have asthma. If you’re in sports, say smoking, drugs, or alcohol will interfere with your training. Maybe you don’t want to because you know someone who does and you can see how it has harmed their life. Or your parents will freak out.

Talk to someone you trust: Talk to an adult you trust, a parent, a family member, a teacher, a coach or other adult in the community:

- Talking to others, and getting help if needed are good strategies for coping with feelings, stress or an addiction.
- Talking about the current issue may help you feel less worried and anxious. It might also help to solve the problem; sometimes the problem is too big or too hard to handle alone.
- If you are struggling with substance abuse or know someone who is, it can help or at least prevent things from getting worse.
- Feels good to know someone understands you and supports you.

How are prescription drugs and street drugs different?

Prescription drugs are prescribed by a health care provider (like a doctor, nurse practitioner, dentist, and others) for a particular medical reason.

- Prescription medications are meant to help your body or mind with an illness or infection. If you don't have the illness or infection, you don't need the medication.
- Prescription opioids (like morphine, fentanyl, oxycodone) can be just as dangerous as illegal opioid drugs such as heroin especially when misused or not used as directed.
- Taking prescription drugs without a prescription is illegal.
- There are many dangerous and unpredictable effects associated with misusing prescription drugs including addiction, overdose and death.
- Prescription drugs, when misused, are not safer than illegal drugs.

Street drugs are purchased and sold illegally and often made by an unknown source.

- Examples of street drugs might include: illicit opioids, mushrooms, crystal meth, acid, marijuana, cocaine, heroin or counterfeit pills.
- Street drugs are unpredictable and can be dangerous; you never know how it is made or what is mixed with it.
- Illicit or non-prescription fentanyl is more toxic than the prescription version. This illicit fentanyl is being made illegally, often as a powder, and there is no way of knowing what else is in it or how toxic it is. This illicit fentanyl has been found mixed with other street drugs in Ottawa. It only takes a very small amount of the powder, like 2 grains of salt, to kill someone.
- Street drugs can be made to look almost the same as prescription drugs, known as counterfeit pills, and it can be hard to tell the difference.
- Counterfeit pills are made with no way to know what is actually in them or how toxic they may be.
 - o Drugs should only be dispensed from a pharmacy or a medical professional.
- Obtaining drugs from a non-medical source such as a friend, ordering online, or a drug dealer is very risky and potentially life-threatening.

Information sourced from:

1. [Health Canada](#)
2. [Stop Overdose Ottawa](#)
3. [CAMH](#)
4. Ottawa Public Health: Healthy Transitions program
5. Ottawa Public Health: Key Messages for Teachers and Grade 6-8 students