



# OPIOID DISCUSSION SHEET FOR PARENTS

Adolescence is a time of major emotional, physical and psychological changes. At the same time, they are exposed to many adult issues like alcohol and drug use. Deciding to use alcohol or other drugs is a personal choice, but they should make an informed decision that considers the potential risks and consequences of using drugs. The purpose of the following factsheet is to provide information to parents regarding a developing public health concern, as well as provide tips as to how parents can discuss the issue with their youth.

## The issue:

Across Canada, including Ottawa, there is a growing opioid crisis with increased numbers of overdoses and overdose deaths. Ottawa Public Health is alerting local schools and the community of the increase risk associated with opioid drug use due to illicit non-prescription opioids (counterfeit, illegal or bootleg opioids). There have been numerous reports in Ontario cities of Fentanyl in pill and powder form being sold as OxyContin, heroin and other substances. Illicit non-prescription Fentanyl might also be mixed into other drugs, including stimulants such as cocaine, speed and ecstasy/MDMA.

## What are Opioids:

Opioids are a family of drugs used to treat acute or chronic pain. Opioids are a depressant drug, which means that they slow down the part of the brain that controls breathing. Overdose of opioids can result in death because breathing stops. All opioid drugs can be dangerous and need to be taken as prescribed by a medical professional.

## What is prescription Fentanyl and how is it different from non-prescription Fentanyl?

**Prescription Fentanyl** is an opioid that comes as a transdermal patch or liquid form and is manufactured under strict guidelines in a controlled environment. It is usually prescribed for severe pain such as cancer. **Non-prescription (illicit) Fentanyl** is not produced by the pharmaceutical industry and much more toxic than the prescription version. Guidelines are not followed and the production is not controlled, so

the person taking illicit non-prescription Fentanyl has no idea what or how much is in the drug they are taking. Illicit non-prescription Fentanyl has the potential to be even more fatal than prescription Fentanyl because:

1. **A small amount can be fatal** – as little as the equivalent of 2 grains of salt;
2. People may not be aware that they are consuming Fentanyl as it can be disguised as other drugs.

## What do I need to know:

You are your kid's first line of defense against drugs. Start the conversation.

Most teens think prescription drugs are less harmful than street drugs.

All opioids have a risk of overdose.

Fentanyl is about 50 to 100 times more toxic than morphine, heroin or oxycodone.

Fentanyl is being added to counterfeit pills which are made to look identical to prescription medication.

You can't see it, smell it or taste it.

Fentanyl is often sold on the street as:

- Faded 80s
- A215s
- Greenies
- K22s
- Fake Oxys
- Green Beans

Carfentanil, an opioid used for large animals like elephants, has been found in illicit drug in Ontario. It is not for human use and 100 times more toxic than Fentanyl.

## How to talk to youth about drugs:

- Look for opportunities to start the conversation in current events, social media postings or news articles.
- Plan the main points you want to discuss, rather than speaking on impulse. Avoid saying everything at once. Instead, keep it brief and target a few main points.
- Respect that youth are experts in their own culture, so invite them to teach you about their world. Ask them about what they know about drugs. What are their questions, concerns or worries.



- Listen to them and respect their opinions. If they see you as a good listener, they may be more inclined to trust your input. Give them room to participate, ask questions, and avoid being judgmental.
- Focus on facts rather than emotions. If you hear that a young person is using drugs, you may feel anger, sadness, fear or confusion. These feelings are natural, but talking about the issue is more productive than talking about your feelings.
- Respect their independence. Tell them you are trying to help them to make good decisions and communicate that your main concern is their safety and well-being.
- Recognize that experimentation and mistakes happen. The adolescent brain is still developing - especially the areas in charge of impulse control and your youth may place themselves in risky situations. Help them reflect on a mistake and turn it into a learning opportunity.

#### More Information on how to talk about drugs

- Health Canada: [Talking with teenagers about drugs](#)
- Drug Free Kids Canada: [Tips for Parents](#)
- Healthy Families BC: [Tricky Conversations](#)
- Vancouver Coastal Health: [Tips for Talking to Youth](#)

#### Tips for Families

- Lock up all medications and check regularly
  - 14% of Ottawa high school students used prescription drugs that were not for them.
  - 2/3 of these students said they got them from home.
- Return unused medications to your pharmacy or at a pharmacy participating in the [TAKE IT BACK program](#).
- If your child has an injury or pain issue, like wisdom teeth removal, speak to your doctor, dentist or pharmacist about the risks of different pain medications, monitor their usage and take back unused medications.

#### Overdose Prevention

##### 1. Prevent an overdose from happening!

If you are choosing to use, following these tips will help to prevent an overdose:

- **Never use alone** (if you end up in trouble, there will be no one to help you)

For more information go to [www.stopoverdoseottawa.ca](http://www.stopoverdoseottawa.ca) or [www.parentinginottawa.ca](http://www.parentinginottawa.ca).

Adapted with permission from Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit and Eastern Ontario Health Unit

- **Never mix drugs** (i.e. pain medication, alcohol, anti-anxiety medication)
- **Go slow** if you are using a new substance, always take a small test dose first to see how it is going to affect you
- **Carry Naloxone** – it is a medication that can reverse an overdose for a few minutes. [Take-Home Naloxone](#) kits are free in Ontario from participating pharmacies.

##### 2. Know the signs of an overdose!

People having an overdose from pain medications such as Fentanyl will have one or more of the following signs:

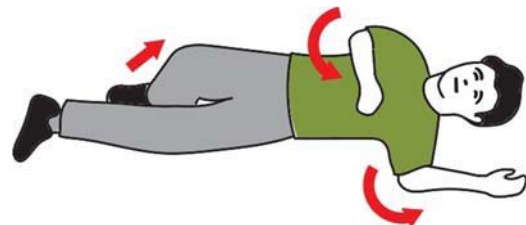
- The person is unresponsive, or doesn't wake up easily
- Their lips and fingernails turn blue
- Their skin is cold and clammy
- Their body is limp
- They may be breathing very slowly or not at all
- They may be snoring or gurgling
- They may throw up

##### 3. Know what to do if someone is in trouble!

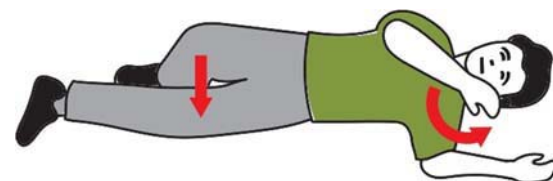
- **CALL 911** (always make the call if you suspect that someone is in trouble)
- Get trained in First Aid and CPR
- Know how to put someone in the recovery position and when to use the recovery position

#### How do I put someone in the recovery position?

**Step 1:** Put the person's arm that is closest to you above their head, cross the other arm over their chest, and raise the furthest knee at an almost 90 degree angle.



**Step 2:** Grab the person's furthest leg and arm. Move them towards you (the person should roll towards you).



**Step 3:** Put the person in a comfortable position that supports their head. Stay with the person until help arrives.

