



WHEN WORDS MATTER

How to talk about overdose prevention



Whether you are a mother, a friend, or a partner of someone who uses substances, the conversations you have together can help prevent an overdose. Starting the conversation may not be easy, and it may be tough to find the right words to say, but talking together can lead to effective overdose prevention.

It may take many talks. Things may be said that hurt or are hard to hear. It may not go the way you want. But as a child, a friend, or a partner, a conversation is a crucial first step, and one that you can take together.

The information and reference materials contained here are intended to provide general assistance to the reader. It does not encompass all of the individual circumstances that influence complex or difficult problems associated with drug use. This guide is not intended to take the place of professional medical care. If you or someone you know needs overdose prevention or substance use support, please consult your family doctor, visit fraserhealth.ca/overdose or call the BC Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service at **1-800-663-1441** to get information and referral to treatment services.

When is the best time to have a talk?

Choose a time when the person is free from distraction and isn't feeling tired or rushed. Make sure the person has eaten and is hydrated, as hunger and thirst can often affect mood. Avoid starting the conversation when you are feeling upset, angry or other strong emotions.

Where is the best place to have a talk?

Choose a place that feels comfortable for the person. Switch off your phone so you won't be interrupted. Sitting beside or at an angle to the person is sometimes better than sitting directly in front of the person, as it is less confrontational. Some people may find it's easier to engage in conversation when they are moving and engaging in activity. It can help to go for a walk to talk things over.

How to prepare yourself for a conversation

The three 'C's' of conversation:

Connect to the present.

Focus on your five senses to bring yourself into the present: "What do I see, hear, smell, feel, taste?"

Connect to your body.

Take a few deep breaths, feel your toes and balls of feet on the ground, touch your hands together. It will help you keep calm and manage your tone.

Connect to the individual. Visualize how you want to look and sound before starting to talk.

How to start the conversation

Invite the person to talk. E.g. “Is it o.k. if I talk to you about something important?” Set aside your fear/worry and focus on speaking from your heart that you truly care about this person (otherwise they might interpret your concern as nagging or lecturing). E.g. “I want you to know that I care deeply about you and that I’m here no matter what. I see that you’re struggling with something. Please help me understand what’s happening.” Listen without judgement/blaming/shaming/attacking/guiltying/nagging – it will shut the conversation down promptly. Work together to create a shared understanding of the risks of using illicit drugs. Ask what else might help.

What to do when the talk didn’t go the way you wanted

Shake out any tension you may have. Be gentle with yourself and your thoughts.

Don’t give up. It may take many talks. The most important thing is to continue to share that you care about this person.

Keep calm and let it go. Don’t drag the negative of past conversation attempts into future conversations. Keep focused on being there for the person no matter what.

When the person refuses to talk

If the person doesn’t want to talk about substance use or overdose prevention with you, you could try the following from **HealthyFamiliesBC.ca**:

- Try to set aside some time each day to talk with the person about other things. Ask open-ended questions and let them know that if they want to talk, you’re happy to listen.
- If the person won’t talk to you, it might be helpful to find another person they would be comfortable talking with. You could suggest a relative, friend, counsellor or neighbour.

You can also try other ways to reach people if talking isn’t working (e.g. a letter, e-mail or text sometimes helps with a younger population who may see direct verbal conversation as confrontational).

Tips to help keep you calm and focused

- Notice if any resentments, judgments or negative thoughts come into your mind, and find a way to put them away in a mentally safe place. Writing them down and sealing them away in an envelope beforehand can help.
- Keep your posture relaxed and your tone of voice calm.
- Take three seconds and one deep breath before responding to any words that trigger you.
- If you do not trust that you will not react negatively to any triggering words from the conversation, then delay it until you or someone else can.
- Focus on what matters most: letting the person know that you care about them. Write it down or hold it in a symbol (e.g. a special stone or other small object) as a reminder and self-soothing object.

How to take care of yourself

You need to take care of yourself before you can care for anyone else. Having difficult conversations takes energy. Here are a few suggestions:

Drink water. Being dehydrated can affect how you respond to a person.

Eat regularly. Being hungry can affect your mood and thought processing.

Breathe. Taking deep breaths is the simplest thing you can do to lower your stress.

Get exercise. Even a short 20-minute walk can help clear your mind and boost your energy.

Be kind to yourself. If you find yourself in a ‘this is not me at my best’ moment, remind yourself that this does not reflect a personal shortcoming, but the fact that you are human and being human isn’t easy.

What else you can do to help save a life

If you have a youth or adult in your life who uses illegal drugs regularly or occasionally – or you use illegal drugs yourself – here are some important actions to take:

- Carry a naloxone kit and learn how to use it. Visit fraserhealth.ca/overdose to find where you can get a kit and training.
- Be prepared to give rescue breaths in case someone overdoses; giving rescue breaths before help arrives can save a life and prevent brain damage.
- Anyone using drugs should do a small test amount first, and avoid mixing drugs (including with alcohol).
- Anyone using drugs should do so with someone who will check on them and call 9-1-1 in case of overdose, or use an Overdose Prevention Site if there is one in the area.
- Call 9-1-1 in a health emergency – a new Good Samaritan law protects people from certain criminal charges (like simple possession) if they overdose or call 9-1-1 after witnessing an overdose.

Help is available

If you or someone you know needs overdose prevention or substance use support, please consult your family doctor, visit fraserhealth.ca/overdose or call the BC Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service at **1-800-663-1441** to get information and referral to treatment services.

Sources

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