



Harm Reduction for Families and Caregivers

What is harm reduction?

Harm reduction is a public health approach that aims to reduce harms related to substance use. Harm reduction includes many options and approaches. It may include abstinence, or not using substances at all. Harm reduction meets people wherever they are in their substance use journey. Evidence shows it does not increase or encourage substance use.

Harm reduction strategies and services can lessen the consequences associated with substance use. The consequences include social, physical, emotional and/or spiritual concerns. It may include access to safer sex and safer substance use supplies and/or take home naloxone. It also involves outreach and support programs and referrals to health and support services. Harm reduction helps ensure services are non-judgmental and available to all.

Harm reduction treats people with respect. It helps people connect with others and develop healthy relationships. It involves working with people and their communities. The service helps individuals, families and friends learn harm reduction skills. People can learn about the resources and supports in their communities.

How can I reduce harm?

There are many ways that you can reduce harm:

- Smoking away from people will decrease how much second-hand smoke they are exposed to. Consider nicotine replacement therapies like gum or patches. This is available at no cost through your local pharmacy
- If you plan to drink alcohol, designate a driver to prevent collisions and injuries

- Do not share or borrow drug use supplies (e.g., injection and non-injection supplies such as bills and straws)
- Use barriers with sexual partners (e.g., condoms and dental dams)
- Learn how to use take home naloxone and carry a kit with you to reverse opioid overdose
- Consider regular testing for STIs, HIV and hepatitis C
- Access mental wellness services and other support services

How can parents, caregivers and communities reduce harm?

A strong community is the result of healthy individuals and families. Together we can all make a difference.

- Support school-based education programs on healthy sexual decision-making and substance use (e.g., tobacco and alcohol). These programs can offer children and youth clear, accurate information. They can learn skills to make safe, healthy choices throughout their lives
- Support and assist children and youth to develop self-respect, confidence and positive relationships with their families, friends and community. Help them develop a sense of belonging, pride and identity. Some examples include sports, art, dance, music, cultural teaching and ceremony, special interest clubs and hobbies.
- Provide children and youth with age appropriate information and skills to reduce harm (e.g., hand washing or finding a discarded needle)

How can families, caregivers, friends and communities get support when a loved one is using substances?

It's hard to be worried about someone you love, especially with all the different messaging that tell us what to do or not do in any given situation. Loving and being in a relationship with someone who uses substances is complex. What we're learning is that families, caregivers, friends and communities need more options to help them support loved ones.

Ways to be involved in your loved one's life:

- Get involved in support groups that use a Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT) approach
- Take some time to know what you can and cannot offer
- In between offering care and support, take time to be happy and experience joy. Self-care will make sure you remain satisfied with your life and are able to offer care for others
- Take some time to know what you do and do not have control of. You can control how you communicate with them. Helpful strategies may include stating your concern and expressing care, love, and how you like to spend time with them
- Take time to connect with other people in your loved one's life who are feeling the same way as you
- Take time to learn about and practice positive reinforcement and motivational communication
- Offer to help many times, in many different ways and with many different options. Be prepared and be ok if the loved one says no or changes their mind

For More Information

- Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions resource page: www.stopoverdose.gov.bc.ca/
- Ministry of Health - Harm Reduction: A British Columbia Community Guide www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2005/hrcommunityguide.pdf (PDF 478 KB)
- Toward the Heart <https://towardtheheart.com/>
- Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction: Community Reinforcement and Family Training www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-04/CCSA-Community-Reinforcement-Family-Training-Summary-2017-en.pdf (PDF 329 KB)

See the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC Files #08o Preventing Sexually Transmitted Infections \(STIs\)](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #30a The Harmful Effects of Second-hand Smoke](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #30b Health Risks of Alternative Tobacco Products](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #30c Quitting Smoking](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #38d Pregnancy and Alcohol Use](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #85 Hand Washing: Help Stop the Spread of Germs](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #97 Contact with Blood or Body Fluids: Protecting against Infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #102a Understanding Harm Reduction: Substance Use](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #118 Naloxone: Treating Opioid Overdose](#)



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