



During these challenging times, the public focus has been primarily on the physical impacts of COVID-19, but the stresses of life during a pandemic are having equally serious effects on our mental health.

It is important for parents to be aware if they are using substances more frequently as a way to cope with their anxiety and stress, and understand that their kids may get the message that substance use is an appropriate way to handle uncomfortable feelings.

Find positive perspectives and healthy coping strategies at:
DrugFreeKidsCanada.org

BE MINDFUL OF YOUR MEDS

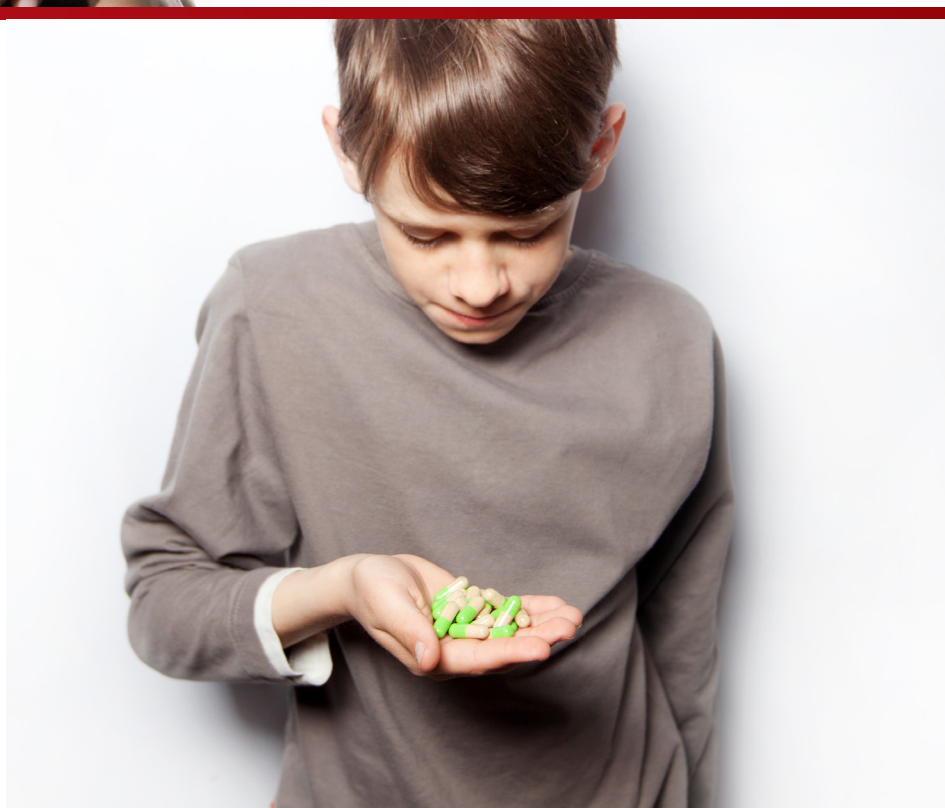
One in two Canadian homes have prescription medications that are potentially dangerous, and most do not store them in a secure place. There is a misperception among some kids that prescription medications are safe to use – even non-medically. With families spending most of their time at home during the pandemic, kids may have easy access to medications that could pose a serious risk to their health.

1 in 10 high school students admit to having used prescription painkillers like Percocet, Tylenol 3, Demerol, Dilaudid, codeine, etc.) without a prescription¹ and 55% say they got them from home. That represents almost 310,000 teens.²

Parents are encouraged to always:

- Secure the medications in their homes
- Model positive strategies for coping with stress
- Talk openly with their kids about the health risks of taking any form of medication without a prescription intended for them, and prescribed by a health care provider.

**It's important to remember there are several pain management options available that do not include opioids. Ask your health care provider for alternatives to opioids.*



SECURE YOUR MEDS

The best way to protect your family during COVID-19 and in the future is to create a healthy home environment until you return your old medications to the pharmacy.

5 ways to keep your medications safe:

1. Install a medicine cabinet with a lock and key – that's a simple solution.
2. Store prescription and over the counter drugs in a lockbox, a locked drawer or a filing cabinet.
3. Don't flush your drugs away when you're done with them – it's harmful for the environment.
4. Collect and securely store any expired or unused prescription and OTC medications until you return them to the pharmacy for safe disposal.
5. Have frequent age appropriate conversations about the health risks of non-medical prescription drug use with your kids.



1. CAMH OSDUHS 2019
2. DFK estimate from CAMH OSDUHS 2019

DROP THE STIGMA

Check your tone when you talk about substance use – do you sound judgmental? Using condescending or disparaging language can be counter-productive, and can have an extremely negative impact on people who use opioids or other substances, people with substance use disorders, people who are in recovery, as well as their families. This negative stigma often leads people to use drugs on their own, which can in turn lead to accidentally overdosing and dying alone.

ANYONE who uses drugs can be at risk of an accidental overdose, including those who:

- Are already struggling with problematic substance use
- Use drugs occasionally in a recreational context
- Are trying an illegal drug for the first time
- Are not strictly following their health care professional's instructions

Opening up the conversation about stigma and its negative effects on people will engage all of us to think about how we treat others who may be suffering from some form of problematic substance use, and encourage people to get the help they need.

Get more information in our resource [“Let's Talk Opioids”](#)

PARENTS – YOU DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Get informed about the non-medical use of prescription opioids and other medications and then be open to talk with your kids.

It helps to understand that as a parent, you can make a difference. Teens say that when it comes to making choices about whether to use substances, their parents are the most important influencers.

Ready to begin that conversation? Here are a few tips to help:

Use open-ended questions - They can help start a dialogue and avoid a lecture. For example; “What do you think motivates kids to take prescription pills recreationally?”

Use Active Listening - Be curious as to what your teen or young adult has to say about substance use. “What have you heard about using cough syrup to get high?”

Reflect back what you hear - Let your child know you heard what was said. For example: “It seems like you're concerned that some kids you know are taking pain pills.” Reflections do not mean that you necessarily agree, but that you understand what your child was trying to convey.

Choose a good time and place - Look for opportunities to talk when both you and your child are most receptive. Occasions when you are doing something together, like taking a walk, going for a drive or working on chores are often good times for conversations.

Give them the information - Explain how taking anyone else's medications can be dangerous. Ask your child if they are aware of the consequences of experimenting with opioids, and explain the risks to them. Talk about the effects drug use can have on their mental and physical health.

Talk about their future plans - Encourage your child to think about what they want for their future, and help them understand the benefits of making healthy choices.

Offer empathy and support - Let your child know you understand the teen years can be tough. Acknowledge that everyone struggles sometimes, and especially now when the world is living through a pandemic, and it may be tempting to use substances as a way to cope with problems. Talk about the importance of finding healthy coping strategies and offer to explore those alternatives together.

Above all, always come from a place of love - Remind your children that you are always there to guide and support them and that it's important to you that they are healthy, happy and making smart and safe choices for themselves.

For more information: DrugFreeKidsCanada.org



Protect your kids - It's up to you to secure all prescription and OTC medications until you can return them to the pharmacy for safe disposal.

For more information: Returnyourmeds.ca