

# SUBSTANCE USE & COVID-19

**A Virtual Workshop for Youth!**

# ABOUT SKYLARK CHILDREN YOUTH & FAMILIES

Skylark is a leading Toronto-based charity dedicated to children, young people and their families struggling with complex mental health and developmental needs.

Our services include:

- Counselling (walk-in and ongoing)
- Residential and day treatment programs
- Wraparound
- Drop-in program
- Drug education programs

[WWW.SKYLARKYOUTH.ORG](http://WWW.SKYLARKYOUTH.ORG)



# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

# AGENDA

- Check-In
- Importance of Harm Reduction during COVID-19
- Considerations for Substance Use
- Harm Reduction Tips for Different Routes of Administration
- Identifying and Responding to Overdose
- Interactions with Others (dealers, friends)
- Accessing Supplies and Supervised Consumption Sites
- Withdrawal

# CHECK-IN

- Names
- Pronouns
- Access Needs
- Pick one:
  - What are you using your time to do?
  - How are you taking care of yourself right now?

KAHOOT!

*KAHOOT.IT*

# WHY HARM REDUCTION? WHY NOW?

- Harm Reduction is all about keeping individuals and communities safe
- COVID-19 has introduced a new risk to substance use and using harm reduction is how we can continue to minimize these risks
- Harm reduction is particularly important now as our community faces both the overdoses crisis and the pandemic

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USING SUBSTANCES DURING COVID-19

# GENERAL TIPS

- Be mindful of the types and amounts of substances being used.
- If possible, keep a running list of all substances (and amounts) used and at what time.
- Try to use substances with the door unlocked and/or slightly ajar.
- Keep a list of all supplies you may need and ensure that you are able to make a trip to grab them before use.

# DOWNERS AND OPIATES

- Please note that downers (incl. alcohol, opiates) are central nervous system depressants, meaning that they reduce heart rate and breathing.
- If you are taking these drugs during times of respiratory infection be aware that these drugs could reduce your breathing to a dangerous level.

# PSYCHEDELICS AND MDMA

- These substances may cause underlying emotions to surface. Take stock of your COVID related feelings - are you in a place to deal with these with limited resources?
- As these substances may cause a greater desire for connectedness, may require space, and may have a more intensive comedown, think about any potential needs you may have ahead of time.
- How might you cope with the inability to be physically close with others? How might being indoors affect your experience?

# CANNABIS

- Avoid sharing joints, blunts, etc. with others. Instead consider using Pyrex pipes/Glass stems which can be picked up from any safer use site.
- Due to the irritation of smoking while experiencing lung/respiratory concerns, consider using edibles at this time if available to you.

# STIMULANTS/UPPERS

- A number of potential harms from stimulant use are secondary, due to feeling a decreased need for food and sleep. Avoiding sleep, food and water can also have negative impacts on immune system functioning, increasing vulnerability to illnesses like COVID-19.
- Usage of uppers typically causes an increase in energy - how might you expend this energy during your high?

ROUTES OF ADMINISTRATION: TIPS

# GENERAL TIPS

- Thoroughly wash your hands before, and after use.
- Carefully sterilize the surface you are using on, before and after.
- Discard of all packaging immediately (ideally before entering personal spaces).
- Sterilize all supplies (e.g. pipes, bongs, etc.) before and immediately after use.
  - NOTE: this should still happen even if you are not sharing your supplies.



# MENTAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

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- While using a certain substance may be your go-to during stress, because we are all indoors, consider how being around others/alone during your high may affect your experience.
- Consider your own mental wellness at the moment – are you in a place that anxiety and other difficult emotions relating to COVID may come up? What is the plan if it does?

# MENTAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

- Self care is especially important right now – and that includes creating a safer use and comedown plan. Create a list of what you may need during, and after, the experience.
- Who would you be comfortable alerting if you were experiencing a difficult high? Would you prefer to have a complete space of your own at this time? How can you communicate that to others?

# PRE-USE CHECK-IN

## Using Substances During COVID Check-list

### DO I HAVE EVERYTHING?

- ☐ SCREENS \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ PYREX PIPES \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ GLASS OF WATER \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ WARM BLANKET \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ SNACK \_\_\_\_\_

### AM I PREPARED TO...

1. Deal with unpleasant emotions?
2. manage with space restrictions?
3. Be in a space with others?
4. Cope with lack of physical touch?

# SNORTING

- Thoroughly wash your hands and sterilize the area.
- Turn the baggie inside out, not allowing the substance to touch the outside of the baggie. Discard baggie immediately.
- Use easily sterilized objects to create lines and avoid using the same card as anyone else.
- Snort using a new straw (ideally one in separate packaging - e.g. McDonald's, bubble tea).
- Discard all materials used/touched.
- Wash hands and thoroughly sterilize the area after use.
- Rinse nose with sterile water at the end of a session.

# SMOKING

- If smoking from foil, use new, sterile foil each time.
- Safely discard of supplies that cannot be reused and sterilized (e.g. blunts, joints).
- Avoid sharing joints with others - to get around this, consider rolling two smaller joints or blunts and smoking together!
- NOTE: Inhaling drugs can damage the mouth, throat and lungs and can cause breathing difficulties, wheezing, chest pain and shortness of breath. Smoking drugs during times of respiratory infection is discouraged as this will most likely make the infection worse and slow down healing.

# INJECTION

- Only use sterile needles and supplies. Free, sterile needles are available from harm reduction services.
  - For an updated list of sites, check [torontoharmreductionalliance.ca](http://torontoharmreductionalliance.ca)
- Wash injection sites (before and after).
- Avoid sharing equipment (including needles, filters, containers, spoons and water) – if possible, use colour-coded equipment so you don't get mixed up.
- If possible, do the injection yourself.

# INGESTING

- If mixed into a drink, avoid sharing bottles/cups. Make sure it is marked so no one accidentally drinks it and never leave your drink unattended.
- The above also applies with edibles usage.



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# OVERDOSE PREVENTION

# GENERAL TIPS

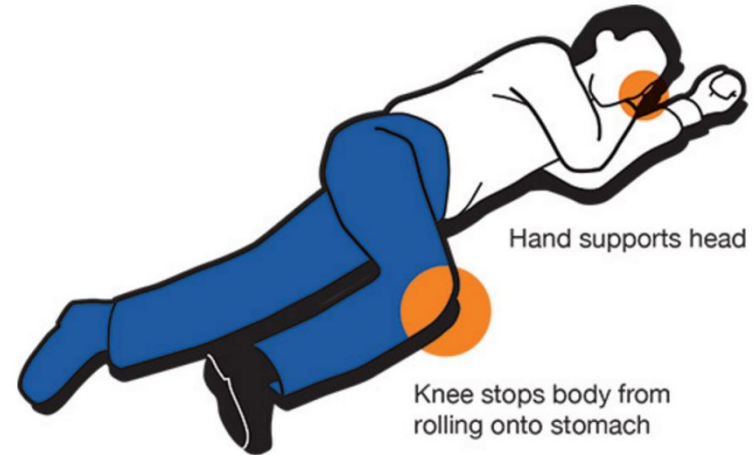
- If using alone, keep the door open or ajar.
- Let a friend, family member, or staff know what/when you are using.
- Make a check-in system with a buddy (e.g. regular messages, staying on video/calls while using).
- If you or someone you know may be concerned about overdose, please reach out to staff, friends, and/or family.
- If it is a medical emergency - call 911.

# RECOVERY POSITION

- When using alone, become comfortable with sleeping in the recovery position.
- This is a sleep/rest position that is often used to help keep the airways unobstructed, allowing for easier breathing, and reduced likelihood of choking.

## The Recovery Position

Keep the Airway Clear



Stay with person. If you must leave them alone at any point, or if they are unconscious, put them in this position to keep airway clear and prevent choking.

# "WHAT I'VE TAKEN"

## WHAT I'VE TAKEN

When using substances alone, it may be helpful to keep a running list of what you've taken. This can be used for your own reference, or in the case of an emergency.

Once completed, please carry with you.

SUBSTANCE: **MDMA + Weed**

WHEN I TOOK IT (DAY/TIME):

**April 9 - 10am**

AMOUNT I TOOK (DOSAGE):

**1 cap (40mg-ish)**

HOW I TOOK IT (ROUTE OF ADMINISTRATION):

**Ingested**

OTHER INFO (E.G. OTHER DRUGS, HEALTH ISSUES, ETC.):

**Also smoked half a king-sized joint**

ONCE COMPLETED, PLEASE CARRY WITH YOU

SUBSTANCE: **WEED + Alcohol**

WHEN I TOOK IT (DAY/TIME):

**April 12 - 3pm**

AMOUNT I TOOK (DOSAGE):

**Other half of the king sized joint**

HOW I TOOK IT (ROUTE OF ADMINISTRATION):

**SMOKED**

OTHER INFO (E.G. OTHER DRUGS, HEALTH ISSUES, ETC.):

**ALSO HAD A BEER**

ONCE COMPLETED, PLEASE CARRY WITH YOU

SUBSTANCE:

WHEN I TOOK IT (DAY/TIME):

AMOUNT I TOOK (DOSAGE):

HOW I TOOK IT (ROUTE OF ADMINISTRATION):

OTHER INFO (E.G. OTHER DRUGS, HEALTH ISSUES, ETC.):

ONCE COMPLETED, PLEASE CARRY WITH YOU

A TOOL CREATED BY SKYLARK'S YOUTH HARM REDUCTION TEAM

SUBSTANCE:

WHEN I TOOK IT (DAY/TIME):

AMOUNT I TOOK (DOSAGE):

HOW I TOOK IT (ROUTE OF ADMINISTRATION):

OTHER INFO (E.G. OTHER DRUGS TAKEN, HEALTH ISSUES, ETC.):

ONCE COMPLETED, PLEASE CARRY WITH YOU

SUBSTANCE:

WHEN I TOOK IT (DAY/TIME):

AMOUNT I TOOK (DOSAGE):

HOW I TOOK IT (ROUTE OF ADMINISTRATION):

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INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS

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# INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS

- Although it may be awkward to say no to sharing your substances, remember that at this time, personal and community safety > awkward.
- How can we say no while maintaining a smooth relationship?
  - Be firm but kind.
  - Remind them that it's not personal, and it doesn't mean that you don't want to hang together.
  - If appropriate, come up with a compromise (e.g. offer to split the substances into two smaller doses and enjoy together, offer to go halvesies when you make your next run).

# INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS

- Discard of and sterilize all packaging after picking up. Wiping down the baggie with some Lysol will work!
- If possible, try to purchase from local dealers. Ideally, someone within walking distance as this may help cut down on travel related risks.
- Try to purchase in bulk to lessen the number of trips out.
- Try to maintain your social distance (2m/6ft) when meeting.
  - If possible, ask if you're able to arrange pick-up from a distance



# ACCESSING SUPPLIES AND SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION SITES

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Please note that while sites may be open, many services will look differently than in previous times. There may not be the same access to building facilities or interactions with staff members.

You may be asked to:

- Call ahead to place order
- Use hand sanitizer
- Remain outside
- Keep a distance from others
- Answer screening questions

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# ACCESSING SUPPLIES AND SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION SITES

Some sites that are open (as of April 27, 2020):

- Parkdale Queen West CHC (both sites)
- Regent Park CHC
- Fred Victor
- Sherbourne Health
- Moss Park
- Unison (all sites)
- Eva's

**For updated information about site availability – please call ahead!**

WITHDRAWAL

# PREPARING FOR REDUCED AVAILABILITY

- In the case of reduced availability of substances, make a plan. This may include:
  - Planning to use your regular amount, but spreading it out over time to reduce bingeing and withdrawal.
  - Slowly reduce the amount you use each day.
  - Drinking lower alcohol content drinks such as beer instead of wine or wine instead of spirits, or taking a break from drinking after slowly reducing.
- NOTE: before changing your use, consider whether or not you are of higher risk of withdrawal. Please see the following slides for more info.



# WITHDRAWAL

- If you believe you may be at risk of withdrawal due to a lack of access to substances – please inform a friend, family member, or staff member ASAP.
- Withdrawal can be unpleasant and potentially dangerous. Informing others is especially important if you regularly use benzos, alcohol, opiates, and/or GHB as withdrawal from these substances carries high risk.
- Withdrawal symptoms can include seizures, sickness and diarrhoea, headaches, pains and hallucinations.
  - The severity of the symptoms will vary depending on the type and amount of drug used but most symptoms will ease after a few weeks.

# RISK OF WITHDRAWAL

- Risk of stimulant withdrawal self-questionnaire:
  - Am I unusually tired?
  - Am I either unable to sleep or can't get enough?
  - Am I feeling restless, anxious?
  - Am I pacing, fidgeting more than usual?
  - Do I have an increased appetite?
  - Are my dreams more vivid and unpleasant than usual?

# RISK OF WITHDRAWAL

- Risk of alcohol withdrawal self-questionnaire:
  - Do I drink more than one bottle of spirits per day, or equivalent? (about 3 bottles of wine or 15 bottles of beer?)
  - Have I ever had a seizure from alcohol withdrawal before?
  - Have I ever had hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't real) from alcohol withdrawal before?
  - Do I usually shake, sweat, and feel nauseous or vomit as soon as I wake up in the morning?

# RISK OF WITHDRAWAL

- Risk of opiate withdrawal self-questionnaire:
  - Do I have a high resting pulse rate?
  - Am I extremely sweaty for reasons not accounted for by environment?
  - Am I experiencing unusual joint/bone pain?
  - Are my pupils dilated?
  - Am I experiencing stomach upset?
  - Am I unusually restless or anxious?

# RISK OF WITHDRAWAL

- Where can I reach out to if I believe I may be at risk of withdrawal?
  - Woman's Own Withdrawal Management Centre
  - Toronto East Health Network - Withdrawal Management Centre
  - Humber River Hospital - Rapid Access Addiction Medicine (RAAM) Clinic
  - North York General Hospital - Rapid Access Addiction Medicine (RAAM) Clinic
  - Toronto East General Hospital - Aboriginal Day Services
  - Ossington Men's Withdrawal Management Centre
  - Centre for Addiction and Mental Health - Medical Withdrawal Unit
- For more info about hours/services **please contact clinics directly.**

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ANY QUESTIONS?

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CHECK OUT,  
EVALUATIONS,  
THANK YOU!