

# SUBSTANCE USE & COVID-19

**A Virtual Workshop for Service Providers!**

# 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)



# WHO ARE WE & WHAT DO WE DO?

**Skylark's Youth Harm Reduction Team** is composed of youth ages 16-24 who have lived experience of drug use and/or sex work.

The team is responsible for developing and facilitating educational workshops for service providers about how to work most effectively with young people who engage in drug use, sex and/or sex work from a harm reduction perspective.

In addition, the team provides workshops for youth to challenge stigma and encourage the use of harm reduction practices.

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

# AGENDA

- Check-In
- Supporting Youth to Practice Harm Reduction
- Interactions with Others (family, friends, dealers)
- Overdose Prevention
- Planning for Potential Withdrawal
- Tools for Youth
- Exploring changes in Substance Use Pre-During-Post COVID-19

# GETTING TO KNOW YOU!

- Where are you from?
- What is your position?

# 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

# SUPPORTING YOUTH TO PRACTICE HARM REDUCTION



# SUPPORTING YOUTH TO PRACTICE HARM REDUCTION:

## DRUG

The substance in which the user has an experience with.

## SET

The mindset in which the user has an experience with a substance.

## SETTING

The physical and social environment (the setting) in which the user has the experience with a substance.

# DOWNERS AND OPIOIDS

- Downers (incl. alcohol, opiates) are central nervous system depressants, meaning that they reduce heart rate and breathing.
- If someone were to take these drugs during times of respiratory infection, these drugs could reduce their breathing to a dangerous level.
- While overdose prevention services are operating at limited capacity, people who use downers/opioids are at increased risk of overdose.

# PSYCHEDELICS AND MDMA

- These substances may cause underlying emotions to surface. Encourage clients to think about their COVID related feelings and ability to deal with these with limited resources?
- Explore any potential needs the client may have ahead of time.
- How might they cope with the inability to be physically close with others? How might being indoors affect their experience?

# CANNABIS

- Inform clients of the additional risks of sharing supplies in the midst of COVID-19. This includes joints, blunts, bongs etc.
- Due to the irritation of smoking while experiencing lung/respiratory concerns, encourage clients to consider using edibles at this time (if available to them) or using a dry-herb vaporizer which can be less harsh on the lungs.

# UPPERS/STIMULANTS

- As with the broader drug supply, there may be disruptions to the availability of stimulant supplies during the pandemic. It is also possible that decreased supply results in bad or new cuts.
- 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.

# GENERAL SUBSTANCE USE TIPS

## Encourage clients to:

- 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 in an accessible location so that someone can respond in an emergency.
- Keep a list of all supplies they may need and ensure that they are able to make a trip to grab them before use.

# SAFER ROUTES OF ADMINISTRATION:

- Thoroughly wash your hands before, and after use.
- 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.
- Do not share or re-use supplies.

# CONSIDERATIONS: SET

- Ask your client to consider their mental wellness at the moment – are they in a place that anxiety and other difficult emotions relating to COVID may come up?
- Discuss a safety plan for during and after they use, especially if they will experience a comedown (common with psychedelics/stimulants).



# CONSIDERATIONS: SETTING

- A large factor contributing to a substance use experience is environment. Explore how being around others (i.e family members) or alone may affect their experience of a drug.
- Support the client to create a list of what they may need during and after the experience.
- Who would they be comfortable alerting if they were experiencing a difficult high?

INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS

SCENARIO

# SCENARIO

Raj (20) is an ongoing client of yours who has mentioned to you that they've used substances in passing, but it has not been relevant to your work together until now...

Due to COVID-19, Raj moved out of their apartment to quarantine at their family's home. They'd like to tell their parents about their substance use, but are concerned about how their family may respond. Raj asks you for support around how to approach a conversation with them.

- How might you be able to support Raj?

# INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS: FAMILY/ROOMMATES

- If a client is living with parents/guardians, siblings or roommates, substance use might be a point of contention if all parties are residing in the same household.
- If substance use is not permitted in the home, you can ask the client if it would be helpful to support them in having a conversation with their parents/guardians/roommates about their substance use.

# INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS: FRIENDS

- One of the reasons youth share with others is because it's socially awkward to say no to your friends.
- Supporting clients to 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.
  - Offer to split the substances into two smaller doses and enjoy together or offer to go halvesies when you next pick up.

# INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS: DEALERS

## Encourage clients to:

- 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 as this can reduce additional travel related risks.
- Try to purchase in bulk to lessen the number of trips out.
- Try to maintain social distance (2m/6ft) when meeting.

# OVERDOSE PREVENTION



# GENERAL TIPS

## Encourage clients to:

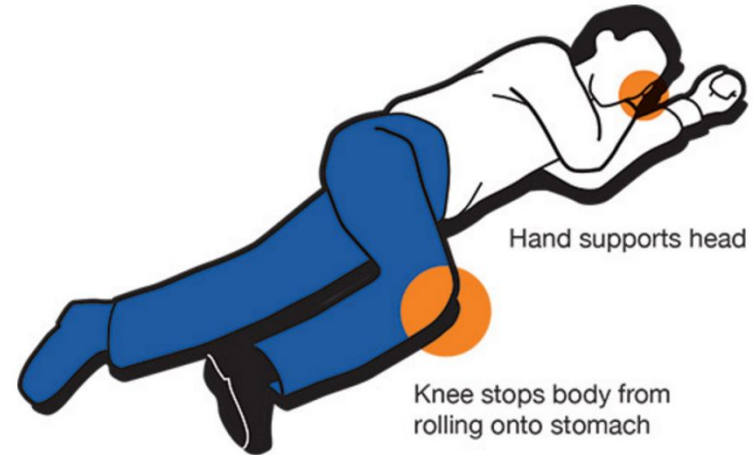
- If using alone, keep the door open/ajar or call the Overdose Prevention Line 1-888-853-8542
- Let a friend, family member, or staff know what/when they are using.
- Make a check-in system with a buddy (e.g. regular messages, staying on video/calls while using).
- Reach out to staff, friends, and/or family if they are concerned about overdose.
- If it is a medical emergency - call 911.

# 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.
- If using alone, it may be beneficial to become comfortable with sleeping in this position.

## 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.

ACCESSING SUPPLIES AND SUPERVISED  
CONSUMPTION SITES IN  
TORONTO, ON, CANADA

# ACCESSING SUPPLIES AND SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION SITES

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

# POLL

Would you know where to refer a client who is seeking a supervised consumption site?

# ACCESSING SUPPLIES AND SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION SITES

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

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

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

WITHDRAWAL

# TALKING ABOUT WITHDRAWAL WITH CLIENTS

- Start by exploring how they feel about the potential for their drug supply to be cut off.
- “If you weren’t able to use for a period of time, how would that feel for you?”
- Ask if it would be helpful to come up with a plan in the event that they are unable to access their drug of choice.



# WITHDRAWAL

- If a client is concerned about their risk of withdrawal due to a lack of access to substances – offer support around how they can minimize their risk.
- Withdrawal can be unpleasant and potentially dangerous. Encourage clients to consider this risk, especially if they 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.

# PREPARING FOR REDUCED AVAILABILITY

- A plan for reduced availability/access 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.
  - E.g. drinking lower alcohol content drinks such as beer instead of wine or taking a break from drinking after slowly reducing.
- NOTE: before suggesting a change of use, consider whether the client is at risk of withdrawal!

# 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

- Who can clients contact if they are 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.**

TOOLS FOR YOUTH!

# 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?



# "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):

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):

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):

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

ONCE COMPLETED, PLEASE CARRY WITH YOU

A TOOL CREATED BY SKYLARK'S YOUTH HARM REDUCTION TEAM

EXPLORING CHANGES IN  
SUBSTANCE USE  
PRE-DURING-POST  
COVID-19

# EXPLORING CHANGES IN SUBSTANCE USE

- Acknowledge that their use may have changed during COVID (affirm that this makes sense and is not a judgement).
- Validate that COVID and the accompanying isolation may be traumatic for some folks. This may lead to changes in mental health, and substance use patterns that may extend post-quarantine.

# EXPLORING CHANGES IN SUBSTANCE USE

- Explore your clients relationship with substances pre, during, and post COVID-19, highlighting discrepancies so that the client can identify how their use may have changed.
- Follow the clients lead around how they would like to proceed in respect to their substance use.

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT...

- How might clients continue to experience trauma beyond COVID?
- In what ways can you adapt the way you work with youth to accommodate their changing needs?
- What new opportunities for support might we explore?

# WANT TO CONNECT?

For more youth-created harm reduction information, follow us on social media



@skylitatskylark

For all other enquiries, please contact

**[jordana.rovet@skylarkyouth.org](mailto:jordana.rovet@skylarkyouth.org)**



EVALUATIONS  
&  
THANK YOU!

ANY QUESTIONS?