

RESPONSE



10 practical tips to help respond to patients who use substances

Every interaction matters. Below are 10 things you can do to deliver compassionate care to individuals who use substances and significantly impact their health outcomes.

- 01 Promote harm reduction:** Ask the person and their loved one if they know where to access harm reduction supplies and Take Home Naloxone kits and training at no cost, and share this information with them if wanted and needed. Printable information available here: [http://www.fraserhealth.ca/media/20170816_ALL_THN_Sites_in_FH\(1\).pdf](http://www.fraserhealth.ca/media/20170816_ALL_THN_Sites_in_FH(1).pdf)
- 02 Provide info on Opioid Agonist Treatment:** Providing medications like Suboxone and methadone with other supports can help people get their lives back on track. See: fraserhealth.ca/opioidtreatment
- 03 Learn about trauma-informed care:** Learn about the role that trauma can play in substance use and how recovery is a journey, not a destination. Ask your Manager/Clinical Nurse Educator about Core Addictions Practice training opportunities, or contact Marika Sandrelli, Knowledge Exchange & Trauma Informed Practice Leader, Mental Health and Substance Use, at: marika.sandrelli@fraserhealth.ca
- 04 Avoid stigmatizing language:** Words matter. Use people-first and strengths-based language and avoid labels like “addict” or “user”.
- 05 Ask permission:** Ask the person and their loved one if they would like to have a conversation about the topic of substance use and harm reduction, e.g. “Would it be alright if we talked about how to help prevent an overdose?”
- 06 Don't interrogate:** With permission, ask questions clearly to complete a good assessment in partnership with the person, but try to avoid a barrage of questions, which may feel like an interrogation. Statements such as ‘Please tell me about that,’ ‘Please let me know how I can help’ or asking, ‘What would be helpful right now?’ can be as informative as numerous questions. See: Engaging in Overdose Prevention Conversations for more information.
- 07 Drink water:** 86 per cent of first responders report being dehydrated, which negatively affects how they respond to others.
- 08 Help yourself:** When you are triggered or feel overwhelmed by a situation, take a minute to ground yourself. Feel your feet on the floor, focus your breath (link to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-8KYih2NTw>), stretch, develop and recall a mantra (“no feeling is final” or recite some inspirational quote that appeals to you), even run water over your hands. If you still can't concentrate on task ahead, consult with a colleague.
- 09 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. Accepting this is not only being kind to yourself, but to patients, colleagues, and the people you love.
- 10 Respect all:** Approach people with respect and compassion. People who use substances are often disengaged from the health care system. We've learned from people with lived experience that even one positive experience with a care provider can make a difference in their health outcomes. WATCH Moments to Milestones (link to: <http://www.fraserhealth.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/substance-use/substance-use--moments-to-milestones>)

For more opioid overdose response information, tools and resources, go to http://fhpulse/clinical_programs/emergency/Pages/OpioidOverdoseResponse.aspx

