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Parenting in the Age of Fentanyl and Substance Use

Mental Health Series



Understanding the Issue

Fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid, has become a significant concern across the country due to its potency and the increasing number of overdose cases. This drug is up to 100 times more potent than morphine, making even small amounts potentially lethal. Its prevalence in various forms, including counterfeit pills and mixed with other substances, has escalated the risk of accidental overdoses, especially among teenagers and young adults. As a parent, it is important to be well-informed about the specific risks associated with fentanyl and other substances, recognizing that this knowledge can be vital in protecting your child.

Starting the Conversation

Talking to your children about the dangers of substance use can be challenging but is essential. Here are some tips to start the conversation:

Be Open and Honest:

Use age-appropriate language to explain the risks of drug use, including the dangers of fentanyl. Share real-life examples and emphasize your goal of keeping them safe and healthy.

Listen Actively:

Encourage your children to share their thoughts and concerns without judgment. Practice active listening, and provide a safe space for open dialogue.

Set Clear Expectations:

Clearly communicate your expectations about drug use and the consequences for breaking family rules. Explain why these rules are in place and discuss the long-term impacts of substance use.



Providing Support and Resources

If you suspect your child may be struggling with substance use, it's important to act quickly and compassionately. Here are key steps to provide the support and resources your child needs.

Seek Professional Help:

Contact a healthcare provider, school counselor, or local support groups specializing in substance use for guidance.

Educate Yourself:

Learn more about fentanyl and other substances through reputable sources like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Build a Support Network:

Connect with other parents, community organizations, and support groups to share experiences and strategies.



SAMHSA's National Helpline (**1-800-662-HELP**) is a crucial resource for us because it offers:

- Treatment Referrals
- Vital Information
- Reliable Guidance
- 24/7 Availability

Featured Articles

Recognizing the Signs

Being able to identify the signs of substance use early can make a significant difference in a child's life. As fentanyl and other potent substances become more prevalent, it is essential for parents to be vigilant and proactive. Here are some common indicators to watch for:

Changes in Behavior:

- **Mood Swings:** Your child may exhibit sudden and extreme changes in mood, ranging from irritability and aggression to unusual giddiness or euphoria.
- **Withdrawal from Family Activities:** A noticeable disengagement from family gatherings and activities can be a red flag.
- **Decline in School Performance:** Sudden drops in grades, lack of interest in schoolwork, frequent absences, or disciplinary issues can indicate substance use problems.

Physical Symptoms:

- **Unexplained Fatigue:** Chronic tiredness that doesn't improve with rest can be a sign of drug use.
- **Weight Loss:** Rapid or unexplained weight loss might indicate substance use, especially if accompanied by a lack of appetite or noticeable changes in eating habits.
- **Frequent Nosebleeds:** For substances that are inhaled or snorted, such as fentanyl, frequent nosebleeds can be a physical symptom to watch for.

Social Changes:

- **New Friend Groups:** Sudden changes in friendships, especially with a different crowd you do not know well, can be a warning sign.
- **Secrecy About Activities:** Increased secrecy regarding whereabouts, activities, and interactions can indicate your child is trying to hide something.
- **Loss of Interest in Hobbies:** If your child suddenly loses interest in activities they once enjoyed, it might be a sign of substance use.



For helpful parenting resources visit:
[ParentGuidance.org](https://www.ParentGuidance.org)

Encourage Healthy Coping Mechanisms

Promote Positive Activities: Encourage involvement in sports, hobbies, and community events that provide healthy outlets for stress and emotions. Activities like team sports, music, arts, and volunteer work can offer your child a sense of purpose, belonging, and achievement. These positive engagements can help divert their attention from negative influences and build a supportive social network.

Teach Stress Management Techniques: Equip your children with skills like deep breathing, meditation, and mindfulness to help them cope with challenges. Introduce practices such as guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, and yoga, which can be incorporated into their daily routine. Encourage them to recognize and verbalize their feelings, promoting emotional intelligence and resilience.

SUBSTANCE USE PARENT FAQ'S ANSWERED



SCAN ME

Join licensed marriage and family therapist, Christopher Lewis, in exploring Frequently Asked Questions. This series is dedicated to what parents need to know when talking to their children about substance use or when managing a substance use crisis with a child. Scan the QR code to find practical advice to help effectively navigate substance use.

Works Cited

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