ARE YOU PREPARED TO HELP YOUR TEEN MAKE GOOD DECISIONS?

STATS, FACTS & TALKING POINTS
ABOUT ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS
PARENT ACTION PACK

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FOREWORD

It’s a “good news story”—according to the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS), a 40 year population survey of Ontario students in grades 7 through 12. The 2017 OSDUHS report shows alcohol use is currently at an all-time low, while use of cannabis is lower than most estimates since 1999. This survey, conducted by the world-renowned Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) is repeated every two years and considered the best evidence we have to gauge youth substance use in Ontario. The Parent Action Pack is based on the results of this survey.

Many other substances are also on the decline, but there is still work to be done to continue the positive trends and address emerging issues, such as the fentanyl crisis. Another challenge ahead involves counteracting the normalization of cannabis in the face of legalization in 2018. Just because something is legal for adults does not mean it is risk free, especially for adolescents.

Parent Action on Drugs (PAD) strives to produce resources providing current, fact-based information to help parents and other adults closely involved in the lives and well-being of Ontario’s youth. We hope using the Parent Action Pack booklet and website, www.parentactionpack.ca, supports you well as you do your part to communicate with your teen and encourage the safest possible decisions around substance use.
YOU ARE YOUR TEEN’S MOST IMPORTANT INFLUENCE!

You may feel like your teen is tuning you out but, the truth is, they’re listening more than you think! In fact, parents have been shown to have an important and growing influence when it comes to teens’ use of alcohol and other drugs.

Parents have significant influence on substance use decisions among their children.

When it comes to alcohol and other drug use, having a teen who talks to you can make a world of difference.

How can you make the most of your influence? Research has shown that parents who are warm, understanding and open to negotiating fair limits are most likely to raise socially competent, responsible adolescents. It makes sense! Teens who feel they can talk to their parents are more likely to share important information about where they’re going, what they’re doing and who they’re with. As a parent, having this information helps you to supervise your teen effectively and decrease the risk that they’ll develop problems with alcohol and other drugs. When you keep the lines of communication open, you’ll also have more opportunities to guide your teen and share important information with them.

You need information based on evidence, not hype.

It can be hard to separate fact from fiction when it comes to alcohol and other drugs. That’s why we’ve designed this action pack. It will give you up-to-date, research-based information that will allow you to help your teen make better decisions when they’re out in the world on their own. For the research behind the stats and facts, visit www.parentactionpack.ca

This action pack will help you to:

- understand how teenagers think,
- get the facts about alcohol and other drugs, and
- prepare yourself to have meaningful conversations with your teen.
TAKE A RISK!
TEEN BRAINS AREN’T WIRED LIKE ADULT BRAINS.

Research done over the past several years using magnetic scanners has shown that while the teenage brain is wired to let young people acquire knowledge and skills more easily than adults, the parts that control impulses and planning aren’t yet fully developed. This helps to explain why teens are prone to reacting emotionally and impulsively and to taking risks.

TEENAGERS GET A GREATER RUSH FROM USING ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUGS.

The intoxicating effects of alcohol and other drugs seem to have a greater impact on the reward centres in teenage brains – giving teens more of a rush than adults would get, and making them more likely to take risks. Teens may also be less sensitive to some of the negative physical effects of drinking and using drugs, like hangovers – effects that might help them to keep their drinking in check, or to reconsider it all together.

How can your teen be so bright, responsible and thoughtful one minute, and so reckless the next? Before learning the facts and stats about alcohol and other drugs, it’s important to understand that there are biological reasons why teenagers don’t always make the best choices. It’s one more reason why parental monitoring and guidance are so important.
Over the past several years, alcohol use by teens has been a good–news/bad–news story. The good news is that young teens are waiting longer before they experiment with drinking, and there have been important decreases in the rates of teen drinking overall. In fact, 1 in 5 teens who drink report that they limit their alcohol consumption to special occasions.

But the concern is that when teens do get involved in heavy drinking or binge drinking (defined as having four to five or more drinks on one occasion) they tend to get themselves into trouble. And the more a teen drinks the greater the risks become.
Almost 1/7 of high school students report drinking at harmful or hazardous levels. By grade 12, this increases to 23%.

Approximately 43% of Ontario students in grades 7-12 report having one drink or more in the past year. This rate increases to almost 68% in grade 12.

About 1/6 of student reported binge drinking in the month prior to the survey. This number increases to 1/3 by grade 12.

Almost 1/7 of high school students report drinking at harmful or hazardous levels. By grade 12, this increases to 23%.

Fifteen years ago female students reported significantly less binge drinking and drunkenness than males. At the present time, guys and girls are equally likely to binge drink and get drunk.

Boys and girls are now on equal ground with heavy drinking.

DID YOU KNOW THAT GIRLS NEED TO TAKE EXTRA PRECAUTIONS WITH ALCOHOL?

Girls get drunk faster than boys – even if they drink at the same rate.

When a girl or woman drinks, the alcohol in her bloodstream reaches a higher level than in a boy’s or man’s – even if they have similar weights and builds and both drink the same amount. This is because alcohol mixes with body water, and females generally have a higher fat-to-water ratio than males. Females also have less active alcohol dehydrogenase enzyme, which begins to break down alcohol in the stomach lining.

For this reason, drinking guidelines consistently recommend that women drink less than men.
ALCOHOL: FACTS

DO YOU KNOW THE DANGERS OF OVERDOING IT WITH ALCOHOL?

THE MORE A TEEN DRINKS, THE MORE THEY INCREASE THE RISK OF HURTING THEMSELVES OR OTHERS.

THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH ALCOHOL INCLUDE:

- **Car crashes** – When youth under 19 die in car crashes, more than 50% of the time alcohol is involved.

- **Serious injuries** – Adolescents have the highest rate of injury of any age group. Alcohol decreases coordination and impairs motor skills, leading to an even greater likelihood of teens getting hurt.
Alcohol poisoning – When a person consumes too much alcohol over a short period of time, their liver can’t process it and alcohol poisoning occurs. It’s one of the real dangers of binge drinking. Alcohol poisoning can lead to shallow breathing, irregular heartbeat, dehydration, choking on your own vomit, loss of consciousness or even death.

Risky sexual behaviour – Drinking can cloud judgement and increase the odds of unsafe sex, an unplanned pregnancy, contracting a sexually transmitted infection or becoming a victim or perpetrator of aggressive physical or sexual behaviour.

Substance use – Binge drinkers are more likely to use other drugs, like street drugs, over-the-counter drugs, prescription drugs that weren’t prescribed for them and high caffeine energy drinks. Adding any drug to the alcohol mix also increases the physical and behavioural risks of drinking.

Canada’s Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines can help both adults and youth to stay in control and make good choices about their drinking.

Canada has a set of low-risk drinking guidelines that include a section for teens. These guidelines aren’t meant to support underage drinking, but to help reduce harmful drinking. They send a message that lower levels of alcohol intake reduce risks for those who choose to drink – both for teens and for adults.
HIGH CAFFEINE ENERGY DRINKS: STATS AND FACTS

DO YOU THINK IT’S SAFE TO MIX HIGH CAFFEINE ENERGY DRINKS WITH ALCOHOL?

CAFFEINE CAN CARRY REAL DANGERS.

Children and adolescents are at an increased risk when it comes to the effects of caffeine, yet compared to alcohol and other drugs the dangers of caffeine don’t get a lot of attention. While a cola or a cup of coffee isn’t likely to do any harm, energy drinks are definitely cause for concern.

THERE ARE UNIQUE CONCERNS RELATED TO ENERGY DRINKS AND TEENS.

- Children and adolescents are at an increased risk of experiencing the effects of caffeine.
- Energy drinks often contain ingredients like guarana that act as stimulants in addition to caffeine.
- 61 adverse drug effects have been reported from consuming energy drinks. Seven of these occurred specifically in adolescents.
34% of Ontario teens (including 1/5 of students in grade 7) report having consumed energy drinks in the past year.

13% of students report having had an energy drink in the past week.

HIGH CAFFEINE BEVERAGES CAN HAVE A SERIOUS EFFECT WHEN MIXED WITH ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUGS.

Mixing energy drinks with alcohol is dangerous. When a person is impaired by alcohol, energy drinks give them a feeling of greater alertness and improved motor control. They then feel more sober than they really are and are more likely to keep drinking – leading to increased rates of injury, drunk driving, risky sexual behaviour or alcohol poisoning.

DID YOU KNOW THAT 20% OF CANADIAN STUDENTS REPORT MIXING ENERGY DRINKS WITH ALCOHOL?
RESEARCH INDICATES ADOLESCENCE IS A HIGH-RISK PERIOD FOR CANNABIS USE—LEGALIZATION DOES NOT CHANGE THAT

- Cannabis (or weed) is the most widely used non-medical drug in Canada for both adults and youth. In fact, about 40% of Canadians have used cannabis in their lifetime. What some people might not realize is that the levels of the psychoactive ingredient, THC, have more than doubled in the last twenty years.

- Research shows the developing brain’s newly forming structures and connections may be especially vulnerable to disruptions, such as exposures to cannabis, which may increase health and safety risks.

- Early use has been connected to higher risk for cannabis use dependence compared to those who start use after brain fully develops in the early-mid 20’s. Visit www.whatswithweed.ca, a website geared to teens that explores their use, risks, and concerns about problematic cannabis use.
FREQUENT USE CAN LEAD TO MEMORY LOSS AND LOWER IQ.

Frequent (daily) cannabis use that begins in the teen years and continues into adulthood has been linked with declines in memory, intelligence and attention – some of which remain even after the person stops using cannabis.

THERE’S AN ALARMING CONNECTION BETWEEN CANNABIS AND MENTAL ILLNESS.

Links have been made between long-term cannabis use and mental illness. Depression is more common among users (while, at the same time, youth who are depressed are more likely to turn to cannabis for short-term relief, which only worsens the problem with chronic use). The same is true for anxiety disorders. Refer to Canada’s Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines (LRCUG) for science-based recommendations to reduce health risks associated with cannabis use at http://bit.ly/cannabispdf.

What’s most alarming, however, is that those who frequently use cannabis during adolescence are significantly more likely to develop psychosis – a severe mental disorder in which thoughts and emotions are so impaired that the person loses touch with reality. Cannabis is also a risk factor for schizophrenia, especially for people who have a family history of the disease.
CANNABIS: 
OTHER IMPORTANT RISKS TO KNOW

Incidences of impaired driving while on cannabis are common, with 9% of teenage drivers reporting driving within an hour of smoking cannabis – something which nearly doubles their risk of a crash. Cannabis is also the drug that teens combine most often with drinking alcohol. This can have unpredictable physical and psychological effects (like nausea or panic) and can lead to more risk taking.

Almost 1 in 8 (13%) of Ontario students in grades 7-12 said they used cannabis and alcohol together at least once in the past year. This is called “cross fading.” While the effects of co-use may vary among individuals, and less is known about combined use effects than single substance use, there are a number of reasons mixing is not a good idea.

**Greening Out**—Drinking alcohol before consuming cannabis can increase the likelihood of “greening out” which is characterized by feeling nauseous, dizzy, needing to lie down, and possibly vomiting.

**Intensified Drug Effects**—Highs experienced from each substance can be felt sooner and more intensely when co-used. When drinking occurs first, much higher levels of THC in the blood result. Alcohol opens the blood vessels in the gastrointestinal tract helping THC to be absorbed more. Intensified negative effects, for some, include increased heart rate, memory impairment, and poor judgement elevating the risk for driving high, getting into a car with an impaired driver, inability to effectively negotiate safe sex, losing personal items, etc.

**Overuse**—Combined use increases the risk of overusing both substances. The effect of overdoing alcohol—alcohol poisoning—can be deadly. Co-use may lead to drinking beyond one’s usual tolerance, increasing the risk for alcohol poisoning. Cannabis can make it difficult to vomit, which is how the body gets rid of excess alcohol, increasing the risk of choking, or giving way to the effects of alcohol poisoning.

Bottom line, mixing can exaggerate side effects and increase the chance of negative interactions. Avoiding drinking and using cannabis on the same occasion is a message both teens and adults need to know.
WHAT DO YOUTH THINK ABOUT LEGALIZING CANNABIS IN ONTARIO?

Students were asked their opinions about it:

**Q: Should cannabis be legal for adults?**
**A:** It’s close to a three-way tie on how students in grades 7-12 answered this question, although more older students answered “yes”:

- **YES** 35%
- **NO** 33%
- **UNSURE** 32%

**Q: When legalized, will you use?**
**A:** The majority of students said no, but a notable proportion said they would try it, or increase current use. Given the risks associated with early onset and frequency of use, education to delay initiation or prevent additional use will be important.

- **NO** 62%
- **YES, SAME AS NOW** 11%
- **I WILL TRY IT** 8%
- **YES, MORE THAN NOW** 4%
- **UNSURE** 14%

Understanding why youth start using cannabis can be helpful. Some say it’s to manage stress as an escape, others use to fit in with a social group because they feel isolated. Talk to your teen why they think young people use cannabis. Exploring healthier alternatives to address coping and loneliness is an important strategy to connect with your teen and delay or reduce use.
PRESCRIPTION & OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUGS: STATS AND FACTS

DO YOU KNOW THAT IT’S RISKY TO TAKE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS THAT WEREN’T PRESCRIBED FOR YOU, AND EVEN MORE DANGEROUS IF YOU MIX THEM WITH ALCOHOL?

PRESCRIPTION DRUG MISUSE IS ON THE RISE.

As a parent, you probably worry about street drugs, but what you may not realize is that there could be dangers in your own medicine cabinet. The misuse of prescription drugs – including pain killers, stimulants and sedatives – is on the rise in Canada.

When prescription drugs are taken incorrectly, they can have harmful effects on a person’s breathing and heart rate (even causing heart failure or seizures in some cases). Some stimulants, when taken in high doses, can also lead people to feel hostile or paranoid.
2% of grade 7-12 students reported using drugs such as Ritalin, Adderall, and Dexedrine without a prescription. This has doubled since 2007.

11% of Ontario students report using a prescription pain killer that wasn’t prescribed for them.

55% of students who report misusing prescription pain killers say they got the drugs at home.

OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATIONS CAN ALSO CARRY RISKS

Cough and cold medicines that contain the ingredient dextromethorphan are sometimes used to get high. When taken incorrectly, these medicines can cause impaired motor function, numbness, nausea or vomiting.

HAVE YOU HEARD THAT COUGH AND COLD MEDICINES CAN BE DANGEROUS, TOO?

CHECK YOUR MEDICINE CABINET!

Some of the most commonly abused prescription pain killers include:
- Percocet
- Percodan
- Tylenol #3
- Demerol
- Codeine
- OxyNeo

WHEN MIXED WITH ALCOHOL, PRESCRIPTION AND OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUGS CAN HAVE DEVASTATING EFFECTS

Alcohol can have unpredictable effects on prescription and over-the-counter drugs. In some cases, it decreases their potency, while in other cases it can double their effects or change them all together. This can happen whether a person is drinking lightly or heavily. Furthermore, when any drug is mixed with alcohol, it can inhibit judgement and increase the likelihood of binge drinking, impaired driving and other risky behaviour.
YOU HAVE LIKELY HEARD ABOUT THE DRUG FENTANYL WHICH HAS RECEIVED A GREAT DEAL OF MEDIA ATTENTION RELATED TO THE OPIOID CRISIS AND ASSOCIATED DEATHS.

What is Fentanyl and why is it so dangerous?

Fentanyl is a potent opioid used safely to treat pain when prescribed by a physician and taken as directed. It is usually prescribed in the form of a transdermal patch or liquid and has undergone strict quality control. However, all opioids, prescribed or not, can be addictive and carry risk. “Counterfeit” or “illicit” fentanyl, made in underground labs and sold illegally, both as a fake prescription drug or mixed into other street drugs, is especially risky. The risk of overdosing and death from illicit fentanyl is very high. While there are many different types of illicit fentanyl with varying levels of toxicity, even a small amount—the size of a grain or two of salt—can be deadly.
EVERY TEEN NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT THIS DRUG.

Don’t assume your teen is safe from encountering fentanyl. In 2017, 1% of grade 9-12 Ontario students surveyed said they had taken fentanyl in the past year. This equates to 5,800 teens who lived to tell about it. When talking about fentanyl, ask your child what they have heard and know about it. Let them know it may be encountered in fake prescription pills or unknowingly hiding in other street drugs. Often drug dealers do not even know it’s in the drugs they are selling. Stress how dangerous this can be. Tell them if taken, fentanyl can stop the ability to breathe.

FENTANYL IS SOLD ON THE STREET AS:

- Faded 80’s
- Greenies
- Green Monster
- Fake Oxy’s
- Green Beanies
- Fentanyl Powder

WHAT ABOUT NALOXONE?

Naloxone is a drug that can help someone who has experienced an opioid overdose to start breathing again if given right away, but the effect is temporary. A “naloxone kit” contains single use doses that can be administered to allow time to get to a hospital for life-saving medical help. For people who use opioid substances or are around others who do, carrying a kit with you is a must. High schools are also starting to adopt the practice of having a kit available. If someone appears to be overdosing, always call 911.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE AN OVERDOSE:

- Breathing is slow or not breathing
- Nails and/or lips are blue
- Choking or vomiting
- Making gurgling sounds
- Skin is cold and clammy
- Person won’t wake up

For more information about naloxone, where to obtain free kits and training, visit: https://www.ontario.ca/page/get-naloxone-kits-free.

A LIFE-SAVING TIP TO SHARE WITH YOUR TEEN—“DON’T TAKE DRUGS YOU GET ONLINE, FROM A DEALER OR A FRIEND THAT ARE NOT PRESCRIBED TO YOU BY YOUR DOCTOR.”
PARENT ACTION TIPS

10 STRATEGIES FOR HELPING YOUR TEEN MAKE GOOD DECISIONS ABOUT ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUGS

START EARLY
LEARN FROM MISTAKES
BE OPEN
SET AN EXAMPLE
PROVIDE A SAFETY NET
STAY INFORMED
Spend quality time with your kids and be involved in their lives. Find out, in a **friendly way**, where your teen is and who they’re with.

**Be open** to negotiating with your teen about limits, family rules and consequences.

Start having talks about alcohol and other drugs early – before your kids reach adolescence – then keep talking and listening. Begin with the **easier discussions** about high caffeine energy drinks and prescription drugs, and build from there. Use movies, news stories and advertisements as the basis to discuss how alcohol and other drugs are shown in the media. **Ask them what they know first.**

Discuss a broad range of issues not limited to substance use with your teen and **invite their opinions**, even if they are different from your own.

As they go through the teenage years, **let your kids know** what you think the **safest choices** about alcohol and other drugs are and what you expect of them. **Stress to never mix drugs and alcohol, or use drugs when alone.**

Let teens know that their **safety comes first**, especially when you tackle the more difficult issues around drinking, cannabis and other drugs. Let them know they can depend on you to **help them** if they feel concerned about their own or a friend’s safety. Tell them to call 911, if they feel it’s an emergency.

**Set an example** by being responsible about your own use of alcohol and other drugs. If you choose to drink or use cannabis, refer to Canada’s Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines and Canada’s Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines. Discuss how you **use the guidelines** to manage your own behaviour.

Recognize that experimentation and **mistakes happen**. By understanding that a teen’s brain – especially the areas in charge of impulse control – is still developing, you’ll be able to better understand why your teen may place themselves in risky situations. **Help your teen** to reflect on a mistake to make it into a learning opportunity, but be sure to wait until you’re both calm and ready to discuss a problem rationally.

**Stay in the know.** You don’t have to be an expert, but being informed about current evidence related to alcohol and other drugs will give you the information you need to help your teen make **better choices.**

Consider the **big picture**. Many youth today experience anxiety, stress and depression. Changes in mood, behaviour and attitude could be an indication of a problem with alcohol or other drugs, a mental health problem or both. If you feel your teen is experiencing problems, **seek help** from a professional.