

# Youth and Substance Use



For many youth there is a large stigma around using substances. Due to this we hope to provide some education on the reality of youth who are using substances and ways in which you may be able to help.

## Common Misconceptions

- Substance use only happens because of experimentation
- Youth who use substances are “bad”
- Youth are only using substances because they are acting out

## Theories You May Want To Use

### Anti oppressive anti privilege theory

- helps look at the intersecting factors that contribute to people being oppressed and privileged (Mullaly & West, J2017).
- This is helpful when understanding a youth's social location and understanding which areas they might need help and advocacy with.
- Also may help with building relationships with the youth as there may be commonalities that you can bond with the youth over.

### Systems theory

- This helps us look at the different factors that are interacting with the youth (Harms & Connolly, 2019).
- By understanding this it can help with seeing the gaps in resources and help that the youth may need.

### Strength based theory

- This theory helps by highlighting what the youth are doing well (Harms & Connolly, 2019)
- This can be helpful when working with youth who are using substances as it can reframe attitudes to help them discover how much potential they have.



## Resource to Check Out

Foundry Virtual BC

[foundrybc.ca](https://foundrybc.ca)

email: [online@foundrybc.ca](mailto:online@foundrybc.ca)

Young people aged 12-24 and their caregivers can access same day virtual services or schedule a virtual [counselling](#) appointment, find [peer support](#), access [primary care](#), get support with [employment](#), access [groups & workshops](#), or browse our library of tools and resources. Download the Foundry BC App.

## Ethics to Consider

Ethics should be followed when working with youth who are using substances. It is important that practice is guided by the Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2024).

Baker, K., Gaudreault, R., Horan, M., Lenart, T., & Stinson, D.



## Ways to Help

- Advocate for youth by using your voice or joining a board or community that would help with resources for youth (Ramey & Volk, 2023).
- Reframe youth substance use as a public health concern (Ali et. al., 2022).
- Educate youth and have open discussions (Ali et al., 2022).
- Implement preventative approaches (Kourgiantakis, et al., 2023)
- Encourage programs with peer supports (Turuba, et al, 2023)
- Make programs that are youth specific (Turuba et al., 2022)
- Encourage peer support workers (Turuba et. al, 2023).

## Potential reasons youth might use substances

- Being in the child welfare system (Wekerle et. al., 2009)
- Childhood mistreatment such as physical, sexual, emotional abuse (Wekerle et. al., 2009)
- There is sometimes a connection between PTSD and substance use. (Preyde et. al., 2022).
- Could have experienced adverse childhood experiences (Adams et al., 2021)

## Why education is important

- Can help reduce stigma around accessing services (Kourgiantakis et. al., 2023)
- Reduce shame in recovery as it is not linear (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997).



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