



## Talking to Children and Youth about Decriminalization and Substance Use: Resources for Parents/Guardians and Caregivers

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### Background:

As you may be aware, Health Canada has granted the Province of British Columbia an exemption from the federal *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*, allowing the removal of criminal penalties for possession of small amounts of certain illicit substances for personal use.

Decriminalizing people who use drugs is a part of the Government's work to tackle the toxic drug crisis, intended to remove the shame and stigma associated with substance use and support people in accessing important health and social services.

To be clear, this exemption does not apply to licensed child care or K-12 school properties. The federal *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* continues to apply to these settings, meaning there will continue to be criminal penalties for possession of illegal substances, regardless of amount, while on child care and or K-12 school properties.

This exemption also does not apply to youth aged 17 and younger, who will continue to be subject to the federal *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA). This means that youth aged 17 and younger will not be permitted to possess illicit substances in any amount.

It is important to note that decriminalizing people who use illicit substances does not mean legalizing drugs. This is not the same as legalizing cannabis as the federal government did; decriminalized drugs will not be sold in stores and they are not legal to manufacture. Drug trafficking and similar drug-related offences involving illegal substances in any amount will remain illegal.

Removing the shame and stigma associated with substance use is one tool of many in British Columbia's response to the toxic drug crisis as laid out in [A Pathway to Hope](#), the Government's roadmap for building a supports and services for mental health and addictions care.

This plan also guides the creation and expansion of substance use services for British Columbians – including doubling the number of youth treatment beds – ranging from prevention and early intervention to intensive treatment and crisis intervention. Prevention efforts include the opening of 14 Foundry centres across the province, which provide wraparound mental health and substance use support to young people.

### Talking to Young People:

While decriminalization will not apply to youth aged 17 and younger, this important change could provide an opportunity to talk openly with your child or youth about substance use and addictions.

The Ministry of Education and Child Care's [Expect Respect and A Safe Education \(erase\) substance use website](#) also provides students, parents/guardians, caring adults and educators with information and resources to support conversations with youth about substance use. The website has been updated to include information regarding the exemption to decriminalize people who use drugs and what decriminalization means—and what it does not mean—for youth in BC.

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For further information regarding drug decriminalization in B.C., please visit:

- [Government of British Columbia – Decriminalizing personal possession of illicit substances](#)
- [Government of Canada – Exemption from the \*Controlled Drugs and Substances Act\*](#)