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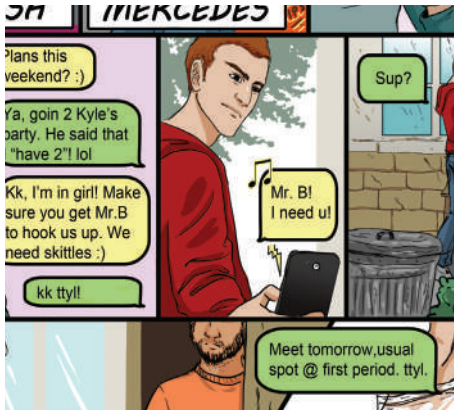
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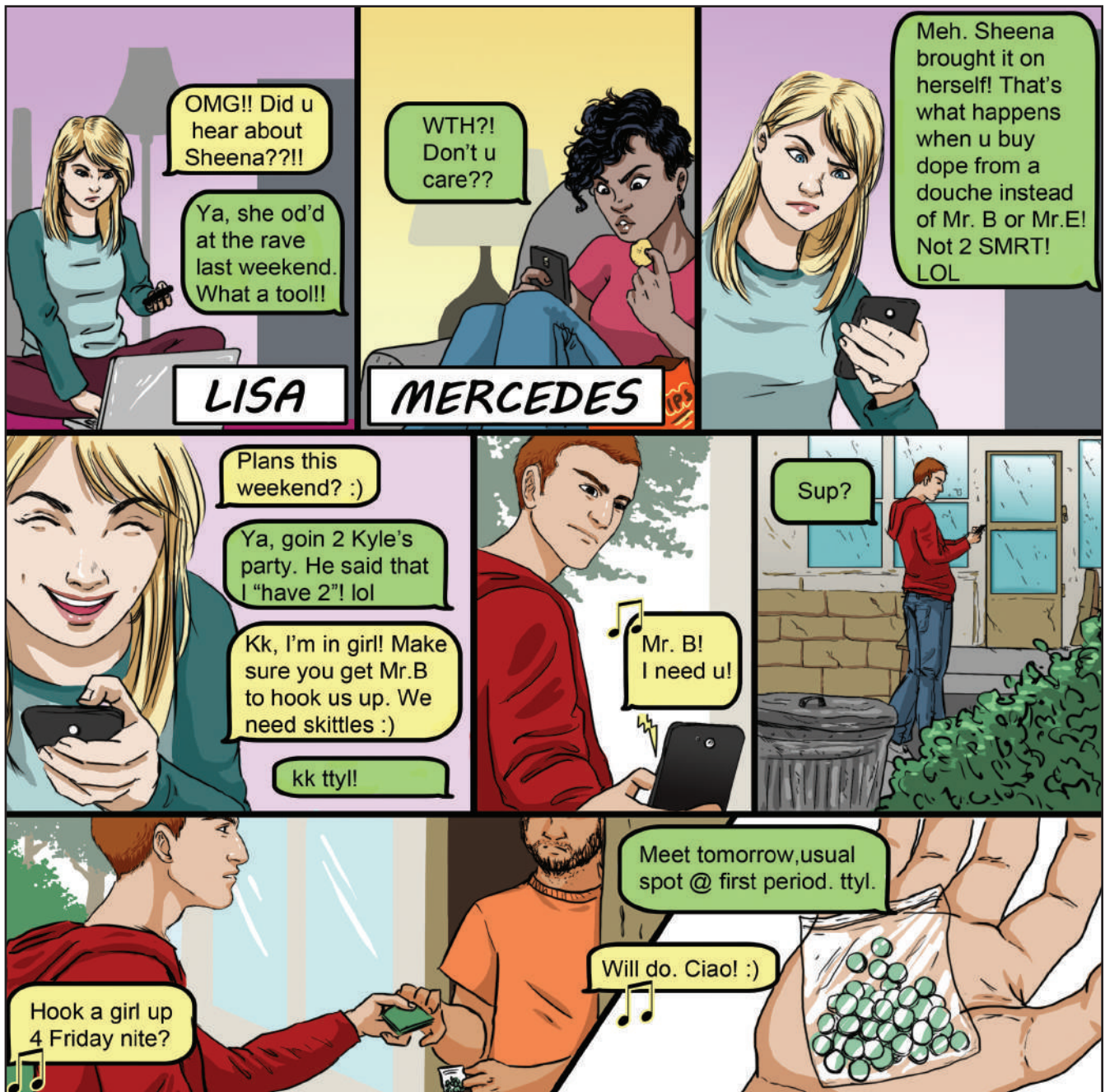


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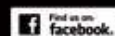


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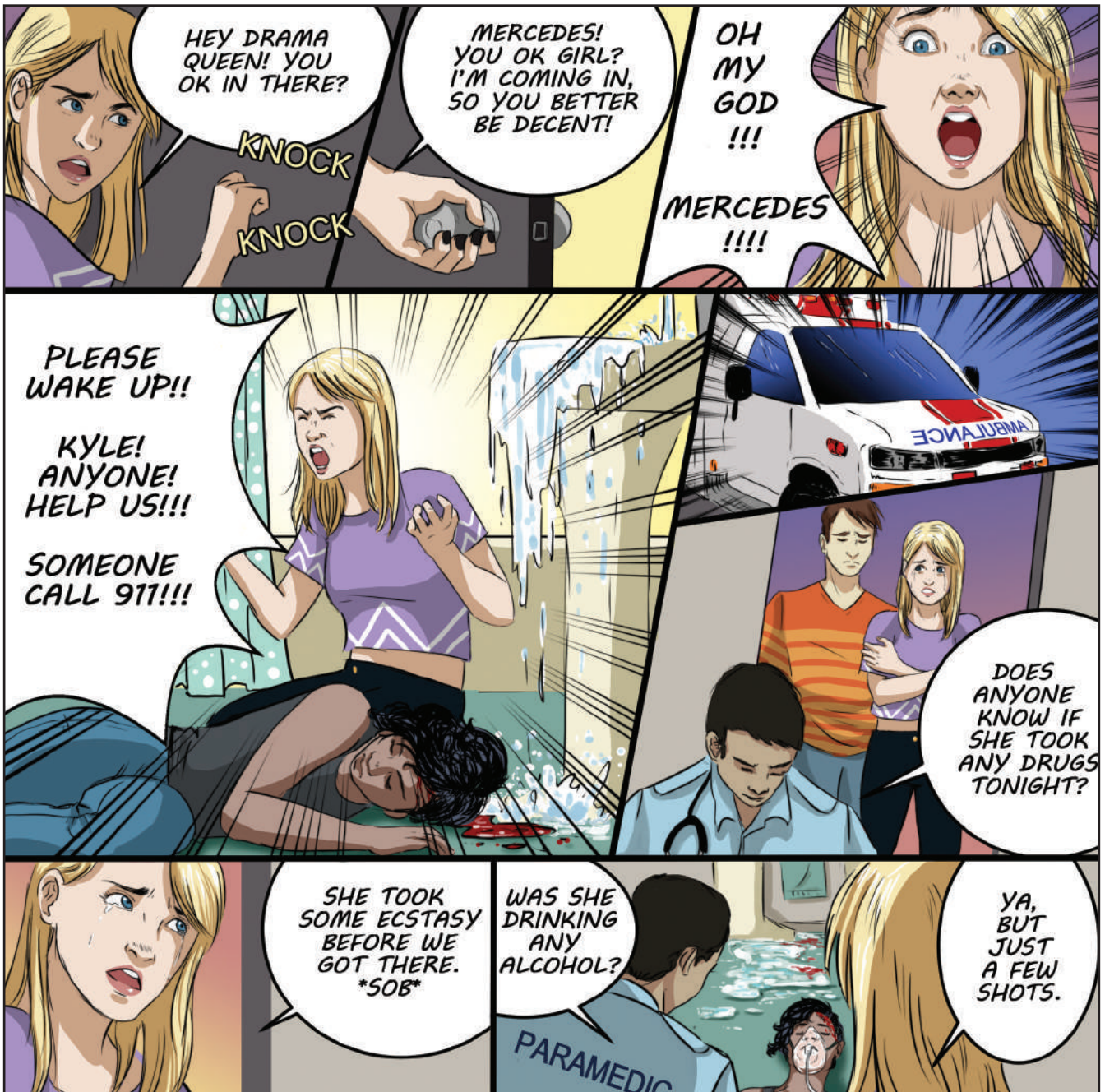
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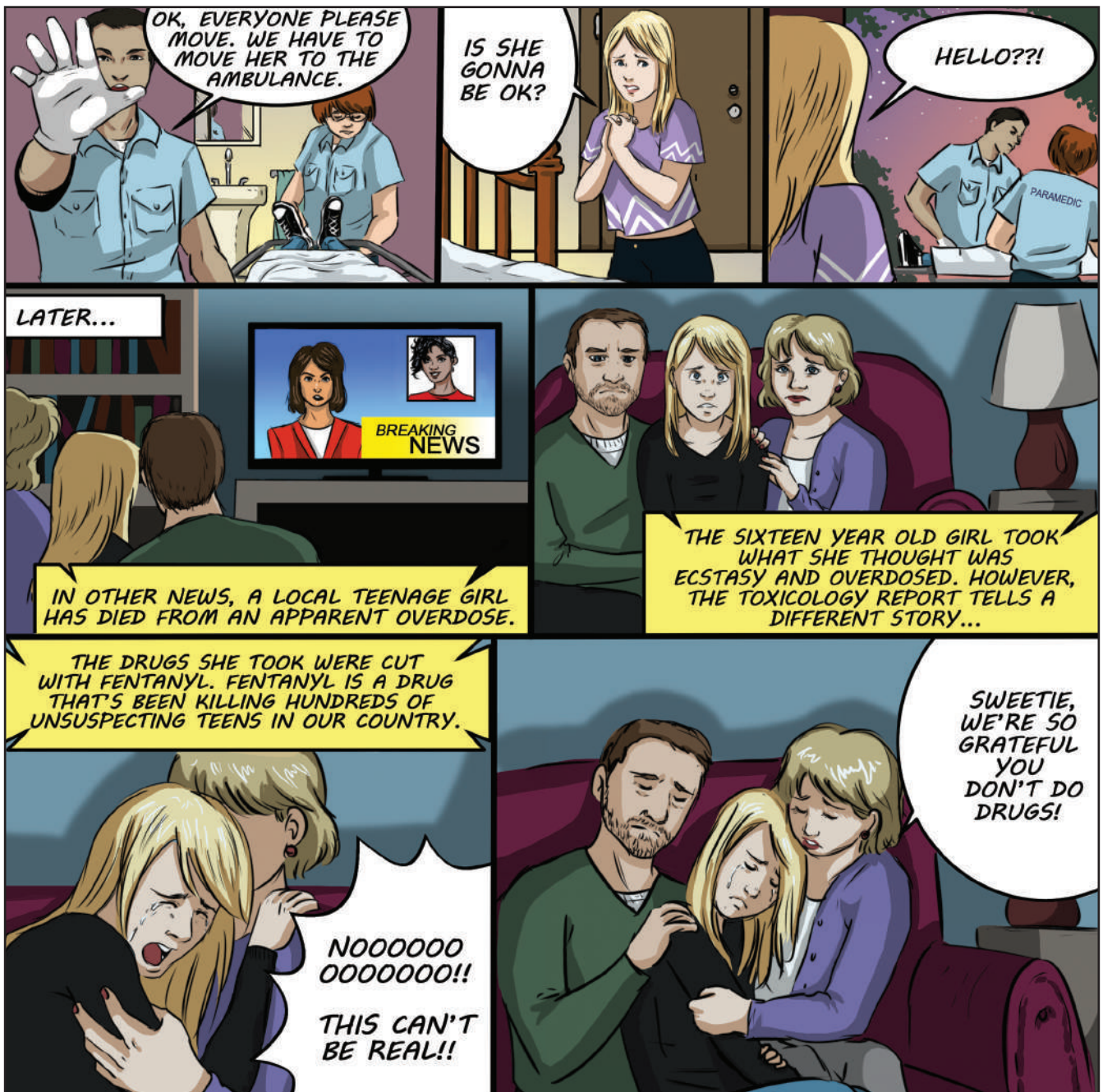
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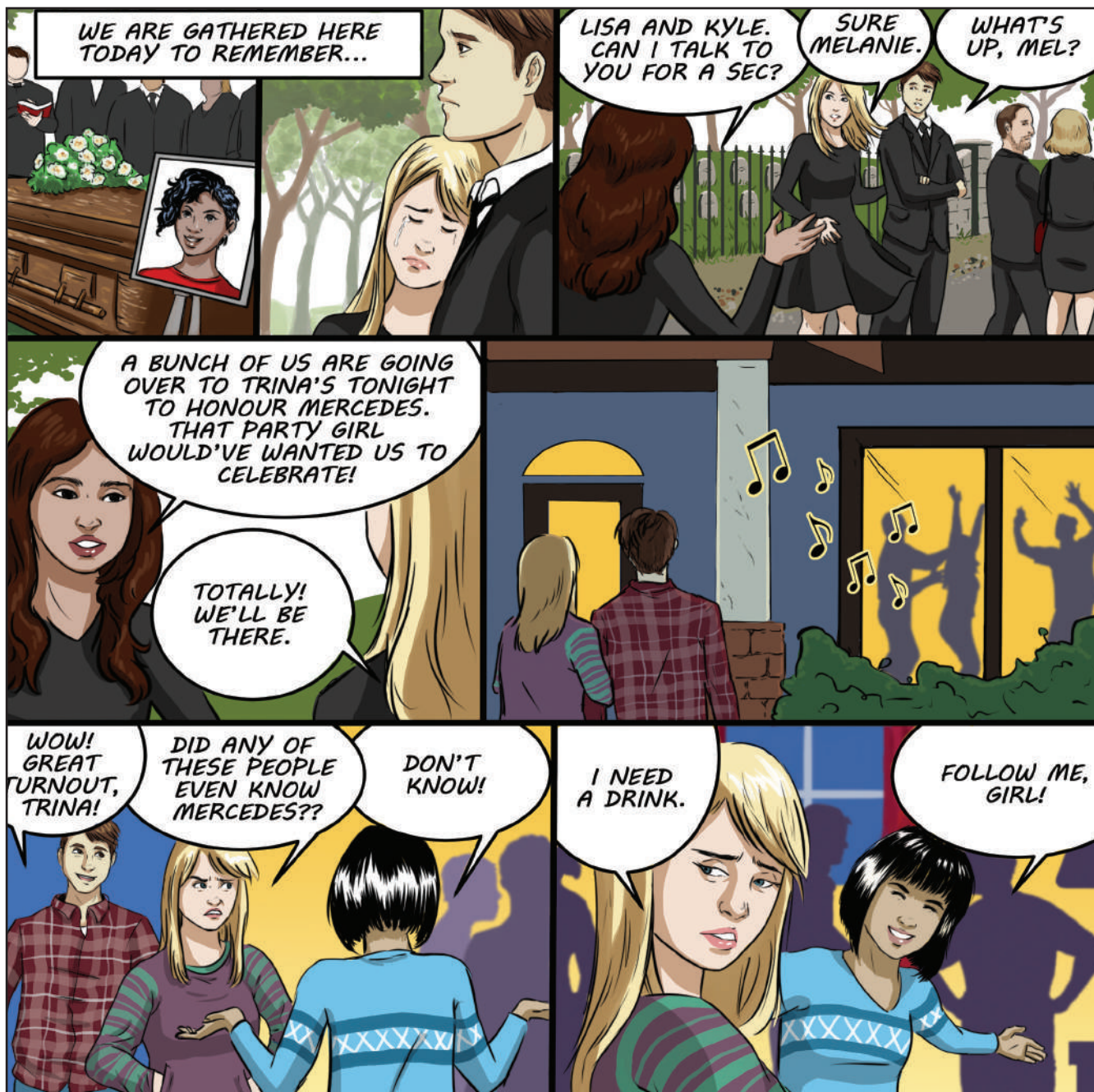

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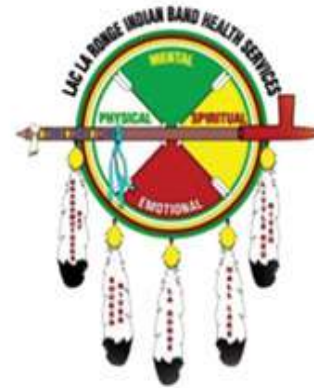
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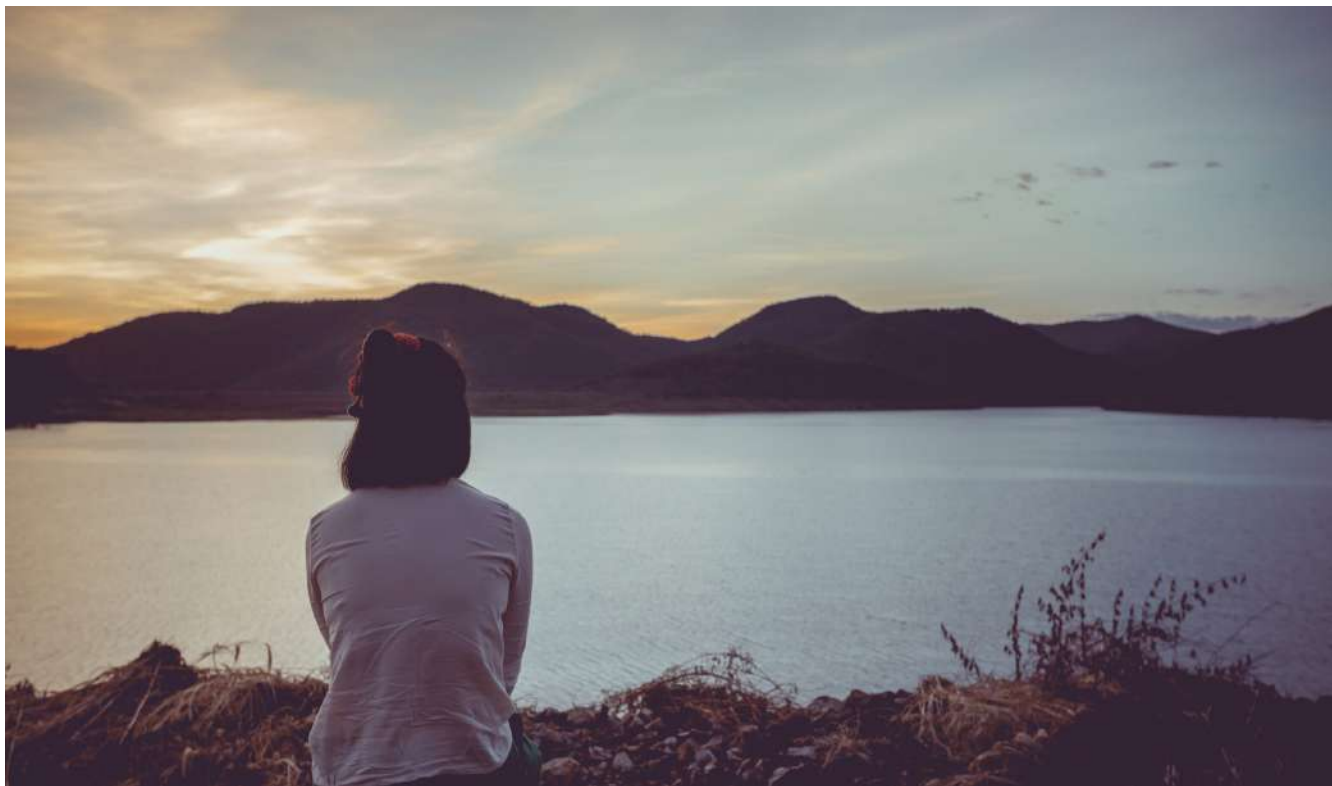
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FROM HARDSHIP TO HOPE: LIFE AFTER ADDICTION

BY HEATHER GUNN



****Please note:** This article makes note of sexual assault and substance abuse. Readers who may be triggered by the discussion of these events, please be aware before continuing to the article**

After enduring immense struggle as a child and young adult, Jamie has defied hardships and is now flourishing in her life.

There was a time when Jamie thought she would not overcome the seemingly never-ending tough times. But today, she is showing just how resilient and strong she is.

At eight years old, Jamie moved with her family from Calgary, Alberta, to the Siksika Nation (also located in Alberta). Her parents felt Calgary was not a safe place anymore, as several kids were being kidnapped and other scary instances were occurring. They also left due to the racism that the family endured for many years.

Because she had been raised in Calgary, she found that adjusting

to some aspects of life on the reserve was challenging.

“I didn’t really fit in. I was told I was too white to be native, which made me confused because I did not realize the difference. There were students lighter than my skin tone,” she says. “I questioned myself, wondering if it was the way I spoke, which I think slightly set off my social anxiety. From then on, I preferred not being in big crowds.”

Struggling to fit into a new home was unfortunately just the beginning of a tumultuous string of events in Jamie’s young life.

“I really noticed it [my social anxiety] when I sobered up. I was an alcoholic from the age of about 15 to 27,” says Jamie.

Her alcoholism at such a young age became a coping mechanism stemming from several incomprehensible sexual assault

experiences Jamie had as a young child. This was another factor that led to her parents wanting to move away from the city.

“When I was in my early teens, early adulthood, I was drinking a lot,” she says. Jamie revealed that around this time, she was sexually abused by someone that she previously trusted. “That took a lot out of me. I became an even heavier drinker,” she says. “I would drink every day, and I would do anything to get that alcohol. I would steal money from my parents and my older siblings. I would even pawn stuff to get my alcohol.”

Jamie’s path became increasingly difficult as the alcoholism began to take hold of her life. Everything she did was influenced and driven by alcohol as she tried to drown out the hurt that she had experienced.

Then, things truly took a turn for the worst. At age 19, Jamie was sexually abused again; This time, by a different person she knew. This alone was beyond enough trauma for one person to endure in a lifetime, but tragedy, unfortunately, struck again.

At only 20 years old, she lost her then partner to a house fire. This unspeakable trauma added more fuel to the already overwhelming pain that Jamie was going through. Her addiction continued to spiral out of control around this time.

“That threw me into a very bad depression. I tried to take my own life multiple times and was not successful. I kept drinking to blackout all the time. I started doing hard drugs to relieve me from all of the demons in my head reminding me of everything that happened,” she says. “I was really mean towards the people that loved me, and I would always get drunk and blame the people I was around for my actions – and I didn’t like that.”

There was also an added layer to the struggles Jamie was facing. For as long as she could remember, her dad has been a Drug and Alcohol Addiction Counselor for Siksika Health & Wellness.

“He’s been in that career all of my life, so that’s why I was ashamed to reach out for help, because I let my parents down becoming an alcoholic and doing drugs. I didn’t feel like I wanted to be helped,” says Jamie. “I started praying and asking if he [God] could help me sober up. I kept praying and asking if he [God] could give me a reason to live. I prayed and begged for a daughter, and I promised that I would quit drinking, doing drugs, and smoking.”

With so many factors contributing to a low point in Jamie’s life, she suddenly faced a major positive turning point when she found out that she was pregnant. It was then that she became

sober and moved towards turning her life around.

After her daughter was born and with the moral support from her spouse, Jamie made the decision to take initiative to get off welfare and work towards a career. She also notes that during her newfound sobriety, she took on her sister’s two children, which is a huge responsibility and an incredibly selfless act.

“I was referred to the Siksika Employment and Training Services by my caseworker from the Siksika Family Services. I was scared because my educational background was not that great,” Jamie says. “I missed my first appointment due to my anxiety, but with a little push from my parents, I finally took that step to reschedule my Career Employment Counseling (CEC) appointment. They assessed me, and I figured out I would rather work than go back to school. So, after a few follow-up appointments, I was ready. She sent me out on a job search around Siksika and I found two jobs looking to hire me.”

This employment journey led her to seek secondary education at CDI College in Calgary where she received a Business Administration Certificate.

Now 35 years old with 7 children (2 of her own), Jamie is successful in her current position at Siksika Employment and Training Services. She is excited to be on her way to becoming a career counselor.

She works hard each day to keep going in the right direction not only for herself, but for her family and their future. She is so thankful for her partner; He is supportive of everything she does in order to help her stay grounded and focused.

“I was approached by multiple friends and family telling me that the way I hold myself up is something they wouldn’t be able to do. They would already be out partying,” Jamie says. “I tell them that it’s not my life anymore, it’s about my children’s lives. I live for my kids, and to help others see it is possible to become sober. It is a long and hard fight – but very rewarding. Also, to let them know that they’re better than they were the day before.”

Jamie has nothing but supportive advice for those who may be going through the same or similar struggles that she went through. She notes that even though she did not personally go to therapy or an addiction program, that a better life can be achieved through dedication, prayer, support, and patience.

“Keep trying, don’t give up on yourself,” says Jamie. “There are always hard days, you just have to take it one day at a time. There is help, you just need to seek it out.”

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ADDICTION IS A FAMILY DISEASE



The previous mentality surrounding addiction was that the person struggling had to suffer alone. Go to rehab, attend AA, then return to the family with the expectation that they have been “cured.” Fortunately, addicts and alcoholics now have access to specialized help like treatment facilities, counselling, mentoring programs, etc., but there’s one major aspect of the addict’s life that is still often ignored: their family.

Addiction is not usually a topic for the dinner table

Addiction is not the sort of thing most families talk about. Quaint remarks like “Oh, he drinks a little too much sometimes,” are often as far as the conversation goes. No one likes to acknowledge the alcoholic in the family who can turn a

gathering into a nightmare, but now that something can be done about it, families can feel safe talking about it and doing something about it.

The addict is not the only one that suffers from addiction. With everything society now knows about addiction and recovery, we can no longer ignore the impact the disease has on a family. Families do not escape unscathed from the addiction of a loved one. Anxiety, emotional pain, stress, fear, shame and guilt are emotions that are difficult enough to manage in our day to day lives, and all of those emotions and feelings can be magnified when we know someone we love is suffering.

Physical, mental, and emotional fatigue set in. We begin to lose sleep, and it all becomes overwhelming. The trust we once felt begins to erode, and loving relationships turn into bitter and resentful ones. This doesn't happen overnight; it tends to creep up on a family. Loved ones' ability to cope begins to fray at the edges. Many families are literally traumatized by addiction, and the damage doesn't just disappear because the addict sought help.

The addict's family needs help too.

We can no longer ignore the suffering that the entire family endures. The reality is that the addict's family needs to heal from the devastating and toxic effects of addiction — almost as much as the addict themselves. The rifts that have formed do not simply vanish. The family and the addict need to work together to understand and recover from what happened in order to once again enjoy life and each other.

The good news is that help for the family now exists. There are meetings family members can attend where they are educated about addiction and alcoholism and how to cope with a family member who's suffering. Al-Anon, Nar-Anon, and Family Anonymous are organizations that provide help and support to the families of addicts and alcoholics, and Aurora Recovery

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Since the inception of this program, families who have taken part are in awe of the quality of the program and what they have learned. Families have been exceptionally thankful that the program exists and for the clarity and peace of mind it brings. Understanding the addicted brain, what a healthy recovery looks like, and how it can be supported by the family brings peace of mind to everyone suffering.

As someone with his own history of addiction and recovery who has watched his family suffer from the ravages of his addiction 30 years ago, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of healing as a family. I wasn't afforded this opportunity. My family wasn't afforded this opportunity. Please don't let it slip by.

Article written by Gerry Verrier, Counsellor at Aurora Recovery Centre, and originally appeared on aurorarecoverycentre.com.



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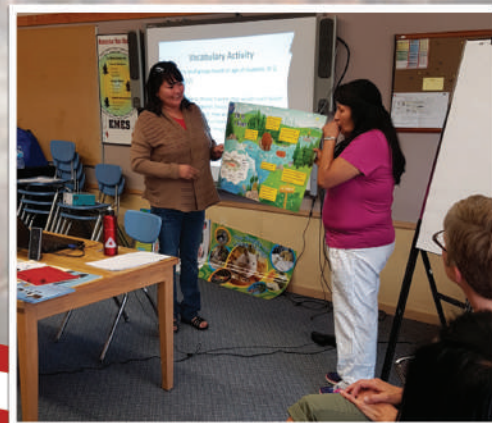
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THE UNDENIABLE SIGNS OF A HIGH-FUNCTIONING ADDICT

BY CELINA DAWDY



Picture an addict.

I'm sure it's a middle-aged man in a white, stained, sleeveless shirt with a 26-ounce in one hand and remote control in the other.

Is he overcome with unexplainable rage and, after a violent outburst, punched a hole in the wall?

Or perhaps you're imagining an unemployed couple with track marks and eye bags as they beg for their next hit. Maybe they'll have scabs on their face from methamphetamine use.

Are they acting erratically and 'tweaking'?

Media has pigeonholed the addict. We use our preconceived vi-

sion and stereotypes to justify when somebody takes their drug or alcohol use too far.

The last time you saw an addict – homeless and on the street – what did you think?

Did you sit back and wonder where their lives were before this moment? Did he have children? Where did she work before the world came crashing down?

Addicts have a starting point.

Addiction isn't one-size-fits-all.

Addiction is the result of a chronic brain disease, and it does not discriminate based on your race, career choice, gender or salary.

What seems to be harmless partying or occasional drug use can quickly evolve into something much more dangerous.

High-functioning addicts can be anywhere – and they defy the traditional stereotype of addiction.

According to Choices Recovery, a high functioning addict is “a person who can hide the severity of their addiction to the people close to them, often at tragic costs. A functioning addict can fulfil obligations while being addicted to drugs or alcohol. They can go to work, pay their bills and still handle living expenses, provide necessary care to their families, and stay away from criminal activities.”

Your doctor, your lawyer, your parents, or even YOU could be a high-functioning addict and not know it.

For example, cocaine is referred to as the “rich man’s drug” because it’s a difficult addiction to maintain on a low salary.

Your job title, living situation or the car you drive doesn’t define you as an addict. Your illusion of success doesn’t make you immune to addiction. Addiction is simply: “compulsive substance use” according to the American Psychiatric Association.

The first red flag is using good behaviour to justify the substance. “It’s been a long day, I can’t wait to have a beer when I get home,” or “I’m going to be here all night, I should do a line to help keep me awake.”

A functioning addict is typically able to maintain an appropriate level of productivity. However, as their addiction grows, they may lose the ability to balance their addiction with everyday life.

Six common characteristics of functioning addicts are:

Has a family history of addiction or mental illness
Well-educated

Uphold a stable, well-paying job

Has a supportive and loving family life
May suffer from major depression

A functioning addict may be of middle or high socioeconomic status. They may be able to responsibly attend extra-curricular activities, such as watching their child’s baseball games. Over time, an addict’s tolerance to a substance will increase, and they will need a more substantial amount to feel the effects.

Five signs of a high-functioning addict are:

Making excuses for their behaviour or becoming defensive about their substance use

Drinking or doing drugs more frequently than usual

Change in their social circle – If their friends suffer from addiction, they are at a higher risk

Ill or sickly in the mornings

Loss of interest in hobbies

Throughout all of the characteristics of each addict, one thing remains true: They are always looking for their next high. This mindset is extremely risky.

As the addiction grows and their ability to live a productive life weakens, they may begin to function less efficiently. Many addicts may suggest that they haven’t hit “rock-bottom”, so they don’t need help. Regardless of the circumstances, addiction is extremely detrimental to the mind, body, and soul.

Addiction is an extremely slippery, and dangerous, slope. However, the good news is: There’s room for recovery. Regardless of your situation, many resources can help an addict overcome their disease.

If you suspect somebody that you love is suffering from addiction, many treatment options can direct them to the road of recovery. Consider inpatient addiction treatment, detox programs, outpatient therapy, 12-step programs, aftercare programs, group therapy, family therapy or addiction counselling.

Early intervention can be extremely beneficial. By getting help early, an addict can avoid the complications of health problems, financial hurdles, and criminal activities.



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COOPER NORIEGA

BY SOS SAFETY MAGAZINE

Cooper Noriega was a popular online personality and model. His following was primarily on TikTok, with more than 1.8 million followers; he built that audience with lip-synching, comedy, and skateboarding videos. Cooper was very candid about his struggles with drug addiction, mental health, and sobriety; In January of 2021, he shared on Twitter.

"90 days clean!!! [It's] been hard, but so much beauty during this process, it's also crazy that [four] months ago [I] was at such a low point. I had a deadly overdose/ suicide attempt on fent[anyl] when I stopped breathing and was rushed to the ER. Luckily, someone found me before it was too late :)."

Cooper created a Discord as a community for people to discuss their mental health struggles. In a social media post, he shared his goals for both the Discord and the future;

"I would like to use my influence I've been giving to create a space built on spreading awareness and normalizing talking about mental illness. My goal is to eventually open a rehab center where people aren't traumatized at the end of their recovery and where the staff members are trusted, people."

"One of the many things I've learnt while struggling with addiction was that surrounding yourself with negative people will only bring you down."

"For that reason, this Discord is meant to bring us all together and create a safe space where people can vent and help others through their tough times."

However, like many stories about addiction things can take a turn very suddenly. Cooper, unfortunately will not be able to see the impacts he has made on many people's lives. Hours after posting a Tik Tok about dying young, Cooper was found dead in a parking lot in Burbank, California, on Thursday, June 9th, 2022. He was 19 years old. After an autopsy by the LA Medical Examiner, the cause of death is still undetermined. An outpouring of messages has come from the Tik Tok community. If you are struggling with addiction and substance abuse, you don't have to struggle alone.

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CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: SUPPORTING YOUTH PARTICIPATION

BY MICHELLE BYRNE

In 1989, Canada signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), pledging that all children, across Canada, would be treated fairly and with respect. This commitment affirmed that children's rights, including participation in decisions that impact them, protection from harm, and having their basic needs met, would be protected and upheld, so that every child could have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Celebrated every year on November 20, National Child Day is an opportunity to commemorate Canada's commitment to children's rights, while recognizing there is still more work to be done.

In the spring of 2012, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) became independent from the Alberta government. Since then, the OCYA has continued to uphold and advance children's rights, including by promoting National Child Day. This year's National Child Day theme is the right to participate, and Terri Pelton, Alberta's newly appointed Child and Youth Advocate, explains what this means to the OCYA.

"It is an opportunity to highlight that children and youth have rights, what those rights are, and to celebrate young people," says Pelton. "The right to participate is critical. Young people have told us that when they are part of the decision-making process, whether they get what they were hoping for, or not – the decision and outcome is better for them."

The OCYA and its provincial partners provide access to resources and learning opportunities for families, schools, childcare centres, and community organizations, which help build awareness of the rights of children and youth.

This commitment to the rights of young people is not only promoted externally but is also embodied throughout the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

"We started at a place of youth engagement, and we are moving towards youth participation," says Pelton.

"Our Youth Council started as a Youth Advisory Panel, and they now have greater control of their agenda, the consultation they provide to the office and to external stakeholders. I think words can mean a lot. Moving from an advisory panel to a council increased the significance of their role."

The language adults use impacts the way young people see the world and their place in it.

The OCYA is focused on positive, inclusive words that bring children and youth into their right to have a voice and to be heard.

"If we can help child-serving systems understand the importance of involving young people in the decisions that affect them, we can come to an agreement that works for everyone," says Pelton.

National Child Day is an annual reminder of the importance of children's rights and Canada's commitment to uphold them. The day encourages children and youth's perspectives to be represented in the systems that serve them.

"I am hopeful that we will see more young people in the office and participating in the work we do," Pelton says.

However, it can be difficult for youth to participate within systems that have been historically unwelcoming to them. Through National Child Day and other advocacy efforts, the OCYA encourages decision-makers to look at their structure from a youth lens. The OCYA also has a dedicated position focused on encouraging youth participation, which helps amplify young voices.

"When we shape policies that impact young people, we should be including them in the conversation, regardless of whether it is a ministry, community agency, or the OCYA," says Pelton.

With a youth-first perspective, the OCYA has incorporated National Child Day seamlessly into their work. The OCYA makes it a priority to have young people participate in the organization and the decisions that affect them.

For more information about National Child Day and the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, please visit nationalchildday.ca and ocya.alberta.ca.



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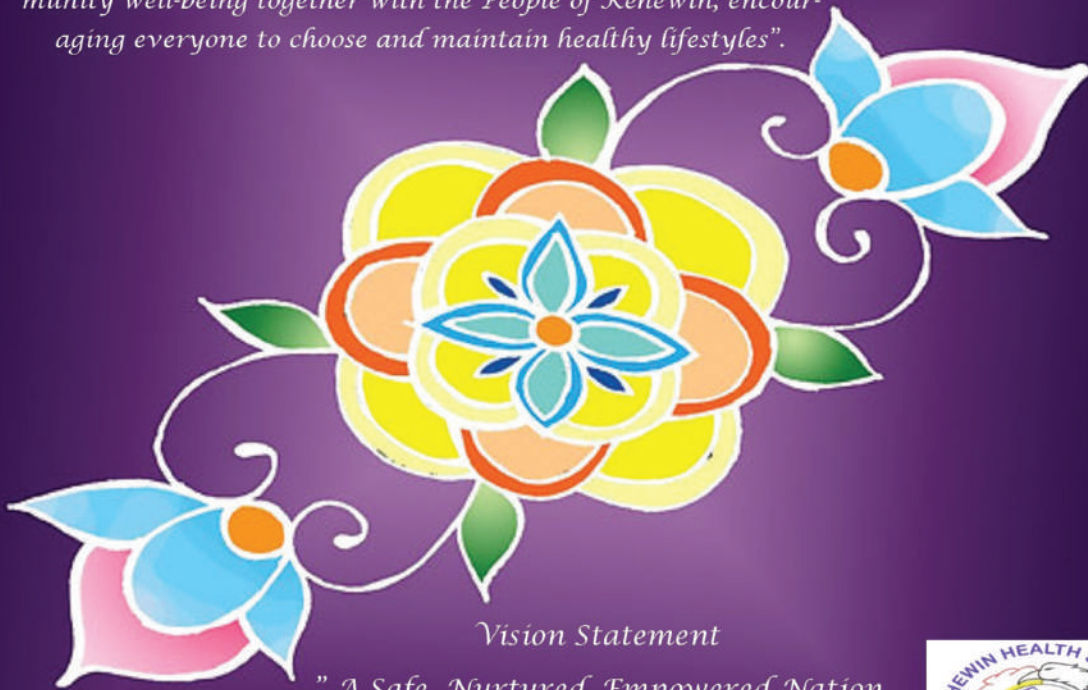
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ADDICTION: HOW TO OVERPOWER THIS CHRONIC ILLNESS

BY: LYNDA ARBON

Addiction is a very strong illness that one never truly defeats. However, even though it's a chronic issue you will deal with for the rest of your life, that doesn't mean it can't be overpowered and controlled.

Millions of people around the world live with addiction every day, but they control it rather than allowing it to control them. It's not easy, but if you're dedicated to living a sober life, it's very possible.

Even if you feel like addiction is in control now, know that you can overpower it by following these tips.

Understand Relapse Triggers and Addiction Cravings

The first thing you have to do is to arm yourself with knowledge about addiction. If you've already gone through rehab, you've likely worked on understanding triggers. If you haven't, you can begin your process of battling addiction by learning about them. Relapse triggers are anything that makes you crave drugs. Your brain associates these triggers with using drugs and getting high. For example, if you always do drugs with a specific person, seeing them or even hearing their name could be a potential trigger. Other triggers may include places, emotions, stress, or even a particular song. Anything can be a trigger.

Triggers often lead to cravings. When an addiction craving hits, you feel an actual physical need to use drugs. That's because your brain is releasing dopamine, a chemical that plays a key part in action-reward behaviour. This makes cravings incredibly difficult to control because your body feels like you must have drugs to feel good. The combination of triggers and cravings is what leads many people to relapse.

Recognize What Triggers You

One of the first things you must do in order to remain sober is to understand what your unique triggers are. Triggers won't be the same for everyone, so it's important that you start a list of everything that makes you want to do drugs. Remember that a trigger can be anything, so it's very important that you carefully analyze what made you feel the need to get high. Many addicts continue to find triggers years after they stopped using drugs, so don't be surprised if you don't make a comprehensive list right away. It's perfectly normal to discover triggers years later.

Have a Plan

Once you know your triggers, you can create a plan to help you

deal with them. If you know seeing a certain bar will make you want to drink, you can plan a route that avoids the location. You can find an alcohol-free drink that you enjoy to have at weddings, barbecues, and other events where you know alcohol will be served. You'll also want to have a plan for dealing with an unexpected trigger. This may be something as simple as calling a trusted friend to talk to or leaving the immediate area of whatever is triggering you.

Be Committed to Sobriety

Having a plan is no good if you're not committed to putting that plan into action and being sober. You've got to be fully, 100% committed to breaking your addiction for anything to work. If you're not, you'll eventually give in to your cravings. As a part of your plan to combat triggers, you may want to make a list of all of the reasons you want to be sober and carry it with you at all times. When you feel like giving it, pull out the list and read over it so you can see everything you'll lose if you relapse.

Accept that You'll Feel the Urge to Drink or Get High

You're going to feel the urge to use again. This is normal, and it doesn't mean that you're failing at sobriety or that you're a horrible person. It's simply something that will happen, and you need to accept that. Remember that the urge to do something is not the same as actually doing it. Most of the time, the urge will pass after about 15 minutes. Just hold out until it does or, if the urge doesn't seem to be passing, do your best to change your current situation (go somewhere else, call someone, etc.).

Be Patient

Overcoming your addiction isn't something you can do in a day, a week, a month, or even a full year. It's a long-term solution, and that means you need to be patient. Over time, your urges and cravings will become weaker, and you'll find yourself being able to handle them much more easily. They will still be there, but you won't feel as if you're about to be overpowered by them.

Think Rationally

You may reach a point where you find yourself wondering if you're really strong enough to beat your addiction. You may even think that you might as well go ahead and relapse since that seems like where things are going. When you find yourself having these thoughts, take a moment and pause everything. Listen to what you're telling yourself and why you're saying those things. Look at the root cause of why you feel like you should relapse and examine it to determine what it was really about. By doing so, you'll take some, if not all, of the emotion

out of it. That will make it easier to see all of the reasons why you shouldn't relapse.

Have Distractions Ready

If you have a craving or have been triggered and can't leave or avoid the situation, it's important to have a list of ways to distract yourself so you don't focus on the urge to relapse. This may be something as simple as taking a walk or reciting a mantra in your head. Anything that helps you remain positive about your sobriety and ignore the craving is helpful: exercise, talk to someone, clean, read, play a game on your phone, bake cookies or any other activity you enjoy.

Go to Relapse Prevention

As mentioned earlier, living a sober life isn't something that happens quickly. It takes a good amount of time, and you want to have support with you.

Still, if you are finding it difficult to get rid of your old routine, you can take the help of a structured sober living environment. Sober living homes are designed to assist people who are proactively looking to kick off their addiction completely. As they have experts who teach you how to live on your own and give you strategies to fight addiction.

Put in the Effort

Finally, none of the above tips will really work unless you put in the effort to make them work. You have to be a fully committed, active participant in your own treatment. No one else can end your addiction for you — you've got to want it, be committed to it, and work at it.

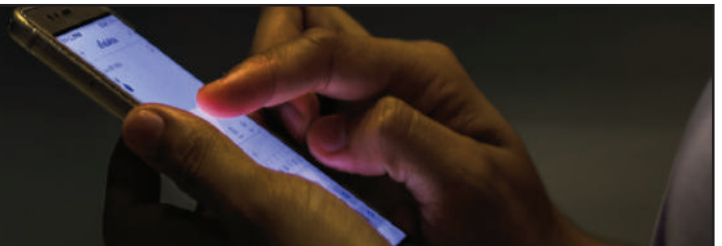


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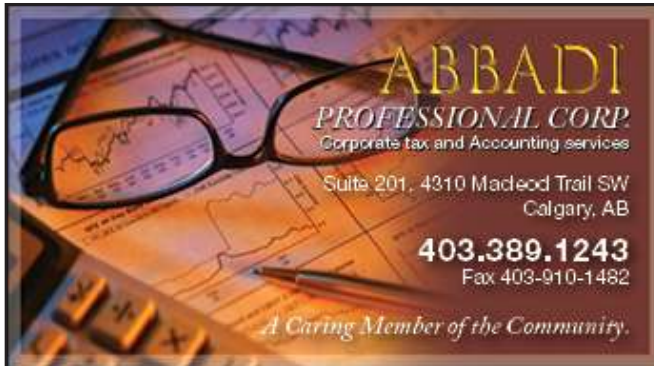
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DON'T BE FOOLED ABOUT FENTANYL



Green beans, apples, shady eighties, greenies or fake oxy are all making their rounds on the street, but do you know what's in them? Don't be fooled.

Fentanyl is often passed off as the new form of OxyContin and is about 100 times more toxic than morphine, heroin, or oxycodone.

In 2014 alone, there were more than 100 deaths in Alberta, associated with Fentanyl. From January 1, 2015, to September 30, 2015, there had been 213 Albertan deaths associated with fentanyl. In a number of those deaths, the people had many other drugs in their blood as well, including medicine used for animals.

Fact is: you never really know what you're getting, no matter what you buy, fentanyl may be hiding in the drugs you're using, and it can kill you.

Fentanyl is a strong medicine made from opioids (chemicals used to treat sudden and ongoing pain), however, on the street fentanyl is often mixed with other drugs and sold as fake oxycodone. Buyers may think they're getting oxycodone or another drug, but they're getting another opioid drug that has fentanyl and other substances in it.

People take prescription fentanyl to help with pain (e.g., from cancer) that another medicine has not been able to help with. Others may use it to get high or to help with sleep. Only medications prescribed by a doctor are safe when following your doctor's directions and taking the recommended dose. Drugs bought on the street are never safe.

Talk To Your Kids About Drugs

Here are a few other tips that might be helpful to talk to your kids about drugs:

Stay calm. Remember, you are the parent and you are in charge.

Try speaking to your child side by side instead of face to face; it may seem less threatening that way.

Use facts, not emotions, and avoid saying everything all at once. Less is more!

Use the news. Fortunately (or unfortunately) there is no shortage of stories about drugs on TV, the newspaper, or the internet? Need proof?

Just type in “drug stories” on your favourite search engine and see how many hits you get. Use stories, current events, or discussions on school life as an opportunity to ask them for their opinion on it. “What did you think about that?” might be one way to open up the discussion.

Be a good listener. Give them room to participate and ask questions. Respect their opinion.

Don’t preach. Kids are more likely to be turned off the message if they think you’re preaching from the pulpit.

Remember to tell your child that you love them and you’re concerned about them.

And finally, you will have this discussion many times. Mini-conversations are better than long boring ones!

Fentanyl may be hiding in the drugs you’re using. You won’t see it, smell it or taste it, but it can kill you. If you’re going to use, don’t use alone. And, get Naloxone.



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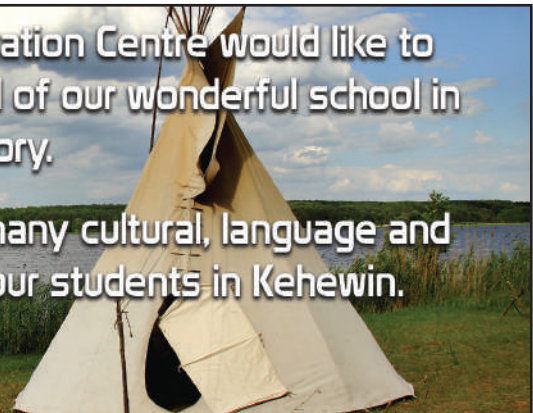
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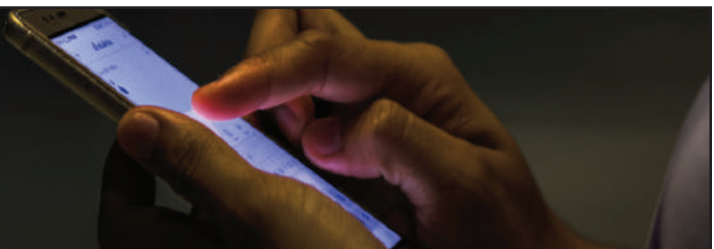
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