

# From Grief to Action



## Coping Kit

Dealing with Addiction  
in Your Family



# FROM GRIEF TO ACTION

From Grief to Action is a volunteer-based not-for-profit association working to improve the lives of young people with substance use disorders and their families and friends.

From Grief to Action (FGTA) promotes recognition of drug addiction as a health issue and, for anyone with a substance use disorder, supports a comprehensive continuum of care including harm reduction, treatment, and recovery, in order that they may achieve and maintain healthy, productive lives.

Through PARENTS FOREVER, our self-help group, we offer regular, ongoing support for parents and family members dealing with the day-to-day challenges of having a child or loved one with a substance use disorder. Without giving direction or passing judgment, we share our experiences, offer understanding and caring, and provide support whenever it is needed. By focusing on issues such as supporting while maintaining good boundaries, and by sharing information on treatment options, we learn to take care of ourselves, and, most importantly, find ways to maintain a relationship with our loved ones. To learn more: [www.fromgriefftoaction.com/current-issues/public-policy-initiatives/family-support/free-resources-form/](http://www.fromgriefftoaction.com/current-issues/public-policy-initiatives/family-support/free-resources-form/)

FGTA also works to raise public awareness. In addition to writing letters and articles, appearing on talk shows, organizing public forums, providing speakers for group or public events, and working with schools and professionals on drug use education and prevention, our society produces educational materials.

## OUR VISION

Providing hope and support, resources and respect to families and friends affected by drug use.

## OUR MISSION

From Grief to Action is a volunteer-based not-for-profit association in British Columbia. We are a voice and a support network for families and friends affected by drug use.

## PURPOSES OF THE SOCIETY

- To promote recognition of drug use as a health issue.
- To raise public awareness of the needs and concerns of drug users and their families, and work towards overcoming stereotypes and marginalization.
- To provide and promote support for families and friends of drug users.
- To promote effective educational programs designed to prevent drug abuse.
- To promote and work towards the establishment of a comprehensive continuum of care for drug users which meets their needs for harm reduction, detoxification, treatment, and recovery, in order that they may achieve and maintain healthy, productive lives.

Other publications available from the website of FGTA:

- *Here to Help: Caring for Yourself and Other Family Members*
  - Provides information on how a loved one's mental illness and/or substance use can impact the family and provides suggestions for coping.
- *Parents in Action: A Guide for Setting-up and Running a Support Group*
- *Patients Helping Patients Understand Opioid Substitution Treatment*
- *Vancouver Coastal Health Mental Health and Addictions Family Involvement Policy*
  - Applies to all Vancouver Coastal Health/Providence Health Care mental health and addiction services, programs, and units, and provides a framework for family involvement in the care of their loved ones.

Additional support resources, including relevant journal articles, films, disability pension options, and tools from other organizations around the world, can be found under "Support Information" on the FGTA website.

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Fourth edition

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[www.fgta.ca](http://www.fgta.ca)

**DISCLAIMER:** No one should rely upon any part of this kit as a substitute for current advice from a physician or lawyer.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From Grief to Action is grateful to the Government of British Columbia, the United Way of the Lower Mainland, the Christmas Family Ball Society and the Moffat Family Foundation for funding the creation and first printing of the Coping Kit.

It is our hope that this resource has proven beneficial to many BC families struggling with the problems associated with a substance use disorder.

We also wish to thank the many professionals working in this field for their ongoing understanding and support, especially Tony Trimmingham of Family Drug Support (New South Wales, Australia), who produced a similar guide which gave us inspiration. We also thank the BC Centre on Substance Use, Canadian Mental Health Association—British Columbia Division, and Pivot Legal Society for their support in revising this updated version.

Most of all we thank those who are using their own experience to assist others struggling with their drug- related family issues and who have so generously shared their hard-earned wisdom and experience in the development of this coping kit for British Columbia.

### Funding sources for the Coping Kit

2001–2007 (first edition)

Ministry of Community Development, Government of British Columbia; The United Way of the Lower Mainland; The Christmas Family Ball Society; The Moffat Family Foundation; Driving to Make a Difference

2013 (second edition)

Mental Health Promotion & Mental Illness Prevention, Ministry of Health, Government of British Columbia

2018 (fourth)

Thank-you to our partners for assisting us in updating the Coping Kit for province-wide distribution

- The Canadian Mental Health Association—British Columbia Division - for covering the printing costs.
- The BC Centre on Substance Use – for providing staff and expertise in assisting us to update the content.
- The Pivot Legal Society – for updating the criminal justice section.
- Martland & Saulnier Criminal Defence Counsel—for their assistance in updating the criminal justice section related to young people.

We encourage our partners to help distribute the Coping Kit.

A digital version can be accessed on our website:

<https://www.fromgriefftoaction.com/current-issues/public-policy-initiatives/family-support/free-resources-form/>

A paper copy can be ordered through our contact page:

<https://www.fromgriefftoaction.com/contact/general-contact/>

## BC CENTRE ON SUBSTANCE USE

The BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) is a provincially networked resource with a mandate to develop, implement and evaluate evidence-based approaches to substance use and addiction. The BCCSU's focus is on three strategic areas including research and evaluation, education and training, and clinical care guidance. With the support of the province of British Columbia, the BCCSU aims to help establish world leading educational, research and public health, and clinical practices across the spectrum of substance use. Although physically located in Vancouver, the BCCSU is a provincially networked resource for researchers, educators, and care providers as well as people who use substances, family advocates, support groups, and the recovery community.

## CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION—BC DIVISION

Founded in 1918, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a national charity that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians. As the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health, CMHA promotes the mental health of all and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness.

In BC, mental health, substance use, and addictive behaviour behavior have been within the scope of the organization since 2005. The CMHA is comprised of 14 branches and a provincial division. To learn more about CMHA BC Division, visit: [www.cmha.bc.ca](http://www.cmha.bc.ca). To contact a branch in your community, click on "Find a CMHA branch serving your community" in the top web bar. CMHA in BC provides a wide range of innovative services and supports tailored to and in partnership with a broad base of stakeholders. Mental health begins where you live, learn, work, and play.

### *We take a person-centered approach*

The *Framework for Support* is the central philosophy guiding our activities. This philosophy holds that the person with the lived experience is at the centre of any supportive health system. The goal of the *Framework* is to ensure that people experiencing mental illnesses and/or an addiction live fulfilling lives in the community.

Through their family of over 100 local, provincial, and national locations across Canada, CMHA provides a wide range of innovative services and supports tailored to and in partnership with our communities. Mental health begins where you live, learn, work and play. Together, we are making a difference.

## PIVOT LEGAL SOCIETY

Pivot Legal Society is a human rights organization located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Pivot's mandate is to use the law to address the root causes of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. Pivot's work is based on the philosophy that the law should be a tool that guarantees and protects the human rights of everyone, regardless of income, ability, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, occupation, or social condition. Pivot is currently working in four major focus areas; homelessness, police accountability, drug policy, and sex workers' rights.

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When From Grief to Action 's (FGTA) founding members first got together, it was for mutual support. Were we in some way responsible for our children's drug use and/or addictions? What could we do to help them? And what could we do to help ourselves?

After much soul searching, research, and consultation with professionals working in the field, we decided to take action. Only concerted effort could bring about an educated public and a better network of needed services in BC. We resolved to speak out on our own behalf and that of families like ours.

Equipped with information and effective support, families can and do develop management and coping skills which enable them to face those challenges head on and to rebuild and strengthen family relationships.

The road to recovery may be long and arduous, with many unexpected twists and turns, but with enough information and support, families can work their way through to a brighter future.

## *WHO THIS KIT IS FOR*

This resource kit focuses on questions, issues, and practical problems faced by parents, guardians, and loved ones of people who use drugs. Whether you have a child or loved one who is just beginning to experiment with drugs or one who has developed an addiction (also called substance use disorder), this kit should be of value to you. This kit was primarily written by parents of young people. Although there is a focus on young people and information relevant to supporting them, it is hoped that this kit will be helpful for any family member or loved one who picks it up.

## *HOW TO USE THIS KIT*

This kit is designed to be absorbed in short, manageable chunks. The headings are self-explanatory, providing a brief road map to issues commonly faced by family members dealing with addiction and substance use disorders.

Because individual circumstances influence the complex or difficult problems associated with substance use, the kit does not pretend to provide definitive answers to these problems. Instead, it offers a summary of ideas and information which has proved helpful to families with drug-using members.

As you use this kit, bear in mind that when it comes to drugs and their impacts, information varies widely, and can be conflicting. This kit contains the most up-to-date and evidence-based information available on alcohol and other drugs, their impacts, treatment, and harm reduction options. FGTA recommends seeking advice from qualified professionals before embarking on a plan of action.



## A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

The language we use to talk about alcohol and other drug use and addiction has changed a lot in a relatively short time. As researchers, the medical community, and those impacted by addiction have begun to understand more about drug use as a health issue, our language has shifted to reflect those new, more nuanced understandings. Some terms or phrases may be new to you, while others may be words you've heard and used before. This kind of language is sometimes called "person-first language", as it recognizes the humanity of people who use drugs and doesn't define a person based on one behaviour or medical disorder. Using this type of language has been shown to reduce stigma and improve people's ability to see themselves as having a health issue and seeking treatment for it. Below you will find a list of words you might be familiar with and a list of words that are now preferred by most people.

<b>Older Term</b>	<b>New, Preferred Term</b>
Addict, junkie	Person with a substance use disorder
Alcoholic	Person with alcohol use disorder
Drug problem, drug habit	Substance use disorder
Drug abuse	Problematic substance use
Drug abuser	Person with substance use disorder
Drug user, User	Person who uses drugs (or people who use drugs)
Clean, Straight (of a person)	Abstinent, not actively using
Clean (of a needle or syringe)	Sterile
Clean (of urine drug screen result)	Negative
Dirty (of urine drug screen result)	Positive
Former/reformed addict/alcohol	Person in recovery, person in long-term recovery
Methadone maintenance	Opioid agonist treatment (or OAT)