

To our wonderful VSB parents and caregivers of teens.

2016 has been a challenging year in Vancouver, in North America, and across the world...and teens are not immune to the stress. Add the normal, but sometimes intense, pressures to fit in socially, manage school, homework, extracurricular activities and family expectations, and some of our youth really need to recharge.

What does reducing stress mean to teens? To adults? To families?

This can be a topic of conversation as a family. Are there activities where we forget the stresses and pressures that face us? Individually, what do each of us like to do that makes us laugh? Can we support each other in taking that time to let go, and take care of our mental health? What specifically could we do to help?

Holidays can bring stresses of their own. It can help to go into the season with a plan to support each other.

A few things we might remember are:

- **Friendships in adolescence are a key safety valve.** Time to hang out and goof around, being silly with friends in ways adults don't "get" can be a real stress relief for teens. *If you rarely give your teen permission to see friends, maybe this is a time to allow a little more.*
- **Time with family is grounding and reconnecting for youth.** It strengthens relationships that might feel frayed by day-to-day tensions. Eat popcorn and watch Netflix (The Marvel franchise? A K-pop weekend? A Bollywood retrospective?). Go tubing at Seymour. Offer a surprise midnight feast. *If your teen rarely participates in family time, keep encouraging it. Let them choose what you do.*
- **Teens like and need to see their caregivers happy.** It reassures them that you are doing well as they grow up, and it reassures them about their own looming adulthood. *What are you doing for yourself that feels good? What helps you feel more light-hearted?*

Finally, parties and celebrations over the season can bring additional risks for youth who are curious about, or who experiment with substances. If your teen attends parties, have a few open conversations with them. Whatever your own values, recognize that they face choices when they are away from you. Let them know your concerns are for their health and safety.

Among the guidelines you offer and limits you set, consider having a frank conversation with your teens about the risks of trying pills or powders. At this time in Vancouver, the risk of any pill or powder being contaminated with fentanyl is high. Can our teens agree this is not a good time to think about that kind of experimentation?

We do not, however, want to imply that it is ok to experiment with other substances (any substance use, including alcohol and weed, is risky for teens and not recommended.) But sticking to your topic of pills and powders, can they agree not to use them this year? (more information at www.vsb.bc.ca/SACY)

Please remember that the majority of youth in Vancouver do not use any substances at all.

(http://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/From_Hastings_Street_To_Haida_Gwaii.pdf) Having those open conversations can keep youth thinking about all the good reasons they don't use. Check out "25 healthy ways to feel better" (<http://www.dafacts.com/25-healthy-ways-to-feel-better/>) for just 25 of the hundreds of healthy skills families and youth use every day to sustain their mental health. *Enjoy your holiday together!*



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