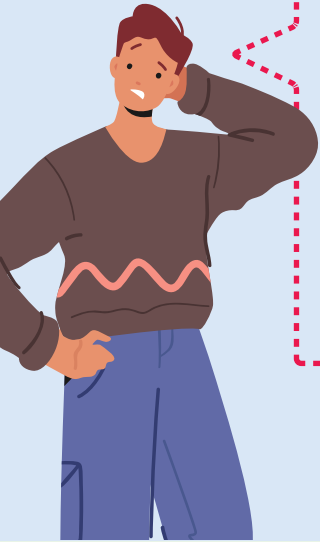




## Harm reduction: myth vs. reality

### **✗ Myth**

Harm reduction encourages young people to use substances and makes it okay to engage in risky behaviour.



### **✓ Reality:**

Harm reduction doesn't encourage substance use or judge choices. It gives young people:

- Access to information.
- Skills and strategies for safer practices.
- Greater awareness to minimize harms.
- Supports, healthcare services, and treatment.



### **✗ Myth**

Harm reduction isn't needed for legalized substances because they aren't harmful.



### **✓ Reality:**

Substances – legal and illegal – can have a negative impact on health and well-being. Harm reduction helps young people understand the effects of all substances.





**Some helpful resources:**

- [Drinking less is better](#)
- [Alcohol](#)
- [Tobacco behind the smoke](#)
- [the Blunt Truth](#)
- [Vaping the mechanics](#)

**Looking for guidance on speaking with young people about substance use?**

- [Tips for talking about substance use](#)
- [Talking with your teen about vaping](#)
- [Talking to youth about cannabis vaping](#)
- [Help your teen understand what's fact and fiction about marijuana](#)

**✗ Myth**

Harm reduction prevents abstinence and recovery.

**✓ Reality:**

Harm reduction isn't against abstinence – in fact, it can include abstinence as a goal. It's a complementary approach to reduce harms for those who choose to use substances.

- Some young people aren't willing or able to stop using substances, but they can use harm reduction practices to stay safer.
- Young people have different reasons and motivations for using substances. Abstinence doesn't work for everyone. Some are ready for change and some may not be.
- Harm reduction can help young people use substances less often.



For more information see [Harm reduction and young people: Reducing substance related harms](#) or visit our [Substance use and addictions webpage](#).

## References

Canadian Mental Health Association. (n.d.). [Harm reduction](#).

Winer, J. M., Yule, A. M., Hadland, S. E., & Bagley, S. M. (2022). [Addressing adolescent substance use with a public health prevention framework: The case for harm reduction](#). *Annals of Medicine*, 54(1), 2123–2136.