Over 500 people in the Province of British Columbia have died as a result of drug overdoses since the beginning of this year. A majority of these were associated with a substance called fentanyl. Most of these individuals did not realize the drug they were using contained fentanyl. The impact on the families and friends of these people has been devastating and irreparable.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid narcotic which is 100 times more toxic than morphine. It is a prescription drug primarily used to manage extreme pain. Extremely small amounts of fentanyl (up to 2 milligrams, the size of a grain or two of salt) can cause breathing to slow down and can lead to brain injury or even death. In the illegal drug trade, illicitly manufactured fentanyl is added or substituted into other drugs such as heroin, oxycodone, cocaine and other drugs. It is most often cut into powder, or pill form. You can't see, smell, or taste it. There is no way for people to know if or how much fentanyl may be in the drug they are about to consume.

Overdoses do not discriminate. Children by nature are curious and teens in particular are willing to take risks, including drug use. This holds true for teens across the spectrum of socioeconomic, cultural or religious backgrounds. Please don't assume that your teen has not used or is not thinking about drugs. The best option is to start a conversation.

Please talk to your children. Evidence shows that teens who have supportive relationships with adults (family members, teachers or professionals) have a lower tendency to use drugs. Supporting teens means being open and honest and listening to what they have to say. Talk to them about the things that are important to them in their life (such as family, friends, school, sports, art) and how these activities might be affected by drugs. Make sure they know they can come to you if they need help.

Thank you.