Harm Reduction for Substance Use

According to the Harm Reduction Coalition, harm reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use.

Here are some considerations for harm reduction:

- Get rest.
  - When a body is tired and overworked, it's at higher risk for adverse health experiences.
- Avoid dehydration and malnourishment.
  - Drink plenty of water.
  - Before use, consume a nutritious meal.
  - Take vitamins to replace those lost through use. Always consult with a physician about what vitamin regimen is best.
- Maintain hygiene.
  - Shower and wash hands regularly. Soap and water are preferred but when access to this is limited, utilize hand sanitizer.
  - If using substances intravenously (IV), ensure injection sites are cleaned use to avoid infection.
  - Brush teeth with toothbrush and toothpaste.
- Utilize safer injecting supplies (such as sterile injecting equipment).
- Have access to Naloxone.
  - This can be obtained at many pharmacies and reverses the effects of opiate drugs. For more information, view our Naloxone HelpSheet.
- When available, utilize drug testing kits to ensure the substance being used is what the consumer believes it to be.
  - Substances can often times be cut or laced with other substances.
- Have a safety contact person that can be reached if additional help or support is needed.
  - If there is not a person like this to help support, help is available 24/7 by calling 211. If there is a medical emergency, call 911.
- Do not use substances when alone in the home.
  - If an overdose should happen to occur due to opioid use, it's important someone is there to administer Naloxone and call 911.
- Because substance use can sometimes lead to higher risk sexual behavior, maintain access to condoms.

Community resources to help support:

- There are resources that may be able to assist with housing, food and other basic need services in the community. To get connected with these services, call the Helpline Center at 211.
- Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) is the use of medications, in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies, to provide a "whole-patient" approach to the treatment of substance use disorders (SUD). For more information, view our MAT HelpSheet.
- Schedule preventative health care screening such as yearly doctor visits and routine dental check-ups. The Helpline Center's Health Navigator may be able to assist with this process.
- If it is decided that a lifestyle change is wanted, help is available 24/7 by calling the SD Resource Hotline at 800-920-4343.

Sources:

- National Harm Reduction Coalition
- United States Interagency Council on Homelessness

Disclaimer: This HelpSheet is developed by the Helpline Center. HelpSheets provide a brief overview of the designated topic. For more information, call 211 or text your zip code to 898211.

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