



family matters: overdose and its social context

An Infographic Presenting Findings from the
Fraser East Overdose Response (FEOR) Research Project



Helping + Healing

Significant Relationships

- Family
- Peers
- Community
- Personal God

Beliefs and Values

- Acceptance
- Personal Philosophies
- Self Reliance

Positive Experiences

- Helping
- Recovery
- Knowledge

Professional Supports

- Groups
- Counselling
- System
- Key Ally



Stressors

Experiences

- Close contact with the impacts of substance use
- Negative System Interactions
- Strained Relationships
- Personal Harm (trauma, abuse housing insecurity, relapse)
- Competing Life Stressors

Feelings and Perceptions

- Feeling Alone
- Feeling Used
- Overwhelming Pain
- Moral Distress
- Shame and Stigma
- Exhaustion
- Denial
- Disappointed Hopes
- Uncertainty
- Guilt

SOMETIMES STRESSORS CAN LEAD INTO HEALING



Crisis Points

MOST OFTEN STRESSORS LEAD INTO CRISIS

Broken Relationships

Isolation

Withdrawal of Support

Homelessness

DEATH

Burnout

Sickness

Relapse

Giving Up

Paralysis



Tracy, 52

Jake's Mom,
home support
worker



Glen, 56

Jake's Dad,
commercial truck
driver



Jonathan, 28

Jake's Cousin,
in recovery
with occasional
relapse



Jessica, 21

Jake's Sister,
attending local
college



Charis, 27

Jake's Girlfriend,
dog groomer



Jake, 26

**construction labourer,
uses drugs**



Jace, 26

Jake's Friend
from childhood,
in recovery

MOTHER

FATHER

COUSIN

SISTER

GIRLFRIEND

FRIEND

Six Degrees of Jake

This graphic represents some of the social network of Jake, a young man at risk of overdose. The story presents a compilation of circumstances and events with de-identified quotes collected during the FEOR research project. For more information, see the back cover of this booklet.

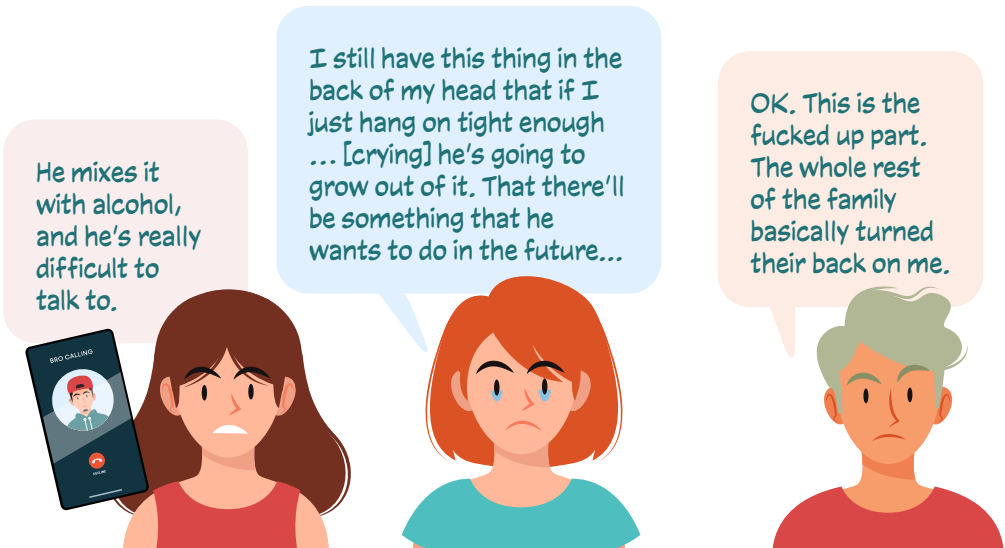
! *Note: Jake's is just one potential story out of many, and trajectories surrounding substance use are varied. Additionally, some of the content might be triggering for those with experience of the impacts of substance use.*

Buildup of Stressors

Relationships intact but under increasing strain



Jake is living at home and working steadily. His drug use raises tensions with his parents. As a result, Tracy and Glen's relationship becomes strained. One night, Jake punches a hole in the wall during argument with Glen. Neighbours call the police. Jessica blocks Jake on her phone and spends more time away from home. Eventually, Jake moves out.



Temporary Relief

Stressors impact more relationships

Quite honestly, the biggest relief, even though I knew it was going to be a disaster, was when he moved out. It was likely going to be a bad scene and quite possibly he could die but I wouldn't have to watch it and I wouldn't be in charge of it.

His own sister won't even talk to him because she has just had it up to - she can't deal with it anymore. She wants him to get his shit together. She acts like she's angry at him... She's not angry, she's scared for his life.

If he doesn't answer his phone for a day, you know, you're automatically afraid.



Jake moves in with his girlfriend Charis, easing his parents' burden. He is no longer talking with his sister, and he is increasingly distanced from his longer-term friends, including Jace. His drug use increases, and he experiences his first overdose. Charis and Jonathan find him in the bathroom. Charis issues an ultimatum for Jake to go into recovery, and they break up.

I'm always worried he's not going to come out of it. The situation itself is really unsafe.



You want to be with them, you want to make sure they're OK. But sometimes you have to step back and let them do their thing until they're ready to receive some constructive help or input.



Rapid Deterioration

Increasing chaos and harm



He was found with very few clothes on, strung out in my parents' basement because they had taken him in AGAIN. I mean... You call 911 and sit there and watch, while you don't know if they're going to live or die. That fucks with a person's head. Talk about a traumatized parent, right?



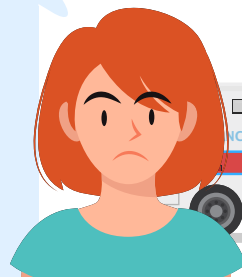
Single and no longer employed, Jake moves back home where he experiences his second overdose. Jessica finds him in the bathroom and calls 911. Then Jake begins stealing money and jewellery from the house, and verbal abuse escalates. Glen finds him in the basement after a third overdose. A violent fight occurs in the home, and Jake is kicked out.

You can't navigate drug use and the chaos that brings. The distrust and the dishonesty and the theft and the manipulation and the—you can't navigate that!

The phone rings, that's my initial thought - is this it?



He started stealing everything under the sun out of the house... And he started getting violent. That's when everything just went really bad really fast.



Isolation + Death

Ruptured relationships, uncertainty, guilt, shame, paralysis

I really did try to help him during the time I was around him. It was really hard to be around that, especially once I stopped using.



My first instinct is to take him home and feed him, let him sleep over and do the laundry, but... I can't do that. I have to be realistic about things.



At this point I'm so consumed with my kid, **I don't know how to help.**

Jake is now homeless. He only has intermittent contact with Tracy and Jonathan, and they believe he is couch surfing with his "drug friends," but they can't be sure. Glen views more support as enabling and putting the safety of the home at risk. In a short time, Jake is found dead in a house with an unknown companion, also deceased.

1996-
2022

I would have been a lot more understanding... I would have been less demanding of him. If I would have been more open about his drug use then he could have used safely, or found some help ... He might still be here. Maybe it's just me wishful thinking - but I think that he would have come around ...

I don't think Jake's parents stopped loving him, but they could no longer endure directly supporting him and that rejection or whatever, I think had a deep and harsh impact on him.



Project Background

Since 2018, the Family Matters Project, supported by UBC's Centre for Health Evaluation and Outcome Sciences,* has been researching factors that keep hidden populations at risk of overdose in the Fraser East. We have found that loved ones play an important role in the risks and outcomes for overdose among people who use drugs in the Fraser East. Both people who use drugs and their loved ones agree that relationships can be both helpful and harmful when it comes to risks from overdose. Lack of support and understanding can make it hard to navigate stress, strains, and crisis points in their relationships that can sometimes come with drug use and addiction. Without this understanding and support, loved ones can pull away, and risks for overdose due to using alone can increase. People who use drugs, and people who love them, need and deserve compassion and service to help avoid these risks.

This booklet reflects findings from an inquiry into stressors experienced by carers that can lead to points of crisis in the supportive relationship. The scenario included here represents a compilation of multiple experiences detailed by research participants. The stories shared during interviews are individual and varied, and the story contained herein represents only one fictionalized example. Furthermore, one story can highlight only some of the many stressors detailed by research participants. Quotes are de-identified and taken from research interviews, and while they have been very lightly edited for clarity, the nature of the role and relationship represented remain intact.

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