Sigma Nu Fraternity

EXCELLING WITH HONOR

Cocaine: It Drains Your Brain Discussion Guide

The following discussion guide is based on information from the Drug Enforcement Agency and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's *Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit*.

Show participants the Cocaine: It Drains Your Brain poster.

Discussion question: What is cocaine, and how is it used?
Solicit a few participant responses, then share the following, if not already mentioned:

- Cocaine is a powerfully addictive stimulant drug made from the leaves of the coca plant native to South America.
- People snort cocaine powder through their nose, rub it into their gums, dissolve it in water and inject it, or smoke it in the form of crack cocaine.
- Cocaine increases the level of the natural chemical messenger *dopamine* in brain circuits that control pleasure and movement. This flood of dopamine ultimately disrupts normal brain communication and causes cocaine's high.

Discussion question: How does a cocaine overdose occur?
Solicit a few participant responses, then share the following, if not already mentioned:

- An overdose occurs when a person uses too much of a drug and has a toxic reaction that results in serious, harmful symptoms or death. An overdose can be intentional or unintentional.
- Death from an overdose can occur on the first use of cocaine or unexpectedly thereafter.
- Cocaine can be cut with Fentanyl*, and individuals can be exposed to it without their knowledge. Fentanyl's high potency suggests that even low doses can stop breathing and significantly increase the risk of a fatal overdose.
- Some of the most frequent and severe health consequences leading to an overdose involve the heart and blood vessels, including irregular heart rhythm and heart attacks, and the nerves, including seizures and strokes.

Discussion question: What are the side effects of using cocaine?
Solicit a few participant responses, then share the following, if not already mentioned:

Short-term effects
constricted blood vessels
nausea
faster heartbeat
seizures
paranoia/irritability

Long-term effects
chronic nosebleeds
malnourishment
unrelenting headaches
erratic behavior
decreased sexual function

Discussion question: How does cocaine use lead to addiction

Solicit a few participant responses, then share the following, if not already mentioned:

As with other drugs, repeated use of cocaine can cause long-term changes in the brain's reward circuit and other systems, which may lead to addiction. The reward circuit eventually adapts to the excess dopamine brought on by the drug. As a result, people take stronger and more frequent doses to achieve the same high and feel relief from initial withdrawal.

Treatment and Recovery

Depending on the level of use or addiction, there are various forms of treatment and recovery methods available to assist individuals. If you or someone you know is struggling with cocaine or other drug addiction, please consider visiting your campus wellness office or counseling center.

To search other options in your area, visit *www.drugabuse.com* or call their toll-free hotline at *(877) 969-2063.*

*What is fentanyl?

Solicit a few participant responses, then share the following, if not already mentioned:

Fentanyl (classified as a Schedule II controlled substance) is a potent synthetic opioid that is used medically for pain management, particularly in cases of severe pain. However, it is now being illegally manufactured by drug cartels and used to contaminate the illicit drug supply. It is significantly more powerful than other opioids, such as morphine and heroin, with an estimated potency 50 to 100 times greater than morphine. Like other opioid drugs, it can also act in the brainstem to slow or stop breathing.

Fentanyl's high potency means that even a very small amount can cause an overdose.

- Illicitly manufactured fentanyl has become a major public health concern due to its potency and the high risk of overdose. Because drug cartels mix fentanyl into other substances, such as heroin, cocaine, and counterfeit medications, individuals using these substances may become exposed to fentanyl without their knowledge. Fentanyl's high potency suggests that even low doses can stop breathing and significantly increase the risk of a fatal overdose.
- Symptoms of fentanyl overdose include severe drowsiness, slow or shallow breathing, pinpoint pupils, cold and clammy skin, and loss of consciousness. Naloxone (Narcan®) can reverse the effects of fentanyl overdose if administered promptly. However, due to fentanyl's potency, multiple doses of naloxone may be necessary.

Responding to an Overdose

If you think someone has overdosed, it's crucial to act quickly and calmly. Use the following steps:

1. ***Check Responsiveness and Ask Questions:***
    - If responsive, ask the person: "Are you OK?" "Have you been drinking or taking anything?" "What drugs or medications have you taken?" Look around for different substances or drug paraphernalia.
    - If they don't respond, check for signs of breathing and a pulse. Try to wake them by calling their name or shaking them gently.
2. ***Call 9-1-1***
    - Follow the instructions provided by the 9-1-1 operator.
3. **Perform CPR (if necessary):**
    - If the person is not breathing or has no pulse, begin CPR immediately. Push hard and fast in the center of the chest until emergency help arrives. If you're trained in rescue breathing, you can incorporate it, but chest compressions are the priority.

4. **Position the Person:**
    - If the person is breathing but not fully awake, place them in the recovery position (place individual on their left side with their arms under their head, bending their right leg to prevent them from rolling onto their stomach).
    - The recovery position is designed to prevent suffocation if the individual vomits.
5. **Stay with the individual until help arrives.**

Concluding discussion question: How can we foster a campus culture where students look out for one another and share resources if they encounter a student contemplating the use of cocaine?