

Understanding Psychostimulants, Opioids, and the Brain

How We Talk About Addiction Matters

- Stigma causes shame and avoidance; avoid stigmatizing language
- Use person-first language: say “person with a substance use disorder” instead of “addict”
- Policies, laws, and behaviors all influence stigma
- Use social media to educate, not shame

Anti-Stigma Toolkit:

- Speak out
- Treat with dignity
- Focus on whole-person care
- Keep hope alive

What Are the Dangers?

Stimulants (e.g., methamphetamine):

- Boost dopamine & norepinephrine
- Raise heart rate, blood pressure, body temp
- Risk: seizures, heart failure, death

Opioids (e.g., fentanyl, heroin):

- Cause euphoria and pain relief
- Risk: respiratory depression, overdose, death
- Extremely addictive — especially synthetics

Addiction = Brain Disease

- Drug use rewires brain’s reward system
- Teens are more vulnerable due to ongoing brain development
- Addiction is a health issue, not a moral failure



The Fentanyl Crisis

- 50–100x stronger than morphine
- Often hidden in fake pills, meth, cocaine, and heroin
- Just 2mg can kill
- Illicit fentanyl is driving overdose deaths in Mendocino County & across the U.S.

How You Can Help

- Don’t stigmatize
- Recognize overdose signs (slow breathing, unconsciousness, blue lips)
- Administer Naloxone (NARCAN) — it can reverse an overdose
- Refer to mental health or substance use services