



SYNTHETIC DRUGS  
PREVENTION  
TOOLKIT  
KNOW THE FACTS

# SYNTHETIC DRUGS PREVENTION TOOLKIT

United Way of Broward County Commission on Substance Abuse has developed this Toolkit as part of "Prevention in a Box" to bring relevant information about synthetic drug use prevention to individuals, families, practitioners, and other key community stakeholders. The Commission on Substance Abuse is dedicated to empowering our diverse community to live healthy and drug-free. Recognizing the consequences of substance abuse and mental health conditions among Broward County youth and adults, the Commission seeks to distribute accurate information and resources that promote health and wellness.

The Commission strives to build individual, family, and community competence and capacity for lasting positive social change. **Today, the majority of youth and adults in Broward County do not misuse substances.** The Commission, therefore, encourages all individuals to read, review, and utilize this toolkit in its entirety.

Sincerely,



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United Way of Broward County



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## Mission

United Way of Broward County Commission on Substance Abuse's mission is to **empower our diverse community to live healthy and drug-free.**

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**LIVE UNITED**

# SYNTHETIC DRUGS

## Synthetic Drugs are

- Man-made psychoactive chemicals created in laboratories (mostly in China)
- Sold in small retail outlets or via the Internet as “herbal incense,” “potpourri,” “bath salts,” and research chemicals
- Designed to mimic the effects of illicit drugs such as cocaine, marijuana, heroin, methamphetamine, crack, etc.
- Snorted, smoked, vaped, ingested, and/or injected
- Addictive substances that are not safer to use than illicit drugs

## Types of Synthetic Drugs include

- Synthetic Cannabinoids are marijuana alternatives known as K2, Spice, Budder, Dabs.
- Phenethylamines are hallucinogenic or psychoactive stimulants such as Methamphetamines, Amphetamines, MDMA and Ecstasy.
- Synthetic Cathinones are the most common Phenethylamine, a synthetic form of the Khat plant. 12 different varieties have been detected in Florida.

The most common are:

- MDPV (Bath Salts)
- Methylone (Molly)
- Alpha-PVP (Flakka/Gravel)
- Ethylone (Molly)
- Butylone
- Mephedrone

Content of synthetic drugs are unpredictable due to constantly changing variety of chemicals to avoid government regulation.

### **Intended Effects of Synthetic Drugs are**

- Euphoria
- Enhanced Concentration
- Mood Elevation
- Elevated Libido
- Decreased Inhibitions

### **Side Effects of Synthetic Drugs include**

- Hallucinations
- Paranoia
- Psychosis
- Excited delirium
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Tremors
- Seizures and convulsions
- Temporary paralysis
- Increased agitation and aggression
- Difficulty breathing
- Kidney failure (Rhabdomyolysis)
- Death
- Decreased Inhibitions (such as Unsafe Sex)
- Increased heart rate (Tachycardia), blood pressure, and heart attack
- Increased body temperature (Hyperthermia) and excessive sweating

Effective treatment is available for synthetic drug abuse and dependence.

**Recovery is possible!**

# LAWS AND LEGAL CONSEQUENCES

In Florida, the use of synthetic drugs is illegal.

Synthetic drugs are designated as Schedule I controlled substances, and it is a crime to possess **any** amount of synthetic drugs.

Under Florida Statute, possession of less than 3 grams of a synthetic drug is classified as a Misdemeanor with conviction consequences of one year of probation, one year in jail, or a fine up to \$1,000 with revocation of a driver's license for at least one year.

Under Florida Statute, possession of more than 3 grams of a synthetic drug is classified as a Third Degree Felony with conviction consequences of five years of probation, five years of prison, or a fine up to \$5,000 with revocation of a driver's license of at least one year.

## Overdose Defense

If you or another person is overdosing on any synthetic drugs, do not hesitate to get help and immediate medical attention – **Call 9-1-1**.

According to Florida Statute, an individual may be immune from prosecution for possession charges if they are experiencing an overdose or are assisting someone who is overdosing.

## STORY OF HOPE AND RECOVERY

### Brad's Story

For two years, I used "bath salts" to get high. When I first encountered the drug, I did not know what it was or what it did, but once I tried it, I wanted more. During my Flakka binges, I would hardly eat or sleep. My high would cause extreme hallucinations and paranoia. My body would feel so distorted and hot that I wanted to strip off all my clothes and am told I did so more than once. Although I seemed to feel really powerful when taking Flakka, this fake sense of strength caused me to engage in bizarre behaviors that scared, upset, and distanced my family and friends. I spent tons of money on Flakka because it was addictive. In fact, my Flakka addiction caused me to totally run out of money. I felt so out of control. I eventually ended up in the emergency room after a Flakka binge. It was in the hospital that my detox began, and the staff offered to connect me with treatment which I accepted as I felt I had nowhere to turn. In treatment, I learned more about synthetic drugs and addiction than I had known. Regaining myself, I started my recovery and repaired my relationships. I left treatment with a place to live, a job, and a commitment of ongoing relapse prevention supports. I feel I was lucky enough to get into drug rehab and to recognize a better life for myself. I want others to know about the dangers of Flakka as well as the potential for recovery.

# EDUCATING INDIVIDUALS

## Information about Synthetic Drugs and their Dangerous Impact is Critical

Synthetic and designer drugs, like Flakka, frequently contain harmful substances that are untested and unknown.

Immediate and long-term negative effects of synthetic drugs can rival some of the strongest and most dangerous drugs.

Increased synthetic drug usage, including with or in combination with other drugs often leads to serious health complications.

Synthetic drugs are highly physically and psychologically addictive.

Synthetic drug usage has a “comedown” period leaving the body and the user feeling fatigued, depressed, and wanting more of the drug.

Synthetic drug usage can alter brain chemistry fueling cravings for increased drug amounts and addiction.

## Protective Measures

Employing protective factors associated with synthetic drug use is vital.

These protective factors include:

- Obtain factual education about synthetic drugs
- Avoid places where there will be drug use
- Cope with peer pressure
- Be a positive role model
- Participate in social and community activities of interest without drug use
- Seek help from a healthcare professional or family member if you are struggling with drug use
- Build and maintain motivation for a healthy lifestyle
- Associate with individuals who do not use drugs
- Do not be afraid to say “No”



# INFORMING FAMILIES

The positive influence of family and the home environment promotes an individual's wellbeing.

Families play an extremely critical role in preventing drug use.

It is important for families to understand the implications of synthetic drug use.

It is essential that families are aware of how easily accessible synthetic drugs are.

Synthetic drugs come in a variety of product names, styles, and packaging.

Synthetic drugs are sold in local convenience stores, specialty smoke shops, and online.

Synthetic drugs have common street names such as Gravel, 5-Dollar Insanity, Budder, K2, Spice, Bath Salt, and Fake Weed.

Synthetic drugs, like Flakka, are a crystalline rock form resembling grainy pebbles or gravel (such as in an aquarium) that is typically a white or pink color with a foul-smelling odor.

Synthetic drugs, like Flakka, can be ingested by vaping the drug through an electronic cigarette.

Synthetic drugs are also smoked, snorted, swallowed, injected, and inserted into the body.

It is common for synthetic drugs to be combined with other drugs such as marijuana.

## FAMILY GUIDANCE

Guidelines to help families include:

- Educate yourself and your family members about synthetic drugs such as Flakka
- Discuss the harmful effects and negative consequences associated with drug use
- Communicate the importance of healthy attitudes and behaviors
- Encourage positive conversation and active listening
- Ask questions
- Maintain open and regular communication
- Set clear expectations and consequences about using drugs
- Discuss ways to refuse drug offers
- Be observant of family member's condition, mood, and behaviors
- Get treatment support for someone suspected of drug abuse or dependence
- Remember it's never too early to start preventing drug abuse
- Remember it's never too late for someone to begin treatment
- Take advantage of teachable moments



# TOOLS FOR EDUCATORS

Youth and young adults spend a considerable amount of time in school.

Educators and school administration should be aware of synthetic drug use.

Synthetic drug use, abuse, and overdose is present in schools and on college campuses.

Educators and school administrators can play a pivotal role in decreasing and preventing synthetic drug use and abuse in young persons.

Students engaged in synthetic drug use may display the following:

- Persistent antisocial behavior
- Loss of interest and/or attention in school
- Lack of motivation and/or commitment to one's educational career
- Academic failure

Synthetic drug use affects school and class attendance as well as drop-out rates.

Synthetic drug use affects healthy brain development and functioning.

Synthetic drug use affects academic performance and grades.

Engaging students in critical thinking helps youth filter misleading messages.

## TIPS FOR EDUCATORS

Educational institutions can employ the following strategies related to synthetic drug use:

- Stay aware of students and the patterns of synthetic drug use
- Institute policies about drug possession and consumption
- Provide training to faculty and staff on synthetic drugs
- Consider synthetic drug use when students display symptomatology
- Implement evidence-based substance abuse education and prevention programming
- Utilize substance abuse screening and early detection approaches from a healthcare professional
- Establish standard protocols for detected substance abuse among students
- Promote suspension alternatives
- Partner with treatment and medical practitioners
- Get treatment support for someone suspected of drug abuse or dependence

# TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

Employers may notice an emotional state or behavior in an employee that may be a sign of synthetic drug use.

Synthetic drug use may negatively impact an individual's workplace attendance and performance.

Synthetic drug use in the work environment can present a safety risk and liability.

## **Synthetic drug use by an employee can be associated with:**

- Decreased focus and concentration
- Impaired thinking
- Elevated mood and increased agitation
- Decreased inhibitions
- Paranoia and psychosis
- Inability to perform and/or complete tasks
- Decreased productivity
- Workplace accidents
- Frequent absences

## **TOOLS FOR EMPLOYERS**

Employers can utilize the following strategies related to synthetic drug use:

- Institute a drug-free workplace
- Implement drug-free policies and activities
- Provide workplace substance abuse prevention education
- Offer specialized supervisory training
- Ensure access to employee assistance counseling and treatment
- Select a health insurance plan with addiction treatment coverage

# INFORMING PRACTITIONERS

A number of health and human service practitioners play a vital role in the prevention and treatment of synthetic drug use.

These practitioners include:

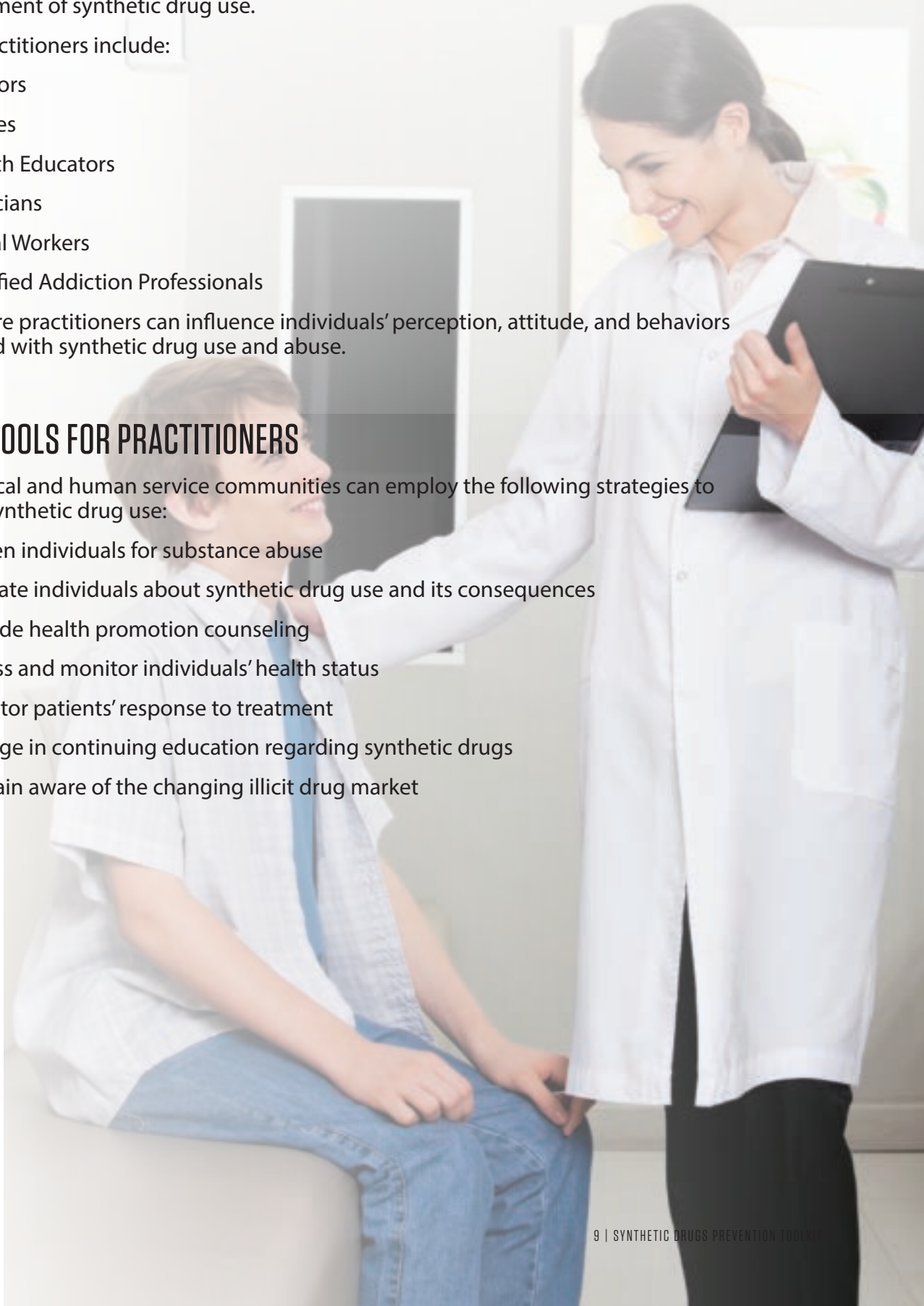
- Doctors
- Nurses
- Health Educators
- Clinicians
- Social Workers
- Certified Addiction Professionals

Health care practitioners can influence individuals' perception, attitude, and behaviors associated with synthetic drug use and abuse.

## TIPS & TOOLS FOR PRACTITIONERS

The medical and human service communities can employ the following strategies to address synthetic drug use:

- Screen individuals for substance abuse
- Educate individuals about synthetic drug use and its consequences
- Provide health promotion counseling
- Assess and monitor individuals' health status
- Monitor patients' response to treatment
- Engage in continuing education regarding synthetic drugs
- Remain aware of the changing illicit drug market



# ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

Preventing synthetic drug use requires a community-wide response and sense of responsibility. Equally important is decreasing any stigma associated with individuals using illicit drugs as well as those persons requiring drug abuse or dependence treatment.

Education, advocacy, and community action are essential for health promotion associated with synthetic drug use.

## SOCIAL ACTION

The following strategies can be employed to address synthetic drug use by advocating for:

- General factual community education, information dissemination, and prevention regarding synthetic drug use
- Health care practitioner education regarding synthetic drug use
- Insurance coverage and treatment access for individuals with drug abuse and dependence
- De-stigmatization of individuals requiring substance abuse treatment
- Community policies regarding illicit drug access
- Community dialogues about illicit drug use
- Alternative drug-free community activities and events
- Legislation that promotes substance use prevention and expands treatment access
- Write legislators supporting these bills
- Write legislators about your family's experience with synthetic drug use and addiction

# HEALTH PROMOTION PLAN

By completing this page, individuals can examine health status and health promotion behaviors.

## General Health Rating

Excellent       Good       Fair       Poor

### Do you

Use illicit drugs, such as synthetic drugs?	_____ YES	_____ NO
Use synthetic drugs regularly and/or heavily especially to relax	_____ YES	_____ NO
Use drugs alone and/or to cope?	_____ YES	_____ NO
Experience negative consequences from drug use?	_____ YES	_____ NO
Plan your life and/or your friends around drug use?	_____ YES	_____ NO
Obsessive about getting and/or using drugs?	_____ YES	_____ NO
Unsuccessful attempts to reduce or stop drug use?	_____ YES	_____ NO

### YES answers to any of these questions may indicate potential risk.

Health Risks (Factors that Negatively Impact Health): \_\_\_\_\_

Health Promotion (Factors that Positively Impact Health): \_\_\_\_\_

Health Goal(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Strategies to Accomplish Health Goals: \_\_\_\_\_

Success Influencers (Factors that Positively Impact Goal Attainment): \_\_\_\_\_

Where to go for help: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Important Factors: \_\_\_\_\_



# RESOURCES

**United Way of Broward County Commission on Substance Abuse**

[www.drugfreebroward.org](http://www.drugfreebroward.org)

**Narcotics Anonymous**

[www.sfrna.net](http://www.sfrna.net) and 1-866-288-NANA

**NIDA - National Institute on Drug Abuse**

[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

**National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc.**

[www.ncadd.org](http://www.ncadd.org)

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

**National Treatment Finder**

[www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov)

**National Treatment Referral Helpline**

1-800-662-HELP (4357) or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD for hearing impaired)

**Narconon Drug Rehab 24-Hour Helpline**

1-800-775-8750

**Smart Recovery®**

[www.smartrecovery.org](http://www.smartrecovery.org)

**The Partnership at Drug-Free.org (Partnership for Drug-Free Kids)**

[www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

**Get Smart About Drugs**

[www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com](http://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com)

**Prevent Teen Drug Use**

[www.preventteendruguse.org](http://www.preventteendruguse.org)

**First Concerns**

[www.firstconcerns.com](http://www.firstconcerns.com)

**2-1-1 Broward 24 Hour Information and Referral Helpline**

[www.211-broward.org](http://www.211-broward.org)

Dial 2-1-1 or 954-537-0211

# SOURCES

**National Institute of Drug Abuse**

**National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc.**

**Florida Statute**



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