TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN ABOUT OPIOIDS:
Keeping Your Kids Safe

TAKE ACTION

Use these tips to talk with your teen:

• Check in frequently to see how they are doing;
• Choose informal times to talk, such as in the car, during dinner, or while watching TV;
• Be clear and consistent about your expectations regarding opioids and other drug use;
• Establish family agreements to spend time together doing social and extracurricular activities;
• Let them know you care and are always there for them; and
• Continue talking with your teens as they get older.

Help your teen create an “exit plan” in case he or she is offered or faced with a difficult decision about prescription opioids (such as texting a code word to a family member). Peer pressure can be powerful, so coming up with realistic action steps and practicing them together in a safe environment will prepare and empower your teen to make good choices when it matters.

Make sure to properly store and dispose of all medication. All medications that are expired, unused, or no longer needed should be removed from your home and disposed of immediately. This will reduce the chances your teen takes medication accidentally, misuses it, or shares it intentionally. Visit https://takebackday.dea.gov/ to locate a collection site to safely dispose of your medication.

Research suggests that one of the most influential factors when a teen is growing up is a strong, open relationship with a parent or caregiver.

For more information about how to talk with your teen about prescription opioids, visit www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov and www.samhsa.gov.

#TalkTheyHearYou

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It’s never too late to start talking with your teen about the risks of prescription opioid misuse. As teens age, they make more decisions on their own and face greater temptation and peer pressure. Though it may not seem like it, teens really do hear your concerns. It’s important you help them understand what prescription opioids are, why they shouldn’t misuse them, and why you shouldn’t combine them with alcohol or other drugs such as benzodiazepines.

**WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?**

Opioids are a group of drugs that include synthetic opioids like fentanyl, heroin, and legal prescription pain medications such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, and codeine. Prescription opioid pain medications can be helpful when used correctly under the guidance of a healthcare provider, but misuse can lead to addiction. When opioids are misused, they can also have other negative health outcomes such as dependence, overdose, and death.

**What is prescription opioid misuse and how prevalent is it?**

Prescription opioid misuse includes taking someone else’s medicine, using medicine in a way other than prescribed, taking medicine to get high, or mixing medicine with alcohol or other substances. Prescription opioids are the most commonly misused substances among Americans ages 14 and older. Teens and young adults are the biggest misusers of prescription pain medication. In 2018, more than 695,000 youths ages 12–17 and 1.9 million young adults ages 18–25 reported misusing prescription pain medication in the past year.

**Why are young people misusing prescription opioids?**

Young people may misuse prescription opioids for many reasons, including curiosity, peer pressure, and wanting to fit in. Another reason teens and young adults may decide to take prescription opioids is because they can be easier to get than other drugs. Studies show that 53 percent of people ages 12 or older who obtained prescription opioids for nonmedical use obtained them from a friend or relative. There are also some situations that may increase your teen’s risk of misusing prescription opioids. Research shows individuals who are prescribed opioids prior to graduating high school are more likely to misuse prescription opioids. After graduating, they are 33 percent more likely to misuse prescription opioids after getting their wisdom teeth removed. Taking opioids after wisdom teeth removal also increases the odds of addiction. Depressed or anxious teenagers are more likely to misuse prescription opioids. Research shows individuals who are prescribed opioids prior to graduating high school are 33 percent more likely to misuse prescription opioids.

**Know the risks and harms of prescription opioid misuse.**

Misusing prescription pain medication—even just one time—can lead to serious illness or death. In 2016, 1 in 5 deaths among young adults were opioid related. After marijuana and alcohol, prescription drugs are the most commonly misused substances among youth.

Risks include, but are not limited to:

- Allergic reactions;
- Breathing problems;
- Coma;
- Permanent brain damage;
- Death.

**Opioids or prescription pain medications can have serious, life-threatening consequences.** Misusing prescription pain medications can happen after just 5 days. Taking prescription opioids long term or incorrectly can cause the brain to become addicted in just a few weeks. Young people may misuse prescription opioids for many reasons, including curiosity, peer pressure, and wanting to get high. More than 695,000 youths ages 12–17 and 1.9 million young adults ages 18–25 reported misusing prescription pain medication in 2018. More than 65 percent of adults age 14 and older who used prescription opioids in the past year used them for medical purposes. After marijuana and alcohol, prescription drugs are the most commonly misused substances among Americans age 14 and older. Teens and young adults are the biggest misusers of prescription opioids. It’s never too late to start talking with your teen about the risks of prescription opioid misuse.

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