

GUIDE 04

Talking to Adults and Seniors About Prescription Opioids

2.3 million US adults age 26 and older experienced opioid use disorder in 2020. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that opioid-related overdose deaths increased by 35% from 2020-2021. One in four Texans has experienced an opioid overdose or knows someone who has.

Opioid addiction is a disease that can happen to anyone at any age. Many older adults who struggle with prescription opioid misuse do so by accident. Older adults are more likely to suffer from chronic pain and physical illnesses that make them more susceptible to opioid use disorder (OUD). Many older adults take multiple daily medications, increasing the risk for mistakes, misuse or drug interactions. In addition, signs of OUD can be easily overlooked among older adults because symptoms can mimic other disorders, such as depression or dementia.

No matter their age, talking with your loved one about opioid misuse can make all the difference. Don't worry about saying everything perfectly; life-saving conversations start with a few words.

Conversation Guide	Suggested Phrases
<p>Choose the right time. Be sure the two of you can have more than a few minutes alone. Don't bring up the subject when the person is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I'd like to talk about something important. Is now a good time? If not, when can we chat today?"
<p>Be specific. List the behaviors you've observed, and state that you are worried about the effect that opioid misuse is having in their lives. It can also help to talk about another person's difficulties as a conversation starter. By talking about someone else, you can talk about your loved one's behavior without them feeling attacked.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "You seem a lot more tired lately, and I'm surprised you missed coffee with the girls. I'm starting to worry about you." • "Sarah's dad told her he's having a harder time keeping his meds organized now that his doctor changed one of his prescriptions. Has that ever been difficult for you?"
<p>Remind them that you support them. Emphasize that you care for your family member or friend, and want to have this conversation because you are concerned about continued use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I care about you and want you to be around as long as possible. I'm afraid that if we don't figure this out together, it will keep getting worse."
<p>Offer empathy and compassion. Create a two-way dialogue where you can both talk about your concerns and understand the person's perspective. Using open-ended questions can help prevent them from feeling lectured or judged. Chronic pain can be a very real concern for older adults, so discussing what alternatives they've tried can help you identify ways to manage the situation together.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "What were some things that helped the pain before you got the prescription? When you asked your doctor about it, what was their advice? There might be some alternatives, or we could weigh the treatment options together with your doctor." • "You don't have to go through this alone, and I'll be here when you're ready."
<p>Keep trying. Don't expect a major change to take place right away. This conversation could be the first time the person has thought about this problem. If the person states that they are certain there is not a problem, ask to talk again at some point in the future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I know it's probably hard to talk about this. Let's take some time to process and maybe we can talk again later this week?"

CITATIONS:

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<https://aperioncare.com/blog/the-opioid-epidemic-and-older-adults-what-you-need-to-know/>

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