



GUIDE 03

Youth and Young Adults: Talking with Friends About Prescription Opioids

Conversations about the risks associated with misusing prescription opioids are good to have, even if you're not concerned about a friend at the moment. It can be awkward to start a conversation like this, but once you and your friend are talking, it'll be easier to start again the next time. If you learn your friend is struggling, let them share their experience and try to understand their perspective. Avoid offering advice or trying to solve your friend's problem if they have one, and instead, just be there to hear them out.

After speaking with them, talk with an adult you trust about what your friend is going through. This is especially important if the substances your friend is struggling with are prescription opioids, as these can be particularly dangerous and even deadly.

Conversation Guide	Suggested Phrases
<p>Choose the right time. A great way to start a conversation is to do it casually. For example, you could use a news story or recent event as a chance to spark the conversation. Keep it light - it doesn't have to be a therapy session or an emotionally loaded topic. It can just be part of a conversation you'd have with them at any time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Did you see that a student at [neighboring high school] went to the hospital for an overdose? Kind of scary. I'm glad they're okay now. Hopefully, this helps everyone realize how risky they are."
<p>Be there for them. It's always good to remind your friends that you are there for them and can make time to talk if they need it. They might not take you up on it often or right away, but when they do, give them your undivided attention. Take time to remove distractions and make the conversation the most important thing happening.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Hey, if you're having a hard time, you know you can talk to me. I'd rather hear about it than you go through it alone. I've got your back." • "Yeah, of course I can talk. I get out of work at 8:00 tonight; can we meet afterward?"
<p>Understand the situation. It can be easy to jump to conclusions about something a friend says they are struggling with. Try to take a pause before responding to think about how you can react with focus and compassion. Ask questions so that you understand exactly what the stress or dilemma is. Are they struggling with opioid use specifically, or are they struggling with something else and occasionally turning to substances? Knowing that can help us avoid making assumptions and recognize whether we need to focus more on prevention or treatment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I'm really sorry you're dealing with this, and I'm so glad you told me. I want to help however I can. What part is the hardest right now? How have you been handling things?" • "What substances are you having issues with? What happened after you tried it? When/why did you end up using it again? What happens when you try not to use it?" • "I care about you and want to see you get better. I'm going to talk to [trusted adult] so they can help us."
<p>Offer empathy and compassion. Maybe there's a question you could ask them: about their experience, their feelings, their support network. How you listen and respond to your friend goes a long way in establishing trust and helping them feel comfortable with opening up to you again in the future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I know everything will be okay, but how are you feeling about it right now? Have you talked about it with anyone else?" • "I know you can get through it, and I'll be there if you need another person to lean on."

CITATIONS:

<https://getthefactsrx.com/conversation-starters>