



Talking to Your Child About Prescription Opioids and Fentanyl: If You Discover Your Child is Misusing

From prescription medication misuse to counterfeit pills that contain fentanyl, opioids are taking the lives of young Texans at an alarming rate. One in four Texans has experienced an opioid overdose (also referred to as a poisoning) or knows someone who has, according to surveys funded by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission in 2020 and 2021. Fentanyl, specifically, is a powerful opioid up to 50 times stronger than heroin. Illegally manufactured fentanyl is being added to counterfeit (fake) pills that look just like real prescription medications. It's also being mixed with other illegal substances. Fentanyl is nearly impossible to detect on your own because you can't see, taste or smell it. Even one pill can cause a fatal overdose.

It may feel hard to start the conversation with your child, but discussing the dangers of opioids could save their life.

Think about your goals for the conversation before talking to your child. Be sure your child is not under the influence of opioids and ask if the two of you can talk about something important. Turn off phones and step away from other distractions. Don't worry about saying everything perfectly; lifesaving conversations start with a few words.

Conversation Guide	Suggested Phrases
<p>Invite your child to have a conversation. Let them know ahead of time that you want to talk, because it will reinforce their autonomy and commitment to return to the conversation later. It also avoids blindsiding them with a difficult or uncomfortable conversation.</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. First, confirm that they really are misusing by asking some broad questions and staying curious. See what comes up before focusing exclusively on opioids. Then, explain what you observed that made you concerned without making accusations or overreacting to something that has already happened.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What’s been going on? How have you been handling things?” • “It seems like your grades have been slipping and you’ve been missing work. I’ve noticed you aren’t yourself when you take opioids and I’m worried about you.”
<p>Try not to take things personally. Be prepared for strong reactions or for your child to be evasive or unwilling to engage. Try to stay as calm as possible throughout the conversation. People will try to get out of uncomfortable situations and may lie or deflect blame. Be ready for that and have some strategies for responding that aren’t retaliatory but are firm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Okay, it seems like you’re not ready to talk about this right now. Let’s try again after baseball practice.” • “This conversation might be tough, but let’s just do our best.”
<p>Create a dialogue. Ask open-ended questions that elicit more than just a “yes” or “no,” and listen as much as you talk. Be sure it’s a two-way exchange, rather than a lecture, and let your child know you value their honesty.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “When did you first try them?” • “I see. I didn’t know that, so thank you for telling me.” • “How did your friends react when you told them?”
<p>Offer empathy and compassion. At times, your child could be hiding their true feelings out of fear, embarrassment or shame. Show that you are willing to listen without judgment. Putting a hand on your child’s shoulder or giving a hug when it feels right can be an important way of showing understanding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’m so sorry you’re struggling with this. I have some ideas about what we might want to do next, but I’d also like to know what you think might help.”

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<p>Remind them that they are supported. Express how much you care about them and explain that the reason you're asking them about this is because you want them to be happy, safe and healthy. Remind them that they can count on you for support and confide in you whenever they need to.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "As your parent, I will always love you and I just want to see you happy and thriving. I know we can figure this out together. I'll always be here when you're struggling with this or don't know what to do."
<p>Carry lifesaving naloxone. Naloxone is a safe, legal medication that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose, including fentanyl, heroin and prescription opioids. If someone's breathing has slowed or stopped because of an opioid overdose, naloxone will quickly restore normal breathing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "One of the risks of misusing opioids is they could cause your breathing to slow or stop. Naloxone is a lifesaver, like having a fire extinguisher. Hopefully you won't need it, but it's important to have it on hand in case you do. Let's go together to buy some, so we'll always have it if we witness an overdose and need it."
<p>Get help from the experts. You may wish to enlist additional help by contacting the school counselor, school nurse or family doctor about your concerns.</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?"

CITATIONS:

drugfree.org/article/start-talking/

youth.gov/youth-topics/substance-abuse/opioids