

Youth and Young Adults: Talking with Friends About Prescription Opioids and Fentanyl

It's important to talk with your friends about the dangers of opioid misuse, including fentanyl — even if you're not concerned about a friend at the moment. That's because Texas is experiencing an opioid crisis — and it's taking the lives of teens and young adults just like you and your friends.

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 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 with substance use, let them share their experience and try to understand their perspective. Don't offer advice or try to solve your friend's problem if they have one. Instead, just be there to hear them out.

After you speak with them, talk with an adult you trust about what your friend is going through. This is especially important if your friend is struggling with prescription or non-prescription drugs, because they can be particularly dangerous and even deadly.

Conversation Guide	Suggested Phrases
<p>Choose the right time. A great way to start the 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 opioids 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. 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 determine whether they're more in need of 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 or 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.”
<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.”

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