

## 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](http://www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov) and [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).

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they hear you®

[www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov](http://www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov)



**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

#TalkTheyHearYou

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# TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN ABOUT OPIOIDS:

## Keeping Your Kids Safe



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they hear you®



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, illegal drugs like heroin, and legal prescription pain relievers such as oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, and morphine. Prescription opioid pain medications can be helpful when used correctly under the guidance of a healthcare provider, but misuse can lead to dependence and addiction.

## 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. Oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, and morphine are some of the most commonly misused prescription pain medications.

After alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana, prescription drugs are the most commonly

used/misused substances among Americans ages 12 and older. In 2019, more than 567,000 youths ages 12–17 and 1.8 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 more than 50 percent of people ages 12 or older who obtained prescription pain medication 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 33 percent more likely to misuse prescription opioids after graduating. Additionally, taking opioids after wisdom teeth removal also increases the odds of long-term use. Smokers are also more likely to misuse opioids than non-smokers.

## KNOW THE RISKS AND HARMS OF PRESCRIPTION OPIOID MISUSE

Using prescription opioids long term or incorrectly can cause the brain to become reliant on them and quickly lead to addiction. In fact, dependence on prescription opioids can happen after just 5 days. Misusing prescription opioids or taking them in combination with alcohol or other drugs can also have other major, life-threatening consequences. Make sure you know the risks of prescription opioid misuse and are prepared to talk with your teen about them.

### Risks include, but are not limited to:

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

**The misuse of opioid 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. Talk to your teen about the dangers of taking prescription pain relievers that don't belong to them.

