

Talking to Your Child About Prescription Opioids and Fentanyl: Preventive Discussions

Many parents and guardians may not believe their child is at risk for misusing opioids or think they don't need to talk about the dangers of fentanyl. However, even young teenagers will have likely heard about opioid misuse and accidental fentanyl overdose (also referred to as poisoning) at some point.

That's because Texas is experiencing an opioid crisis. One in four Texans has experienced an opioid overdose 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, but discussing the dangers of opioids can protect your child from an accidental overdose.

Conversation Guide	Suggested Phrases
<p>Choose the right setting. Keep an eye out for a time when the topic comes up naturally so that the conversation can form naturally, too. For example, if there's a recent news story about a celebrity's opioid use or overdose, or if the problem comes up in the child's school or neighborhood, this could provide the opening for a discussion. Informal times to have conversations, such as in the car or while folding laundry, can help to create a less intimidating environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I saw that [name] did an interview about going through treatment. I know how much you love their [music / movies / sports]! I didn't know they had been struggling with [prescription / non-prescription drugs]. Have you watched it yet?”
<p>Make it interactive. Asking your child if they have heard about opioids or what they already know can be a good starting point and gives you an opportunity to do some research together.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “What have you heard about opioids? [Listen, validate accurate information and correct any misinformation.] Maybe you've heard of brand names of opioids like Vicodin, Ultram, OxyContin, Percocet or Codeine. These prescription pain medications are safe when you take them as a doctor prescribes, but they're also addictive. If someone takes them without a prescription — for example, they got pills from a friend or family member — or takes more than their doctor told them to, that person can overdose really easily.” “What have you heard about fentanyl? [Listen, validate accurate information and correct any misinformation.] Fentanyl is a powerful opioid up to 50 times stronger than heroin. It's safe when taken as prescribed by a doctor to treat severe pain. However, illegally made fentanyl is being added to different substances, including fake pills that look exactly like the real thing. For example, if someone takes a pill from their friend at a party, it might contain fentanyl — even if it looks exactly like pills that come from a pharmacy. The scary thing is that many people don't know that they're taking fentanyl — and even one pill can cause a fatal overdose.”
<p>Help your child think through what they would do. Talk to your child about having an “exit plan” if they are offered prescription drugs that are not theirs. Make sure they know that if the pills weren't prescribed to them or didn't come from a pharmacy, they're not safe. Peer pressure can be hard to resist, and having a plan to avoid misuse can help them make smart choices on their own. Be sure to practice the exit plan in a comfortable environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “What if someone you were friends with told you that you'd feel better if you tried their mom's medication? That they've tried it, and it helps them feel less stressed? It could be helpful to have an idea of some things you could say so that making the smart choice at the moment is also the easy choice.” “What if your friend offered you a pill to help you stay up late to study for an exam? Let's practice some different ways you can say, ‘No thanks.’”

Conversation Guide	Suggested Phrases
<p>Make sure they know about 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"> “Have you heard about naloxone? It’s a medication that can save someone’s life in minutes, and it’s really easy to use. Naloxone won’t hurt someone who does not have opioids in their system, so it’s always best to use it if you think someone may be experiencing an overdose.”
<p>Talk often. These conversations are not a one-time thing, so plan to have many short talks, even as your child gets older. Talking often sets a tone that this will be an ongoing dialogue, and it can make it easier to get over the awkwardness or recover from a weird conversation. Add new information when it’s relevant, revisit your expectations often, and let them know you are always there for them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Remember when we were talking about opioids [or fentanyl] a while ago? I learned something new that I want to share with you.”

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