

Is your child exhibiting signs of risky opioid use? You could be right.

Risky opioid use among teens is more common than you may think. In fact, young adults don't even have to rely on a "supplier." Nearly one in five teens say they have used prescribed medication at least once with the intention of getting high.¹

What is an opioid?

Opioids are drugs that are sometimes legally prescribed by providers as pain relievers and can include ingredients such as morphine, oxycodone, codeine and fentanyl. Heroin is an example of an illegal opioid. Opioids and synthetic drugs change the way the brain and the rest of the body reacts to external stimuli. These drugs are highly addictive and users can easily develop dependence even if properly prescribed.¹

Among teens who reported living with opioid use disorder, 17 percent were only looking to experiment.

Teens are typically exposed to opioids through one of three ways²:

- 1** Prescription from a doctor
- 2** Recreationally through someone they know
- 3** Self-medicating to escape

Educate

The signs of risky opioid use can vary from person to person, but the following are some common indicators you can look for:

Negative changes in grades;

Skipping class or school;

Dropping longtime friends or sudden new, intense friendships;

Loss of interest in usual activities;

Changes in appearance, such as lack of concern for grooming and hygiene; and

Changes in general behavior, including sleeping and eating habits.¹

A recent study from the American Academy of Pediatrics found that two-thirds of teens misusing opioids are getting them from friends, family and acquaintances.

Support

If you believe your child is using, there are important steps you should take:

Ensure safety by having medications that can reverse an overdose – such as Naloxone or Narcan – on hand as a precaution.

Schedule an evaluation to determine the level of care needed for the recovery process. Your insurance company and/or primary care physician may be able to suggest a person for you.

Locate a treatment option that best fits the needs of your child by visiting sud.fast-trackermn.org.

Accept and acknowledge that recovery is not a linear process; it is important to support your child wherever they are in their recovery.

Prevent

Opioid use disorder is not inevitable. You can begin to take precautions now to stop the problem before it begins.

Keep dialogue open with your child to encourage communication without fear of judgment or other repercussions;

Identify risk factors such as determining whether there's a family history of substance use disorder, mental health problems or past trauma, and address these with your child;

Use active listening and non-accusatory statements to prevent feeling attacked or judged;

Be a positive influence. Teens report that when it comes to drugs and alcohol, they take their cues from their parents; and

Monitor usage of prescription opioids in the home and dispose of them correctly.

¹ Operation Prevention Parent Toolkit (Discovery Education)

² Heroin, Fentanyl & Other Opioids: A Comprehensive Resource for Families with a Teen or Young Adult Struggling with Opioid Use (Partnership for Drug-Free Kids)