

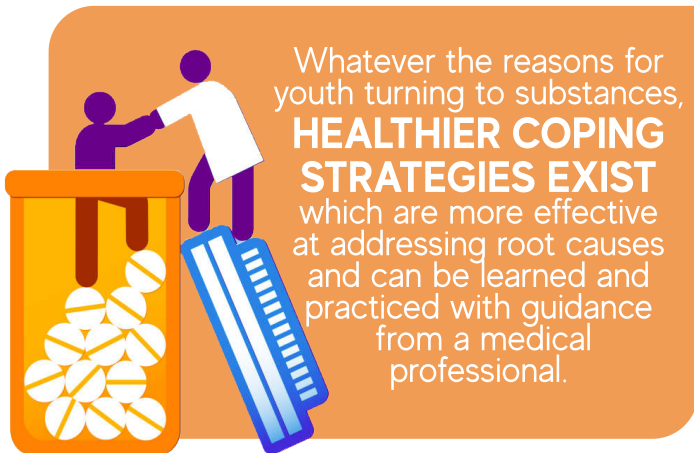
Chapter 3

Youth and Opioids



Young people experiment with opioids due to their own curiosity about the effects of the drug, peer pressure from their social group, other substance use progression, and self-medication to cope with depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges.

At the beginning, using a drug can cause euphoric or calming feelings, heightened awareness and attention, or simply increase social status.



Whatever the reasons for youth turning to substances, **HEALTHIER COPING STRATEGIES EXIST** which are more effective at addressing root causes and can be learned and practiced with guidance from a medical professional.

It's important to remember that using drugs does not often result in healthy outcomes or other positive benefits.

Several factors can increase the risk of a child using substances. Youth who identify as LGBTQ or gender minorities experience more instances of bullying, exclusion, and discrimination that can cause significant psychological stress; youth who play competitive sports and become injured can feel pressure to return to their team and perform at their previous level quickly; and young teens or children who undergo dental procedures and are prescribed opioids by a doctor may be impacted more quickly by the drugs.







Opioid misuse occurs when an individual uses the drug in a way that it was not originally prescribed for use or past the date of use. For example, if a medical provider prescribes a teen Vicodin for postoperative pain for once a day and up to two weeks, misuse occurs if the teen uses the medication more than once per day or for longer than two weeks. Misuse may also occur from over-prescription of the opioid which occurs when a medical provider prescribes a patient a large quantity or a higher dose of the medication than is necessary. While youth may initially acquire prescription opioids from their medical provider due to injuries, surgery, dental procedures, or other health conditions known to cause severe pain, such as cancer, they may also access their own or a family member's leftover prescriptions or receive them from a friend. Misuse has been linked to addiction.





Despite the many ways or reasons a young person might turn to opioids, **parents and caregivers who actively build protective factors in their child's life decrease the likelihood of their child misusing, becoming dependent on or addicted to, and overdosing on opioids.**

Protective factors include but are not limited to:

-  **Stable home environment and family rituals**
-  **Cohesive and affectionate families**
-  **Abstinent role models or peers, including family members and friends**
-  **Social and recreational activities without substances**
-  **Self-confidence**
-  **Connectedness to school and teachers, peers, and the neighborhood**

Just like protective factors support a young person in avoiding drug use, risk factors that include instability, lack of affection, substance-using role models or peers, a lack of connection, low self-esteem, and discrimination or bullying can detrimentally impact a child. Parents and caregivers, while supporting their children with protective factors, should also be prepared to mitigate risk factors when possible. **By building a strong relationship with your child and maintaining open communication, substance use prevention is possible.**