

CHAPTER 3



Youth and Opioids

INTRODUCTION

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, heighten awareness and attention, or simply increase social status.

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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 may experience instances of psychological stress due to bullying, exclusion and discrimination. Youth who participate in sports who may have been prescribed opioids to assist in the healing process may develop a dependency or choose to overuse in order to return to their previous level sooner. Children and young teens who have been prescribed opioids for routine dental surgery or other minor surgeries have a higher risk of developing a dependence due to an increased sensitivity to the drug and their developing brains.

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,**

Just like protective factors support a young person in avoiding drug misuse, 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.**

Protective factors include but are not limited to:

-  **Stable home environments 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**