

CHAPTER 5



At-Home Recommendations

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INTRODUCTION

Building on the previous chapter about creating a strong foundation for good communication and practicing skills, parents, and caregivers can take many steps to ensure their children are protected from opioid misuse, dependence, addiction, and overdose.

The steps below can support parents whose children may or have come in contact with opioids.

Spend time together.

Whether your child wants to know it or not, you still hold considerable influence over their choices. Using the earlier guide for difficult conversations is appropriate, but also make space for doing things you enjoy together.

Take mental health seriously and seek treatment early.

Youth with the greatest risk of drug misuse often have other mental health challenges like anxiety or depression, whether or not they have a diagnosis. Mental health is integral to preventing drug dependence, taking the place of healthy coping strategies. Equally important is parents' mental health. As a child's first teacher, kids need parents to model the best ways to deal with stress, strong emotions, and physical pain. When parents model those behaviors consistently, children are more likely to follow suit and seek self-soothing techniques that don't include substance use.

Request non-addictive pain treatments.

For many kids, their first experience with drug use is through prescriptions, often opioids prescribed for pain control after dental surgery, a sports injury, or to control a chronic condition. Caregivers can advocate to their child's physician to offer a non-addictive pain treatment option, such as rotating pain relievers from different drug classes like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAIDs) and acetaminophen.



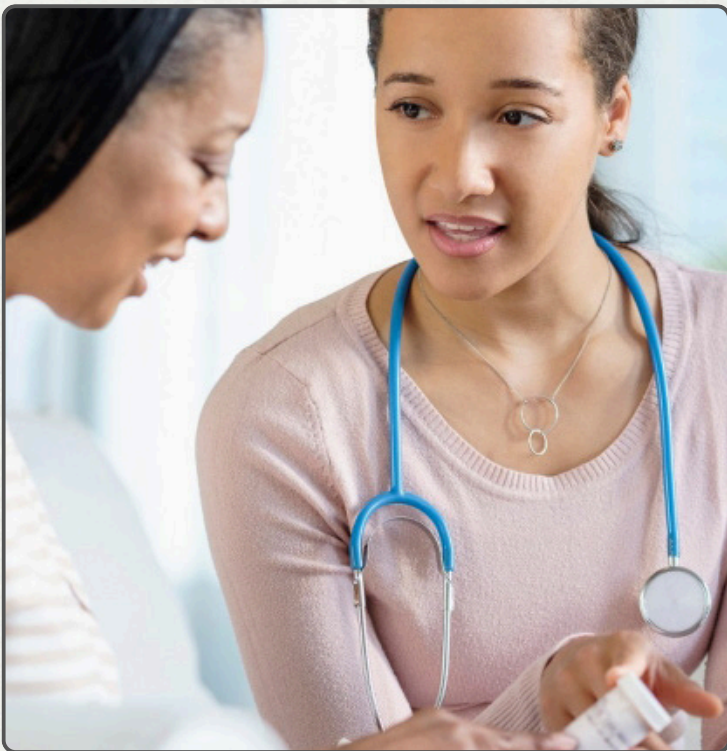
Follow the prescription.

If alternative treatment options aren't available, it's important to follow the prescribed dosage and timing. While using opioids appropriately can still lead to dependence, it can slow the process and buy parents enough time to prevent addiction. Rather than offering more pain pills or more often, talk to your physician if the prescription doesn't seem to be helping your child enough.

Dispose of substances properly.

If you have leftover medication after treatment, dispose of them as soon as you don't need them by mixing the pills with something gross like coffee grounds or old food, place them in a sealed bag, and throw them in the trash. Rather than flushing pills, which might prevent

misuse but adds chemicals to the water supply, make sure the medications are hard to retrieve and highly undesirable. Check with your local police department to see if they have a drug disposal box.



Take note of drug-seeking behavior.

If your child looks for the drugs on their own, has admitted to misusing them, or asks others for substances to handle pain, mental health, or other challenges, this is drug-seeking behavior. If your child has a prescription and asks for more pills or requests them sooner but is near the end of their healing period, it could be a symptom of dependence. Withdrawal symptoms can include physical pain and mood swings, among others, and may have your child convinced they need more. If you're not sure whether your child's symptoms are related to dependence, talk to them directly first and bring it up to their physician together. While parents want to protect their children from drug abuse and its related dangers, it is important to allow them agency in addressing their needs, especially as teens. Doubting their pain when it may be legitimate could backfire.

Secure the substance.

When you have prescription or recreational drugs or alcohol in your home, make sure it is in a child-proof container and somewhere children and teens cannot access them. Lock pills and other substances away, changing locations regularly if necessary, and put strong tape across caps so they cannot be opened without breaking the tape. Take an inventory of the prescriptions in your house, count pills, or use permanent markers to label bottles.

Be responsible yourself.

As a parent or caregiver, your actions - more than your words - set the precedent for how your child will engage with drugs and alcohol. Don't use illicit drugs yourself, and use legal substances in moderation. If you're going to drink, have a designated driver. If you smoke regularly, seek treatment and talk to your child about how it affects your health and your concerns about continuing to use.



Be clear about the risks of specific substances.

While everyone is affected differently by the things they ingest, some drugs and patterns of misuse have predictable risks. Opioids and alcohol lower the heart rate and slow breathing, while cocaine and amphetamines increase heart rate and alertness. Mixing substances is deeply misunderstood and very dangerous; it should be addressed directly. Many accidental opioid-related deaths are caused by people taking multiple substances. Using a drug that increases alertness does not cancel out the effect of one that decreases heart rate.



If you suspect your child is currently under the influence, stay with them.

Most accidental substance-related deaths happen when someone is using alone. Monitor your child's well-being closely and be ready to summon an ambulance if you suspect they have alcohol poisoning or may be overdosing.

Every minute counts.