

INTRODUCTION

America is facing an “opioid epidemic” and there has been a growing number of overdoses due to opioids. Parents are a pivotal influence on youth’s experimentation and use of substances. So, how can you, as a parent or caregiver, help support your child and stop the deadly cycle of heroin use and opioid pill misuse? This guide has been designed to help you learn more about the opioid problem, recognize warning signs, and open up lines of communication with your child and those in your community.

The Operation Prevention program has curriculum materials for students in grades 3-12. This Toolkit provides background information, statistics, and helpful tips for talking with your students about the content that might be presented through the curriculum. However, recognize that some content may be too mature for your student, and the conversations you have should be tailored to your student’s age level.

INTRODUCTION TO THE OPERATION PREVENTION PROGRAM

Why is Opioid Prevention Important?

Medications are chemicals or compounds used to cure diseases and save lives. When used responsibly, medications can help manage and prevent disease, ease symptoms, and in some cases, diagnose illnesses. Today’s medications are produced using a variety of sources. Some medications are produced in labs by mixing chemicals or through biological engineering. Others are manufactured by using byproducts or substances from nature. One example is penicillin which is extracted from Penicillium mold. Another example is from 1962 when Arthur Barclay, a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) botanist, collected a sample of bark from the Pacific yew tree. Today, the anti-cancer agents from the Pacific yew are used in some of the most effective cancer medications ever developed.

However, the overuse and misuse of prescription and over-the-counter medications is a serious public health threat. After marijuana and alcohol, the most commonly abused substances by Americans aged 14 and older are prescription and over-the-counter medications. Opioids, a type of prescription medication, are prescribed to treat pain. Despite the fact that there has not been an increase in pain reported, prescription opioid sales in the U.S. nearly quadrupled from 1999 to 2014. Opioid-related deaths increased from 8,048 in 1999 to 47,600 in 2017 - more than five times higher! Prescription opioids and heroin, an illegal type of opioid, are the main causes of overdose deaths. However, there are over-the-counter medications that can be just as addictive and dangerous as prescription medications. Cough and cold remedies containing dextromethorphan are the most commonly misused over-the-counter medications. When misused, dextromethorphan can cause hallucinations and a potent high. Dextromethorphan can also cause impaired motor function, numbness, nausea, vomiting, increased heart rate or blood pressure, and, on rare occasions, hypoxic brain damage.

How Will My Students Learn About Opioid Prevention?

In the curriculum sessions, students will investigate what medicine is and when, how, and why people take it. Through a series of activities based on grade level, students will discover how medication enters the body to control illnesses that won’t go away, helps prevent people from getting sick, and makes people feel better when they are sick. They will use this information to help explain the importance of responsibly using medications that are sold over-the-counter (OTC) and those prescribed by a doctor. Additional Operation Prevention sessions continue educating students on the dangers of opioid use and addiction, specifically the use and misuse of opioids such as heroin, morphine, oxycodone, fentanyl and other prescription painkillers.

SECTION 1

LEARN THE FACTS

How Do the Sessions Work?

Presentations are in PowerPoint so that the content can be presented in a variety of classroom settings. There are many interactive aspects of the presentations, including graphics, popups, and video clips. Teachers use an Educators Guide to facilitate discussions, lead students through activities, and highlight key talking points.

Session Structure: Each Operation Prevention session provides the following information:

- **Objectives:** Each session includes its overall goals as well as specific behavioral and cognitive objectives for students.
- **Required Materials:** Many sessions include student handouts, articles, and activities.
- **Definitions:** Any words that can be used as vocabulary words will be defined for the teachers and students.
- **Key Points to Make:** To help the teacher guide discussion and reinforce key concepts, key points are provided.



PROGRAM OUTLINE

Here is what you will find in this parent toolkit:

- Section 1: Learn the Facts
- Section 2: How Medication Works
- Section 3: Parenting Styles and Skills
- Section 4: Start the discussion
- Section 5: Skills for your Child
- Resources

SECTION 1

LEARN THE FACTS

Here is a chart of our program sessions based on grade level.

Elementary School	Middle School	High School
<p>Lesson: Proactive Prevention</p> <p>Over-the-Counter and Prescription Medications: How do medications work in our bodies, and why is it so important to use them responsibly? Follow medication on a path through the body to investigate how they make us feel better with responsible use.</p>	<p>Lesson: Our Brain and Body on Opioids</p> <p>How do addiction and withdrawal affect the body's many systems? Students examine how drug use alters the mind and body and reinforces their understanding by creating a peer-to-peer social media campaign.</p>	<p>Lesson: Opioid Use: The Signs. The Symptoms. The Science.</p> <p>Separate fact from fiction with this classroom-ready digital lesson. Through investigation and hands-on activities, students learn the science behind prescription opioid and heroin addiction, overdose, and withdrawal.</p>
<p>Interdisciplinary Activity: Malachi's Medication</p> <p>In this activity, students will identify and explain the dosage instructions included on a prescription label and conduct an experiment to understand the importance of accurately measuring medication dosage.</p>	<p>Lesson: Is Our Community Influenced by the Opioid Epidemic?</p> <p>Students will examine why people turn to opioids, and then will act as investigative reporters to consider the who, what, when, where, why, and how of opioid use and misuse.</p>	<p>Lesson: Reporting on a Public Health Crisis: Opioids in the Community</p> <p>Students will investigate how the opioid epidemic impacts their community by acting as investigative reporters to investigate the who, what, when, where, why, and how of opioid use and misuse.</p>
<p>Interdisciplinary Activity: Sarah's Sister</p> <p>In this activity, students will meet Sarah and her younger sister who has obtained medication that was not properly stored, to understand the importance of storing medication safely.</p>	<p>Self-Paced Module: The Science of Addiction - The Stories of Teens</p> <p>In this self-paced, standards-aligned e-learning experience, students meet teens who are struggling with prescription opioid misuse and heroin use and learn the science behind their powerful stories. With strategies and resources for those being faced with a decision about prescription opioid misuse or struggles with addiction, students become better equipped to handle these experiences.</p>	

WHAT IS AN OPIOID?

You may be wondering what an opioid even is. Opioids are drugs that are derived from the opium poppy plant or are synthetic equivalents. Heroin is an illegal opioid, but many opioids are legal. These include a variety of pain medications routinely prescribed by doctors and include morphine, oxycodone, codeine, and fentanyl. Because they are prescribed, teens do not always need to purchase opioids at school or on the street. In fact, they can often get access to them from their own medicine cabinet or the medicine cabinets of friends. It may seem harmless – even helpful – to give a pill to someone in pain. However, the physiological processes that allow these medications to work are very powerful. They can change the way the brain and the rest of the body react to the presence as well as the absence of the drug. The initial decision to take opioids may start off as a choice, but can develop into dependency or addiction. It is important to understand the biological effects opioids can have on the body.

THE SCIENCE

One way to help you understand the impact of opioids is to understand the science behind how they influence your body.

When you are prescribed an opioid for pain relief, you are given a substance that changes the way your body communicates with your brain. It does not remove the problem causing the pain. Instead, it silences the message the body sends to report the pain to the brain.

The body's messaging system consists of thousands of tiny nerve cells, called neurons, spread throughout the body. Neurons send messages to and from the brain, giving instructions to other parts of the body and reporting what is happening there.

Endorphins are naturally manufactured in the brain to help us feel good and regulate pain. Opioids have a chemical structure similar to



endorphins. They can actually lock onto the same receptor sites as endorphins. One reason opioids are much more powerful than our naturally-released endorphins is because we can choose how much of the chemical enters our body.

When opioids such as pain pills are ingested, they act to increase the effects of endorphins. As drug use continues, a person often has to use more of the opioid to receive the same effects. This is called tolerance. Tolerance is a clear signal that the chemical balances in the brain have been changed. It is important to remember that a teenager's brain is changing rapidly throughout adolescence. Frequently-used connections between neurons are strengthened, and unused connections are trimmed away. These changes make possible the intellectual and emotional transitions between childhood and adulthood.

As they are happening, however, they can make teenagers more prone to risky, impulsive behavior such as drug misuse and abuse. The chemical changes to the brain caused by drugs can also interfere with these changes that happen naturally during adolescence. This can sometimes lead to serious social and health risks.

SECTION 1

LEARN THE FACTS

Consider these statistics:

- In 2017, there were 192 drug overdose deaths per day in the United States. Nearly sixty-eight percent of those deaths were related to pharmaceutical opioids or heroin.
- 11.1 million Americans indicated misusing prescription pain relievers in 2017.
- In 2017, one in seven high school students said that at least once in their lifetime, they had taken prescription pain medicine without a doctor's prescription, or differently than how a doctor told them to use it.
- In 2018, 61 percent of 12th grade students reported a "great risk" in trying heroin.
- Most prescription narcotics used by high-school seniors are obtained through a friend or relative – not through a prescription.



FACT OR MISCONCEPTION

Increased media coverage has led to many myths and misconceptions about opioid misuse and abuse. It's important to separate myths from truths when talking to teens.

Myth

Prescription opioids are safer than “street drugs” because physicians prescribe them all the time.

Truth

“Street drugs” and prescription opioids frequently have the exact same addictive properties and some prescription drugs can even be worse.

Myth

There is an “addiction” gene that controls who does and does not become addicted.

Truth

Genetic factors might make some people more sensitive to the effects of a drug. However, many factors determine the likelihood that someone may become addicted to a drug. This includes both inherited and environmental factors.

Myth

The use of pain medication will always lead to addiction.

Truth

In most cases, when taken according to prescription instructions, pain medication is safe. It is important to discuss the prescription thoroughly with a doctor. If a patient needs long-term pain relief, it might be better to look at other options than to risk opioid addiction.

Myth

Heroin is the opioid that kills the most people.

Truth

Prescription drug overdoses outnumber deaths by heroin and cocaine combined. This does not in any way lessen the danger of heroin—or other illegal drugs—but it does put into perspective the problems with prescription drug misuse.

Myth

Only certain people misuse or abuse drugs.

Truth

Drugs affect people from all races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic classes. Drugs do not discriminate or stereotype.

Myth

Once a person is addicted to drugs, there is no hope for recovery.

Truth

Addiction is not a hopeless problem. Help is available, and treatment can work.