

KEEP YOUR KIDS SAFE

GUIDE

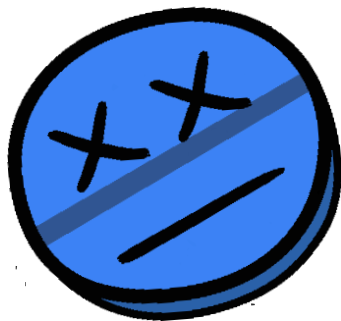
Mental Health & Substance Awareness Toolkit
2025



Losing **Them** Means
losing **This**.



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INTRODUCTION



Parenting in today's world is very different from what it was in the past. Young people are growing up surrounded by constant **pressure.**

They are expected to perform well in school, fit in socially, manage their online presence, and think about their future before they even know exactly who they are.





On top of all this, there is the very real risk of dangerous substances like **fentanyl**, which can be hidden in counterfeit pills.

For many parents, the instinct is to protect their children by warning them to stay away from drugs. While this comes from a place of love, the truth is that **telling them to “just say no” is often not enough.**

This guide is here to help you understand what your child might be going through, how to recognize the early warning signs, and how to have the kinds of conversations that keep communication open even when the topics are difficult.



Nearly 46% of Gen Z in the U.S. has
been diagnosed with a mental
health condition.

6 in 10 counterfeit pills with
fentanyl now contain a potentially
lethal dose.



IT ALL STARTS WITH
MENTAL HEALTH

burnout

anxiety

depression

confused

Tired



WHY “JUST SAY NO” ISN'T ENOUGH

It would be much simpler if keeping children safe from drugs and risky behavior was only about setting rules. In reality, the decision to try a substance is rarely black and white.

Many young people do not start experimenting because they want to rebel. Sometimes it begins as a way to cope with anxiety, sadness, loneliness, or pressure from their peers. Other times it happens because they want to feel accepted or believe it might help them handle stress.

Simply warning them about the dangers does not address these deeper needs. What they often need most is a *safe space* to speak honestly about **what they are feeling and experiencing**. They need to know that if they find themselves in a risky situation, they can come to you without fear of being judged or punished. Building this trust is not something that happens overnight, but it is one of the most powerful ways to keep them safe.

HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION



Choose a moment when you both have time and privacy. Avoid starting the conversation when either of you is already upset or distracted. Begin by letting your child know that you care and that your goal is to understand, not to accuse or punish.

Ask questions that invite longer answers. Instead of asking "Are you using drugs?" you might say "How have you been feeling lately?" or "Is something worrying you?" After you ask, give them time to respond without interruption. Avoid the urge to immediately offer advice or solutions. Sometimes the most important first step is simply making your child feel heard.

If they are not ready to talk, do not force it. Let them know you are there when they are ready and follow up later. Your consistency and calm approach will make it easier for them to open up over time.

If you suspect your child is experimenting with substances, take a moment to breathe before reacting. Strong emotions are natural, but an intense or confrontational response can close the door to communication.

Instead, try to understand what led to the behavior. Was it peer pressure? Is your child trying to manage stress or emotional pain? Are they feeling disconnected or unsupported? Understanding the reasons will help you address the root of the problem instead of only the behavior itself.



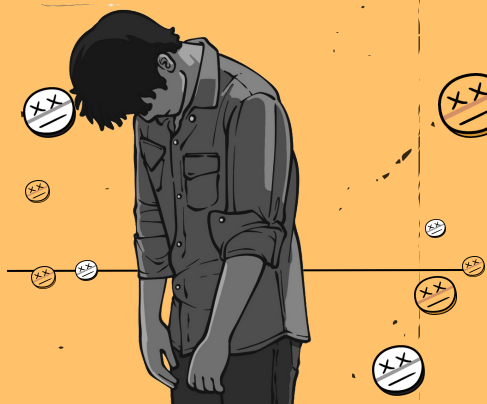
Consider seeking guidance from professionals. This might include a counselor, pediatrician, therapist, or addiction specialist.

If there is any chance that opioids are involved, it is important to learn how to recognize the signs of an overdose and **always keep naloxone** (overdose reversal medication) **at home**.

RECOGNIZING

WHEN SOMETHING IS WRONG

The first signs that your child might be struggling are not always dramatic. Sometimes the changes are subtle and can be mistaken for typical teenage behavior. **This is why paying attention over time matters.**



You might notice that your child is withdrawing from family activities or spending less time with friends. They may lose interest in hobbies or sports they once loved. Changes in mood can appear without an obvious reason. Irritability, sadness, or becoming unusually quiet can be indicators that something is off. Sleep patterns may change. Some young people start sleeping much more than usual, while others barely sleep at all. Appetite and weight can shift as well.



Academically, there may be a drop in grades or a loss of motivation to complete assignments. They may forget responsibilities or stop caring about goals they once valued. While these signs do not automatically mean drug use, they do mean your child is facing a challenge that requires support and open conversation.

opioid overdose signs

Spotting an opioid overdose is urgent, but to really understand it, it helps to know the stages that can happen before things get that far.

LEVEL ● TOLERANCE ● DEPENDENCE ● ADDICTION

TOLERANCE

Occurs when a person begins to experience a reduced response, requiring more to get the same effect

- Crushing & snorting pills
- Chewing pills
- Taking more frequently or increasing dose without being advised by a doctor

DEPENDENCE

Occurs when the body adjusts its normal functioning around regular opioid use. Unpleasant physical symptoms occur when stopped

- Behavioral: Agitation, irritability, impatient
- Physiological: Shakes, chills, sweats, nausea
- Psychological: Mania, paranoia, impulse control

ADDICTION

(OUD) Occurs when attempts to cut down or control use are unsuccessful or when use results in social and personal inability to fulfill normal obligations

- Severe withdrawal
- Worsening drug use
- Uncharacteristic behaviors like lying and stealing
- Self-destructive actions that severe relationships
- Seeking/using illicit drugs

[Commonly Used Terms](#) | [CDC's Response to the Opioid Overdose Epidemic](#) | [CDC](#)

signs and symptoms of Opioid Overdose

When someone has crossed into dangerous territory, these signs can mean an overdose is happening right now:



Blue Lips and/or nails



Dizziness and Confusion



Slow weak or no breathing



Choking and/or Gurgling



Can't be woken up



Drowsiness or lack of response



WHAT IS



MALOXONE?

What is Naloxone?

Naloxone is a medication designed to rapidly **reverse opioid overdose**. It binds to opioid receptors and can reverse or block the effects of other opioids, quickly restoring normal respiration to a person whose breathing has slowed or stopped due to overdosing with heroin or prescription opioid medications.



HOW TO ADMINISTER NALOXONE?

1



CALL FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL HELP

Dial 911 or your local emergency service first.

2



ADMINISTER THE DOSE

Insert the nozzle into one nostril and press the plunger to release the naloxone dose into the nostril. Begin chest compressions.

3



Monitor FOR RESPONSE

If there's no response within 2-3 minutes, administer a second dose in the opposite nostril and continue chest compressions.

4



AWAIT EMERGENCY RESPONDERS

Stay with the person and monitor their breathing and wait for emergency responders to arrive.

WATCH FULL NALOXONE TRAINING VIDEO



Where to get



naloxone?

- **Pharmacies:** In Florida, you can get it without a prescription. Ask the pharmacist for naloxone, NARCAN, or Kloxxado.
- **Community organizations:** Many local health departments, harm reduction groups, and nonprofits give it out for free.
- **Schools and campuses:** Some keep it in nurse's offices or health centers.
- **Online programs:** Certain websites mail free naloxone kits; check Florida's health department or local harm reduction programs for links.