

# Parent Guide

Resources for talking to children and teens in your life about prescription opioid use and misuse.

Little things have never mattered so much.



[LittleThingsNM.org](http://LittleThingsNM.org)



**HEADS**  
**UP.**

**SPEAK**  
**UP.**

**STEP**  
**UP.**

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**What is Narcan?**

**Our everyday lives are filled with ‘little things’. From making a meal for your family, to going out of your way to let them know they can always talk to you. And, when it comes to their safety, little things have never mattered so much.**

**They don’t call it an epidemic lightly.**

The effects of prescription painkillers, when they are misused, are tragic. From young people to elderly, from wealthy homes to those that make due with what they have, hundreds of our loved ones encounter these highly addictive pain medications each year. Even when a doctor prescribes them, one in four people will fall into a spiral of misuse that can result in dependency and even death.<sup>1</sup> Maybe you don’t know it, but there are little things that you can do to prevent harm before it even starts. It has never mattered so much.

**This guide provides some of the most important, little things you can do to keep your family safe from the misuse of prescription opioid medications.**

Our guide is divided into three sections:

**HEADS  
UP.**

What you need to know.

**SPEAK  
UP.**

Tools to talk with your doctor, providers and children about the dangers of prescription opioids.

**STEP  
UP.**

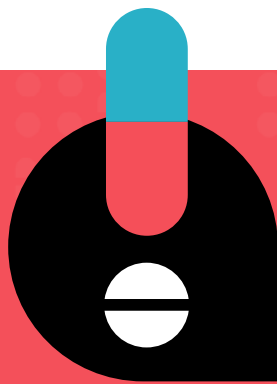
The actions you can take to keep you and your family safe.

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<sup>1</sup> The Pain Project. Top 8 Facts About the Opioid Dependence Problem in the U.S. <https://www.thepainproject.com/top-8-facts-about-the-opioid-dependence-problem-in-the-u-s/>

You may have already spoken to your family members about the dangers of illicit drugs, but legally prescribed medications are also a concern. They can cause great harm and have unintended consequences. In fact, the trend in increased prescription drug use among adolescents and young adults has been on the rise for the past three decades with an increase in misuse of prescription drugs of 212% from 1992 to 2003.<sup>2</sup> Some researchers have argued that that these trends are due to the perception that prescribed drugs are less harmful, more accessible and have a lower level of stigma attached to them versus using illegal drugs.<sup>3</sup>

We are here to support you as a parent or caregiver in discussing the dangers of prescription opioid use with any children, teens and young adults in your care, as well as with your fellow community members.



Did you know that nearly 1 in 4 teens report taking a prescription drug NOT prescribed to them at least once in their lives?

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<sup>2</sup> National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University. (2005) Under the Counter: The Diversion and Abuse of Controlled Prescription Drugs in the U.S. [https://www.centeronaddiction.org/sites/default/files/Under-the-counter-the-diversion-and-abuse-of-controlled-prescription-drugs-in-the-us\\_0.pdf](https://www.centeronaddiction.org/sites/default/files/Under-the-counter-the-diversion-and-abuse-of-controlled-prescription-drugs-in-the-us_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Friedman RA. The Changing Face of Teenage Drug Abuse - The Trend Toward Prescription Drugs. N Engl J Med. 2006; 354(14):1448-1450. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp068010>

## What you need to know about opioids.

### First things first: What are opioids? And why would someone misuse them?

Opioids are an entire class of drugs that are used to relieve pain. They refer to both legally prescribed drugs such as morphine, hydrocodone and codeine and illegal drugs such as heroin. Opioids act on pain receptors/sensors in the body as well as in the brain and can produce a highly addictive effect that is thought to contribute to rewiring the brain.

Below are some of the most common opioids:



**Oxycodone**  
OxyContin®,  
Roxicodone®,  
Oxydose®



**Oxycodone / Acetaminophen**  
Percocet®, Endocet®,  
Roxicet®, Tylox®



**Fentanyl**  
Duragesic®, Actiq®,  
Fentora®



**Codeine**  
Only available in  
generic form



**Tramadol**  
ConZip®,  
Ultram®



**Hydrocodone / Acetaminophen**  
Lortab®, Vicodin®,  
Lorcet®, Norco®



**Hydromorphone**  
Dilaudid®, Exalgo®



**Meperidine**  
Demerol®



**Morphine**  
MS Contin®,  
Duramorph®,  
Roxanol®, Kadian®



**Methadone**  
Dolophine®,  
Methadose®

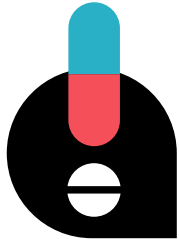


As a parent or caregiver, you can make a difference. Talking with your child or teen can help them make the right decisions when it comes to taking prescription medications.

Nearly one in four teens report having misused or abused a prescription drug at least once in their lifetime.<sup>4</sup>

You may have heard that “if it’s prescribed, it is safe”, which is a common and harmful misconception about prescription drugs. Chances are, teens and young adults have also heard this misconception. Given the way prescription drugs are heavily marketed and advertised, young people have also grown up associating medications with “solving problems” and have less of a fear or perceived harm when using or abusing prescription medications.

As a parent, grandparent, guardian, sibling or concerned friend, there are things you can do to support your loved ones. Use this guide to learn more about the dangers and myths around opioid use because prescribed opioids from your doctor are just as addictive as illicit opioids.



**Heads Up: Know the signs of prescription painkiller misuse. If your child is prescribed an opioid, pay attention to signs, especially if they persist longer than the duration of the treatment. Here are some common signs of misuse:**

- Finishing prescriptions prematurely
- Wanting a prescription refill when their doctor didn’t prescribe refills
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Agitation and mood swings
- Poor academic performance and missing classes
- A strong interest in opioids
- Getting in trouble in school or with the law
- Poor job performance if they’re working
- Withdrawing from friends, family and activities

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<sup>4</sup> Partnership Attitude Tracking Study: Teens and Parents. (2013) <https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/PATS-2013-FULL-REPORT.pdf>

# Tools to talk with your children and your medical provider about the dangers of prescription painkillers.

## Talking to your children:

Being a teen is tough. Sports injuries happen. Wisdom teeth are pulled. School stress intensifies. These are all common issues in a young adult's life, and opioids — prescribed or illegal — can dull pain caused by strenuous activity, injury or stress.

In fact, “in New Mexico’s Youth Risk and Resiliency survey, one in 10 youths admitted to using opiate-based prescription drugs to get high.”<sup>5</sup>


Young athletes are under uniquely intense pressure to perform well on the playing field and are extremely prone to injuries. Coaches, families and educators play a major role in athletes’ lives, especially when it comes to injury recovery. Even elite athletes have troubles with opioids. The data shows that 71 percent of retired athletes report opioid misuse when they had access to prescription opioids.<sup>6</sup> Use the conversation starters on page 10 to talk to your child about the dangers of using opioid medications to get back to their sport before an injury is fully healed or to numb emotional stress.

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<sup>5</sup> Wertheim JL and Rodriguez K. (2015) *How Painkillers are turning Young Athletes into Heroin Addicts*. <https://www.si.com/more-sports/2015/06/18/special-report-painkillers-young-athletes-heroin-addicts>

<sup>6</sup> Cottler, Linda B, et al. “Injury, Pain, and Prescription Opioid Use among Former National Football League (NFL) Players.” National Center for Biotechnology Information, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 28 Jan. 2011, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3095672/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3095672/).



 **Consider the story of Roman Montaña, an Eldorado High School student, whose story was covered in a Sports Illustrated article about young athletes and their exposure to opioid medications.**

Roman was a multisport star, but he had a favorite: baseball. With a clear path to play for the Braves, who had already expressed interest in him, his ambitions were set on the big leagues. “Everyone wanted to be him, but everyone wanted to be around him, too.” Reminisced Ken Giles, a friend of Roman’s who is now a Phillies reliever. In junior year, Roman had minor surgery for a foot injury and was prescribed OxyContin. After his recovery, he was kicked off the baseball team for getting in trouble outside of school. Feeling angry and ashamed, he turned to OxyContin which evolved into an addiction to heroin.

He lost interest in sports and was showing other signs of addiction. His parents noticed and took him to addiction center where he was prescribed Suboxone to treat his opioid dependency. Addiction is a disease and Roman unfortunately relapsed. Roman died from an overdose in 2012.

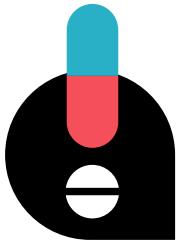
“He looked so healthy, a big, strapping guy, not like a junkie,” said Bo, his father. “He was back doing his athletics. We thought the addiction was behind us. We didn’t know how cunning and how manipulative this drug is.” <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Wertheim JL and Rodriguez K. (2015) How Painkillers are turning Young Athletes into Heroin Addicts. <https://www.si.com/more-sports/2015/06/18/special-report-painkillers-young-athletes-heroin-addicts>

In addition to knowing more about the types of medications in your home and their addictive qualities, it is also helpful to know what your child or teen might be hearing from peers, media and pop culture.

Drugs and “drug culture” are often glamorized in music, media, literature and popular culture. Today’s youth can be inundated with everything from “heroin chic” makeup tutorials to advice on how to best hide drug use from teachers and adults. Did you know that in a recent study looking at drug references found in popular music, over 50 percent of the current top 40 radio hits reference opioid medications?<sup>8</sup>



**Speak Up: Have a conversation with your child about the dangers of opioid misuse. Talking to them about opioids can be the difference it takes to change their future forever. The best approach is to be non-accusatory and ask open-ended questions with the hope of starting an interactive dialogue. Below are a couple of tips and conversation starters:**

- Use topical events or stories in the media to seize the moment. For example: “There are a lot of news stories lately about people of all ages using drugs called opioids. How much do you know about this? What do you think about this? Have you heard of these drugs being used at your school?”
- Listen more than you speak and try not to overreact to what a child or young adult may tell you. You may be surprised by how much they know or surprised by what they might have already been exposed to. Use these opportunities to learn from each other.

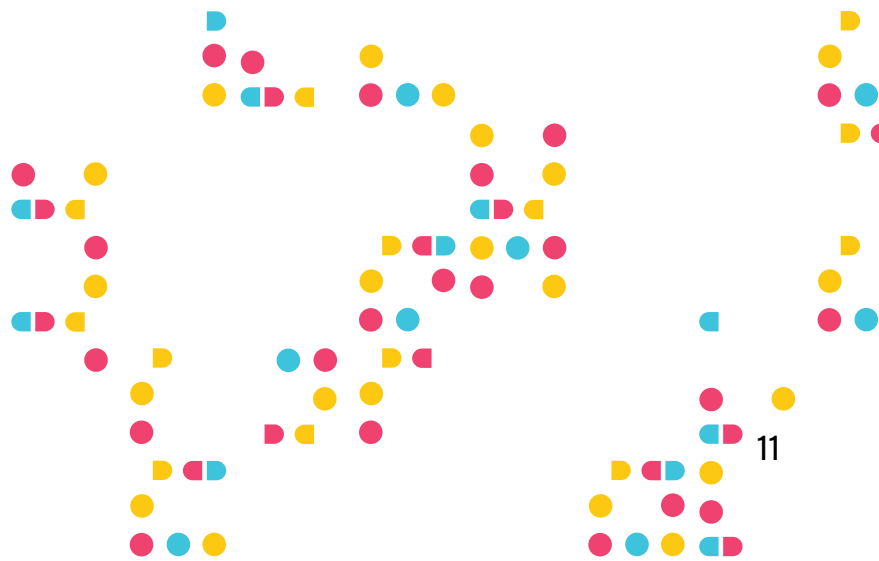
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<sup>8</sup> Hanba C and Hanba D. (2018) Opioid and Drug Preference in Top 40s Music: A 30 year review. *J Am Board Fam Med.* doi: [10.3122/jabfm.2018.05.180001](https://doi.org/10.3122/jabfm.2018.05.180001)

- Have resources to educate both yourself and young people. What should you ask your doctor? What are the names of different types of drugs? And, if they aren't willing to talk to you, have options for other people they could talk to about opioid misuse.

Get these resources and more at [LittleThingsNM.org/resources](https://LittleThingsNM.org/resources)

- Be honest. Tell youth and young adults about your experience or your family experience just like any other chronic disease or illness. Use this to empower them if possible.
- Ask open-ended questions that will lead to an interactive dialogue. For example:
  - ❑ How often do you hear other people or your friends talking about drugs at school? How does that make you feel?
  - ❑ Do you think it is easy for kids your age to get drugs or alcohol when they want to? How and why?
  - ❑ What have you experienced so far? Does it make you scared or curious? How do you face these issues when you come across them?

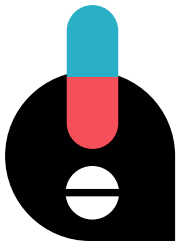


## Talking to your medical provider:

In some cases, you or your child may be prescribed an opioid that may not be necessary. It is up to you to talk with your medical provider about alternative pain management options<sup>9</sup> to figure out the treatment that will work best. Don't get prescribed a dangerous medication that you don't need.

Did you know that opioid prescription sales have increased by 300 percent since 1999 – without any changes in reported pain? Which means that people are being over-prescribed these medications and that unintentional access to drugs in the home is at an all-time high.

It only takes a little to take a life, and it only takes a little to save one. By making sure that you and your family are only taking medications that are truly needed and avoiding the ones you don't, you'll reduce the risk that you or someone in your home is exposed to the dangers of opioid use.



**Speak Up: Talk to your medical provider about the dangers of opioids before they enter your home. It makes a big difference. Here are three questions you can ask your medical provider before they give you a prescription:**

- Is there something else that will treat my pain?
- Are you giving the lowest dose and the least amount of medication for what I need?
- What do I do with any unused medications?

Get the full list of questions to ask your provider at [LittleThingsNM.org/questions](https://www.littlethingsnm.org/questions)

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<sup>9</sup> “Center for Disease Control. “CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain.” [www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/guidelines\\_at-a-glance-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/guidelines_at-a-glance-a.pdf).)

## **Three little things you can do to keep you and your family safe:**

### **1. Safe Storage**

Always remember: when your medications are stored safely, your family is safe. From young children who don't know that medications are dangerous, to teens who may be feeling peer pressure to take medications that are not theirs, it's best to make sure that only you know where your medications are stored.

1. Talk to your doctor about what medications you need to keep.
2. Keep all medications (even over the counter ones) in a safe—and ideally locked—place away from children and hidden from teens and young adults.
3. If your child or family member has been prescribed an opioid, carefully monitor the dosage, number of pills and refills, and review the signs of addiction on page seven of this guide.

## 2. Disposal

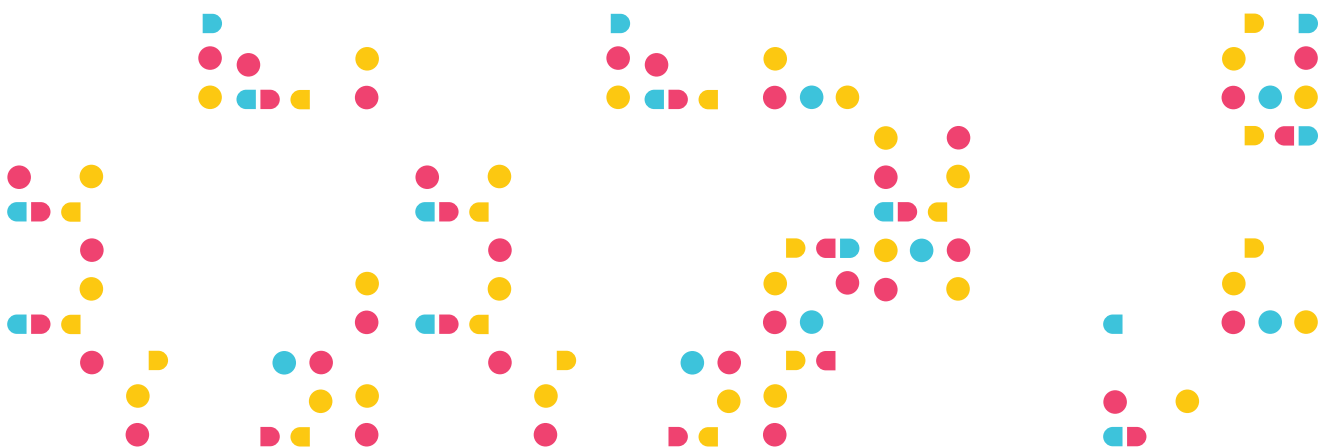
It is extremely common for caring family members to think they are keeping pills “just in case”, but this poses more of a danger and a threat to other family members. Leftover or expired medications should be disposed of safely and as soon as possible. Keeping opioids out of the house is the easiest way to protect your family from accidental misuse.

**Drop Off Site** — *These allow you to dispose of your medications at a safe location so that they won't get into the wrong hands.*

1. Find a drop off site at [takebackday.dea.gov](https://takebackday.dea.gov).
2. Gather all unused medications in the house.
3. Drop off medications.

**Deterra® Drug Deactivation System** — *These bags neutralize the opioids so that they are no longer harmful and can be thrown away safely.*

1. Get a Deterra® bag at [shop.deterrasystem.com](https://shop.deterrasystem.com).
2. Gather all unused medications in the house.
3. Place medications in the deterra bag following the directions indicated on the bag and throw away.







## Why can't you just throw unused pills in the kitchen trash?

For a couple of reasons. First, there's still a chance that they could get into the wrong hands in your home even when they're thrown away. And, when they make it to the landfill, they release their harmful properties into the environment and water systems, causing immense harm. It also puts sanitation workers at risk of exposure, as some drugs can be absorbed through the skin with direct contact.

### 3. Sharing

The number one source of abused prescription opioids is free pills from friends and family, according to the CDC.<sup>10</sup> While none of us want to see our loved ones in pain, prescription painkillers, when they are misused, can have tragic consequences like dependency and even death. If someone asks you for your prescribed opioid medications:

1. Let them know that you can't give them any of your prescribed medications because it could have long-term negative effects (and is a federal offence).
2. Ask them if they're in pain and what they're currently doing to manage it.
3. Help them research alternative pain management options, find local providers and help them schedule an appointment with a medical professional to discuss what's right for them.

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<sup>10</sup> Tello M. (2018) Opioids in the Household: "Sharing" Pain Pills is too Common. Harvard Health Publishing. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/opioids-household-sharing-pain-pills-common-2018032213269>



# What is Narcan® (Naloxone)?

The opioid epidemic touches us all. It crosses generations and communities. It doesn't care how much money you make, or where you work. Unintentional overdoses happen, and if you have prescription drugs in your house, you should also have Narcan® (Naloxone) on hand. It is a nasal spray used to treat emergency cases of opioid overdose. It temporarily offsets the effects of overdose so that you can get your loved one to the hospital.

Why should you have Narcan if you or your loved one is not showing signs of misuse? Because, in New Mexico, six out of every 10 unintentional overdose deaths involve prescription drugs.



**Let's consider this case example: a 75 year old woman who suffers from severe osteoarthritis is prescribed a fentanyl patch for pain control.**

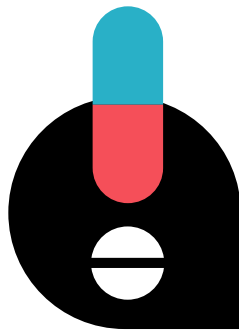
Fentanyl patches are applied directly to the skin and release a slow amount of opioid medication into the system over a 72 hour period. She applies the patch to her right hip and experiences pain relief and better range of movement.

She also has a previous prescription for Vicodin that she was given for acute pain flare ups. She bumps her knee on a table at home and uses her Vicodin as prescribed to her but has forgotten she is still wearing her fentanyl patch for hip pain. She begins to become drowsy and disoriented and her husband calls an ambulance.

In this extremely common example of an accidental overdose, she took her medication as prescribed but didn't realize the risk of combining different opioid medications.

You can save a life by ensuring that you have Narcan® (Naloxone) in your home. Find locations to get Narcan® (Naloxone) at [doseofreality.com/treatment/find-naloxone](https://doseofreality.com/treatment/find-naloxone).

Visit [LittleThingsNM.org](https://LittleThingsNM.org) for more resources and information about the opioid epidemic in New Mexico.



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