HÓZHÓ & HEALING:

A FAMILY GUIDE TO WELLNESS AND PRESCRIPTION SAFETY

FOR PARENTS, BY PARENTS.



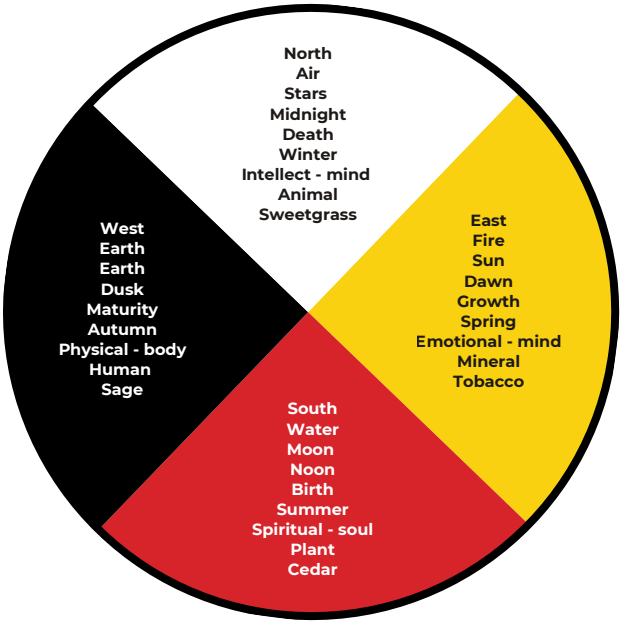
Yá’át’ééh (Diné) | Guwedzi (Acoma) Ma gu-am (Tiwa) | Tanyan Yahipi (Lakota)

This guide was created from the voices, heartaches, and hopes of parents and grandparents right here in our New Mexico communities. We sat in circles, shared meals, and talked about the challenges facing our children.

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE: WHY OUR CIRCLES ARE BREAKING

We hear the word "epidemic" on the news, but in our communities, we see it in our homes. Whether it is a relative who started taking pills after a workplace injury or a young athlete who was prescribed opioids after a sports surgery, the "spiral" doesn't care about how much money you have or how traditional your home is.

Many of our youth believe that because a doctor at the IHS or a local clinic wrote the prescription, the pill is "safe." They see these medications marketed everywhere and think they "solve problems." **This has led to a 212% increase in prescription drug misuse over the last few decades. In New Mexico, 1 in 10 of our youth have admitted to using these pills just to get high or to numb the stress of being a teenager.** We are living in a time where pills are more accessible than ever. Sometimes, they are even in "Grandma's purse" or the kitchen cabinet. This isn't about blaming our elders; it’s about realizing that the world has changed, and our methods of protection must change with it.



UNDERSTANDING THE MEDICINE

WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Before we can protect our circles, we must understand what we are up against. Opioids are a powerful class of drugs designed to "quiet" pain. They include both legal medications—like morphine, hydrocodone (Vicodin), oxycodone (OxyContin), and codeine—and illegal drugs like heroin or illicit fentanyl.

Think of your body’s nervous system like a series of mountain trails. These trails carry messages of "pain" from an injury (like a broken bone or a surgery site) up to the brain. Opioids act like a heavy snowstorm on those trails—they block the messages so the brain doesn't "feel" the pain.

The "Spiral": How Does Someone Get Addicted?

Addiction isn't about being a "bad person." It is a physical change in the brain's map. Here is how it happens:

1. When someone takes an opioid, the drug doesn't just block pain; it also floods the brain with a chemical called dopamine. This creates a feeling of "euphoria" or intense calm. For a young person dealing with the stress of school or a family loss, this feeling can be very tempting to chase.
2. Our brains are designed to be "Reflective" and adaptable. If someone takes opioids for too long—even if they were prescribed by a doctor—the brain starts to think it needs the drug to function. It stops making its own "feel-good" chemicals.
3. Over time, the same dose doesn't work anymore. The "trail" is blocked, and the person needs more and more of the drug to feel "normal."
4. Eventually, the person isn't taking the pill to get "high"—they are taking it just to avoid feeling incredibly sick (withdrawal). At this point, the **1 in 4 people** who fall into this spiral find that the drug has taken the "driver's seat" in their lives.

A Note for Our Families:

Because prescription drugs are heavily marketed and come from a pharmacy, many of our youth have a "lower level of stigma" toward them. They think, "It's just a pill, it's not like the drugs on the street." We must teach them that a prescribed opioid is chemically very similar to heroin. Both can lead to the same tragic consequences if the "spiral" begins.

THE SCIENCE OF THE SPIRIT

RESTORING THE BALANCE

When we talk about addiction, we use the word **Reflection**. We ask our loved ones to look inward. If the brain has been "rewired" by a pill, it takes time, patience, and often medical help to "re-map" those trails back to health.

- It’s not a secret to keep; it’s a wound to heal.*

** Just as we would treat diabetes or a heart condition, we must treat opioid misuse with the right medicine and community support.*

The Medicine Wheel: A Narrative of Balance

In our culture, health isn't just about the body; it is the Medicine Wheel in motion. When an opioid enters a home unmanaged, it doesn't just affect one person; it wobbles the entire wheel.

- **The East (Physical):** This is where we respect our bodies as vessels for our ancestors. We must teach our children that our bodies are sacred. Taking a pill that wasn't prescribed for you is a violation of that physical temple.
- **The South (Mental):** Knowledge is a shield. When we understand how opioids "rewire" the brain—changing how we feel pleasure and pain—we are empowered. We aren't "bad people" for getting addicted; our brains are being hijacked by a chemical.
- **The West (Emotional):** This is the space of the "Talking Circle." Many youth use pills to numb emotional pain—grief from a loss in the family, the stress of school, or feeling "less than." We strengthen the West by letting our kids know it is okay to feel hurt without needing a pill to hide it.
- **The North (Spiritual):** This is our connection to our People and our Culture. Culture is Prevention. When we participate in our ceremonies, speak our languages, and respect our elders, we fill the "void" that drugs often try to fill.

Prevention Tips: Protecting the Home

Prevention isn't a one-time talk; it's a way of living.

- **Know exactly what is in your house.** Opioids have specific shapes and imprints. If you find a pill, look it up. Don't be afraid to ask, "Where did this come from?"
- We lock our doors to keep our families safe; we should lock our medicine for the same reason. **A lockbox isn't a sign of distrust—it's a boundary of protection.**
- When you or your child are at the doctor, Responsibility means asking: "Is there a non-opioid way to treat this pain?" or "How many days of this do we actually need?" **Advocate for you and your family. Ask questions.**
- Watch for the "Signs of the Trail." If your teen is suddenly sleeping all day, missing classes, or losing interest in the things they used to love (like sports or art), the wheel is out of balance. **Reach out early.**

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

SAMPLE SCRIPTS AND EXERCISES TO INFORM, EDUCATE, AND PROTECT OUR FAMILIES

Many parents want to talk about medicine safety, pills, and substance use, but they don't always know how to begin the conversation.

You do not need to have all the answers. Starting the conversation is what matters most.

These examples are conversation starters you can practice using with people in your life. Use the words that feel natural to you.

TALKING WITH OTHER PARENTS

Building Support with Other Families

1

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- *"Hey, I've been thinking a lot about medicine safety lately. Have you ever talked with your kids about prescription pills?"*
- *"I recently learned that a lot of teens get pills from homes they know. It made me start thinking about how we store medicine in our house."*
- *"I'm trying to be more proactive about these conversations with my kids. Have you ever had that talk before?"*

ADVOCATING FOR SAFETY

- *"I think it helps when parents are on the same page about this stuff."*
- *"Maybe we can remind each other to keep medicines locked or safely disposed of."*
- *"We're all just trying to keep our kids safe."*

TALKING WITH YOUTH

2

Remember: When it comes to youth, listening is often more important than talking.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- *"What have you heard about pills or prescription medicine at school?"*
- *"I heard that sometimes pills get shared among friends. Have you ever heard about that?"*
- *"I want you to know you can always ask me questions about drugs or medicine. You won't get in trouble for asking."*

SHARING YOUR MESSAGE

- *"My job as a parent is to keep you safe."*
- *"Some medicines can be very strong and dangerous if they aren't used the right way."*
- *"If you ever feel unsure or pressured, you can always come talk to me."*

TALKING WITH HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Advocating for Your Family's Health

3

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- *"I want to understand this medication better before my child takes it."*
- *"Are there non-opioid options for pain management?"*
- *"What are the risks of this medication?"*
- *"Is this medication safe to have in a home with children or teens?"*

SAFETY QUESTIONS

- *"How should this medication be stored?"*
- *"How should unused medicine be disposed of?"*
- *"Should our family have Narcan available?"*

ADVOCATING FOR YOUR FAMILY

- *"I want to make sure we are using medicine safely."*
- *"I'm asking these questions because I want to protect my family."*
- *"I appreciate you taking time to explain this."*

TALKING WITH ELDERS OR TRUSTED COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Learning from Wisdom and Experience

4

In many Native communities, elders carry knowledge that helps guide families. Talking with elders can help parents gain perspective and support.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- *"I've been thinking about how to protect my kids from drugs. I would really value your thoughts."*
- *"What teachings did you learn growing up about caring for your body and health?"*
- *"What advice would you give parents today?"*

LISTENING RESPONSES

- *"I appreciate you sharing that."*
- *"That's something I want to pass down to my children."*
- *"Your wisdom means a lot to our family."*

Visit next page for the START THE CONVERSATION worksheet.

Worksheet: The "Talking Stick" Family Conversation

Instructions for Parents: Find a quiet space. You can use a traditional talking stick or any object that holds meaning for your family. Whoever holds the stick speaks from the heart; everyone else listens with Respect.

Step 1: The Opening (Acknowledge the Ancestors) Start by saying: "We are talking about this today because I love you and I am responsible for your future. Our ancestors survived so much so we could be here; I want to make sure our family stays whole."

Step 2: The Questions (Passing the Stick) Ask your child to hold the stick and answer honestly. There are no "wrong" answers.

- "What have you heard at school or from friends about 'pills' or 'blues'?" (Listen without interrupting).
- "Do you feel like kids your age use things to hide their stress or pain? Why do you think that is?"
- "If you ever felt overwhelmed or saw a friend in trouble with pills, do you feel safe coming to me? How can I make it easier for you to talk to me?"

Step 3: The Commitment (The Family Pact) As a family, agree on these three things:

- We only take medicine with our own name on the bottle.
- We look out for each other. If one of us is hurting, we talk about it; we don't hide it.
- Our home is a "Safe Zone." No shame, just help.

START THE CONVERSATION

One Conversation I Will Start This Week

- ☐ Another parent
- ☐ My child or youth in my family
- ☐ A doctor or healthcare provider
- ☐ An elder or trusted community member

My plan: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

You don't have to have all the answers — just start the conversation.

MEDICINE INVENTORY SHEET

Name of Family Member	Medication Name	Date Received	Dosage Strength	Quantity in Bottle	Frequency (how often taken)	Reason for taking	Prescribing Physician	Discard By
Grandma	Lisinopril	March 20, 2026	10 mg	30	1/day	blood pressure	Dr. Physician	March 20, 2027

Tip: If you cannot identify a medication, do not take it. Consult your healthcare provider or use a trusted pill identifier tool such as Drugs.com: https://www.drugs.com/imprints.php

What is Narcan® (Nalaxone)? And How Do You Use It?

Across our communities, we take care of one another—our families, our relatives, our elders, and our youth. Part of that care is being prepared for the unexpected.

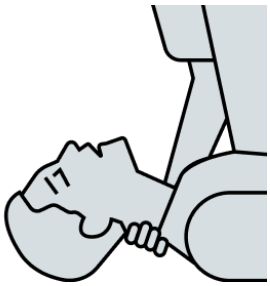
Narcan® (Naloxone) is a medication that can reverse an opioid overdose. It comes as a nasal spray and is easy to use. When someone is experiencing an overdose, Narcan can help restore breathing and give them time to receive medical care.

Opioid overdoses can happen in any home, often unintentionally—even when medications are taken as prescribed. That's why having Narcan on hand is important if there are prescription medications in your household.

Keeping Narcan nearby is an act of care. It's a way to protect your loved ones and be ready to help when it matters most.

1

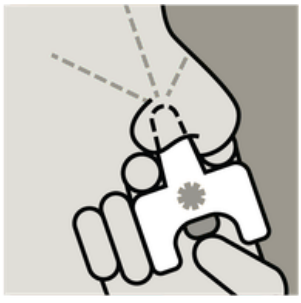
LAY



- Check for slowed breathing or unresponsiveness.
- Lay the person on their back and tilt their head up.

2

SPRAY



Insert device into either nose and press plunger firmly.

3

STAY



Call 911 immediately and continue to administer doses as needed.

Opioid Misuse Prevention Resources

Immediate Help (Save These Numbers)

- **National Helpline -** Free, confidential, 24/7/365 treatment referral and information service
  - **1-800-622-HELP (4357)**
- **Poison Help**
  - **1-800-222-1222**
  - **PoisonHelp.org**
- **Crisis and Access Line -** Call for support and resources. Toll Free 24/7/365
  - **1-855-NMCRISIS (662-7474)**

IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY ALWAYS CALL 911!

NARCAN® (Nalaxone) Access

DOH Public Health Offices

- In person services
- Available at no cost
- Locate an office closest to you at **NMHIVGuide.org**

Order Online

- Available at no cost
- Shipped to your address/PO Box
- To order naloxone: **NMHarmReduction.org**

Pharmacies

Walgreens, CVS, Target, Walmart, Smith's, or Albertsons all carry naloxone

- Over the counter for purchase
- Without a prescription (with insurance - possible copay)
- With a prescription (possible copay)

Safe Disposal Options

- **Medication Drop Boxes -** At pharmacies, police substations and community locations
- **Take Back Days (Bi-Annual) -** Scheduled for the last Saturday in April and October
- **Disposal Bags (like Deterra) -** Safe at-home solution for expired and unwanted/unused medication. Call the Health Equity Council at **(505) 246-1638** to request a free Deterra Bag

Find a drop off location near you

PROTECT OUR HOMES, OUR WATER AND OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS.
DISPOSE SAFELY!

Safe Medication Practices

- Keep medications locked and out of sight
- Only take medications exactly as prescribed
- Keep track of your medications
- Dispose of unused or expired medications safely

Treatment and Recovery Support

- Behavioral Health and Addiction Treatment Service
  - **https://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov/**
  - **1-800-662-4357**

LEARN MORE & GET CONNECTED

www.LittleThingsNM.org

“As Native parents, we carry the responsibility (wóaiȟpeye) to protect our children (wakȟáŋyeža) in every way, this guide gives us knowledge to keep our families safe, strong, and informed.”

- Nakina Mills

"We cannot heal the circle until we understand where and why it is broken. Like our bee relatives, who scurry to fix the hive after it has been damaged, we are now the fixers and restorers of the circle. In that work, we become healed."

- Dr. Anthony Fleg

“Our children (wakȟáŋyeža) are sacred. When we understand how to keep them safe, from medicines to everyday choices, we are honoring our role as parents and being good relatives.”

- Nakina Mills

Paid for by NM Behavioral Health Services Division Office of Substance Abuse Prevention

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TOOLKIT



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MONTSERRAT REGULAR

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