

Combating the Opioid Crisis:

Guidance for Educators and Coaches

The opioid crisis is plaguing American families and communities, causing vast suffering and killing people at unprecedented rates. While the causes of opioid misuse are complex and determined by many factors, the goals of prevention and recovery focus on reducing risk and promoting resiliency. Educators and coaches play an important role in reaching these goals.

How you can help:

- Understand the [risk factors](#) for abuse of painkillers: stress over school, sports, home life demands and pressures, trouble with friends, depression, and anxiety.
- Talk with students and parents about the risks and dangers of prescription painkillers, especially opioids and narcotics.
- Encourage students and parents to ask healthcare professionals for non-narcotic alternatives if pain requires medical intervention.
- Let students and parents know you will stand by them and offer support if they need it.
- Review your school policies on drug use and encourage administrators to consider updating policies to include use and/or abuse of opioids and other prescription drugs. Know how to follow through if you suspect a student is abusing drugs.
- Watch students for signs of addiction.

Be alert for these warning signs:

- Acting withdrawn, depressed, hostile, or fatigued for no reason
- Showing a decline in school performance or attendance
- Consistently coming late to school
- Switching to a “new” group of friends
- Changing relationships with family and friends
- Nodding off in class

Because children who experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) may be at risk for substance abuse, be especially aware of the vulnerability of children with a history of any of the following:

- Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- Physical or emotional neglect
- Mental illness of a household member
- Alcoholism or illegal drug use of a household member
- Divorce or separation of a parent
- Domestic violence towards a parent
- Incarceration of a household member

Coaches, if you suspect your athlete is at risk:

Coaches may be in a unique position to pick up on other signs that their athletes may be at risk. In addition to the general signs mentioned above, pay attention to an athlete who is:

- Showing a decline in practice, game performance, or attendance
- Consistently coming late to practice and/or games
- Becoming distant from you or other team members

What you can do:

- Talk with athletes and parents about the risks and dangers of prescription painkillers, including opioids and narcotics.
- Encourage parents and athletes to ask healthcare professionals for non-narcotic painkiller alternatives if an athlete's pain requires medical intervention.
- Let parents and athletes know you will stand by them and offer support if they need it.
- Review your school and athletic program policies on drug use and encourage administrators and other coaches to consider updating policies to include use and/or abuse of narcotic painkillers. Know how to follow through if you suspect an athlete is abusing drugs.
- Watch athletes for signs of addiction.