

# Understanding THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC



## But, the Doctor Prescribed It...

Grades 7-8

1 Class Period

### Program Segment(s)

- How Addiction Happens (approximately 8 minutes)

### Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify the misperception that prescription painkillers are safe just because they come from a doctor.
- Explain the differences between prescription drug use, misuse, and abuse.
- Identify ways to avoid misusing/abusing prescription painkillers.

### Instructional Resources

- *Understanding the Opioid Epidemic*
- Obtain the most current statistics on the opioid epidemic – e.g. deaths/overdoses related to prescription painkillers and/or heroin (<https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>)
- Create a sign for each of the following response options
  - Never okay
  - Could be okay (under certain circumstances)
  - Always okay
  - Not sure if this is okay or not
- Use, Misuse, and Abuse Handout

### Procedures

1. Students will watch the *Understanding the Opioid Epidemic* segment and take notes.
2. The teacher will reiterate points made in the segment such as:
  - what the opioid epidemic is
  - share local statistics of individuals affected by this epidemic from their county health department or local police department (optional)
  - individuals are becoming addicted to prescription painkillers that have been prescribed by the health care system
  - the false perception of safety that exists when the drugs are prescribed by physicians

3. The teacher will explain to students that they will explore this misperception more deeply. Brainstorm when prescription drugs could be dangerous. If possible, show these webpages in the classroom – or get information from them to share with the class: <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/prescription-drugs> and <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/prescription-pain-medications-opioids>
4. Tell students that you will be reading them a list of statements about prescription pain medications, they will be moving to a certain area of the room, and then standing beside a sign based on their opinion regarding the statement. Explain the response choices as:
  - Never okay
  - Could be okay (under certain circumstances)
  - Always okay
  - Not sure if this is okay or not
5. Read each situation aloud. Allow students a moment to think, then direct them to move to the posted sign that most represents their opinion. Ask for volunteers to discuss why they selected the response they did. Provide the correct response to the situation if no one chose it. Continue to read statements, and have students move and discuss responses until each statement has been read.

Situations:

- Taking a prescription drug prescribed for you by your doctor or other appropriate medical professional, exactly as instructed, with adult supervision
- Using another family member's or friend's prescription drug
- Giving your prescription drug to another person to take or sell
- Using another person's prescription drug because you are sick too
- Asking the pharmacy to sell you more of your prescription drug after you run out
- Asking the pharmacist if you have questions about your prescription
- Using your own prescription drug for any other reason than for what it was prescribed
- Throwing leftover prescription drugs in the trash when you are done taking your prescription
- Deciding on your own to take more than the prescribed dosage of a prescription drug, because you think that it isn't working well enough
- Using your own prescription drug after the prescription has expired
- Using another person's prescription drugs to get high
- Continuing to take your prescription after you have completely healed or have no more pain

Direct students to return to their seats after completing the statements.

6. Remind students that intentionally and knowingly using another person's prescription drug is prescription drug abuse and is never okay to do. Explain why it is important for students to be clear about what is okay and not okay with regard to prescription drugs

(misuse and abuse of prescription drugs may happen for different reasons; both can be very harmful and have the same consequences). In particular this is important because of the high addiction rate associated with prescription painkillers. Explain the difference between use, misuse, and abuse by reviewing the *Use, Misuse, and Abuse Handout*. Revisit some of the previously discussed scenarios and ask students to identify if they would be considered as use, misuse, or abuse.

#### 7. Brainstorm ways to help avoid prescription drug misuse and abuse

- Examples could include: reading prescription labels, not using prescriptions that were not prescribed to you, not sharing prescriptions, talking with the doctor to have a limited prescription of painkillers; asking for a non-opioid painkiller; learning more information about the type of drug you are being prescribed; sharing this information with your family and friends.

### **Adaptations (Grades 9-12)**

- Working in groups of 4 or 5 students, they should develop a video to serve as a public service announcement detailing the differences of use, misuse, and abuse. This can be done in a number of ways – strictly defining the 3 terms, role play scenarios depicting each, etc. The PSAs could be used on the school website. (In a situation where no video cameras are available, students may write scripts for a PSA and act them out for classmates or in a school assembly).

### **Assessment Task**

Students will participate in the use, misuse, and abuse exercise and be an active participant in the conversation during and following the exercise.

### **National Health Standards**

- Standard 1 - Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.
- Standard 2 - Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors.
- Standard 4 - Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.
- Standard 5 - Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.
- Standard 8 - Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.