

Understanding THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC



Understanding the Opioid Epidemic is a one-hour PBS documentary that traces the causes behind the unprecedented growth in the use of prescription opioids and the devastating impact these drugs are having in every part of America. To accompany the television program, a community education and engagement initiative has been developed. The impact on young people, families and communities is devastating. Awareness and education can hopefully begin to slow the epidemic.

A Curriculum Overview

Classroom curriculum, to be used with the television program *Understanding the Opioid Epidemic*, has been developed. The lesson plans were created to be used with 7th-8th grade students but include ideas for adapting for use with 9th-12th grade students. Lesson content is based on the documentary as well as important themes such as misperception of opioid safety, community awareness, brain science, stigma, and the struggles associated with treatment and recovery. Lessons are aligned to National Health Education Standards.

The full accompanying lesson plans for middle and high school students can be found on the project website at pbs.org/understandingopioids as well as on PBS LearningMedia. PBS LearningMedia is a free platform for educators housing videos, images, and other classroom content that can be downloaded and saved to be used year after year.

Each lesson plan follows the same format: one or two short video segments from *Understanding the Opioid Epidemic* are to be shown to the class followed by a related activity. The lesson plan indicates an approximate length of lesson. Each set of materials has been designated for a specific audience, however they were created with the understanding that they may be adapted based on educator, facilitator, or audience.

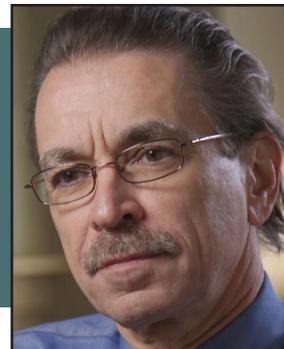


"If we had prevention programs in all the schools and all the districts from an early age on up, then kids would have the education. Parents would have the education and all the people around them...the coaches. It's a community problem. Wherever there's a propensity for somebody to be, to get an opiate, whether it's a dentist, a doctor, wherever...the education needs to be there."

- Jennifer Weiss-Burke, parent and founder of Serenity Mesa, New Mexico

"So now we have to start thinking about educating our children better, about educating doctors better, about educating parents better, about educating our public health officials better, about educating our politicians better, all of those people have to come together to really effect a strategy of prevention."

- Dr. Richard Blondell, National Center for Physician Training in Addiction Medicine



A production of WNED-TV Buffalo - Toronto



Funding provided by BlueCross BlueShield Association and the Brain Research Foundation.

Lesson Plans

Effects of Opioids on Communities and What Can Be Done

Students will explore the dangers of opioids and what effects they have on whole communities. They will use critical thinking skills to think about ways the opioid crisis could be minimized.

Pharmaceuticals, Doctors, and Misinformation

Students will learn how doctors, pharmaceuticals, and misinformation influence the prescription of opioid pain medications. They will learn to make informed decisions on when opioid pain medications should be prescribed to patients and be able to share that information with others.

The Facts and Fictions of Addiction, Recovery, and Relapse

Through research, discussion and viewing the program, students will learn some factual information about the opioid epidemic, addiction recovery options and relapse.

What is the Opioid Epidemic?

Definitions for "opioid" and "epidemic" will be examined. Students will also research factors that led to the current opioid epidemic as well as other epidemics throughout history.

But, the Doctor Prescribed It...

Students will explore the misperception of safety associated with prescription opioid painkillers. They will understand the differences between prescription drug use, misuse, and abuse.

How Opioids Change the Brain

Students will understand that addiction is medically classified as a disease. They will learn about brain structures and functioning and how that is affected by opioids.

Stop the Stigma!

The definition of "stigma" will become clear to students. They will understand why many people who are addicted to opioids do not seek treatment and develop ideas to reduce stigma within their communities.

"I believe that we need to educate at a much younger age than we do now. But again, because of the disease of denial, many folks are going to say, well, we don't need that in my town, we don't need that in my school, that's for down the road."

- Bill Bly, Advanced Clinical Counselor, Horizon Village, New York



Resources for Educators

As seen in *Understanding the Opioid Epidemic*, we know that most students are in some way connected to this tragic situation. Education professionals provide more types of support to their students and families than just academic. We know that basic needs of children are essential for learning. These are some suggestions to provide that extra support in schools:

- Use any appropriate *Understanding the Opioid Epidemic* resources and lesson plans in your classroom
- Be aware of any home issues involving opioids and offer support to students and families
- Talk to your building and district administrators about using preventive education tools in the classroom
- Bring the opioid epidemic up at school board meetings; ask what support districts are offering
- Share *Understanding the Opioid Epidemic* resources with parent organizations and district leaders

"Every day we battle this, the effects of the drugs. We battle the addictions right here in school. They're precious kids and they all have special qualities. We need to save their lives, we need to."

- Shanda Lester, Principal, Oceana Middle School, West Virginia

