

IT'S UP TO US RIVERSIDE

# Substance Use & Prevention Family Resource Guide

Facts, tips, and conversation starters to talk  
with your child about alcohol and drugs.



[Up2Riverside.org](https://Up2Riverside.org)

 **Riverside  
University  
HEALTH SYSTEM**  
Behavioral Health

**As our kids grow older, we must prepare them to face a new set of challenges. Some of these will be familiar to us. Others won't. After all, 20 years ago, marijuana wasn't as potent as it is now, and no one had ever heard of "social media." So what can we do to best support our children in facing their own challenges?**

First, we talk. Then we talk some more. Of course, we don't do all the talking. A good conversation requires listening, too. So we listen closely. We keep the lines of communication open, and we make conversation easy and inviting. This is not a one-time thing—it's ongoing. As long as we're talking, we're still in the game.

As parents, we have a significant impact on our children's decision to experiment with alcohol and drugs. By talking with our kids about alcohol and drugs early and often, we can help them avoid or delay using these substances and avoid the high-risk behaviors and negative consequences often associated with their use. When we approach the topic of alcohol and drug use directly and honestly, our children are more likely to respect our rules and advice.

One of the things we can share with our kids is this: While peer pressure might make it seem like "everyone" is drinking and smoking, that's actually not the case. In fact, we learned that the majority of teens in Riverside County don't drink, smoke, or use other drugs<sup>1</sup>. Holding off will allow your child's brain—which is still growing and changing until around age 25—to fully develop without the negative impact of alcohol and drugs.

So, how can we best support you in supporting your child? You probably haven't had time to brush up on what scientists now know about the impact of alcohol and drugs on a developing brain, but we have. In this Family Resource Guide, we've collected the most important facts and tips we know so you can bring the most up-to-date information to your conversations.

Here's some more good news: We don't have to wonder about the things that increase or decrease the likelihood of children and adolescents using drugs and alcohol. Researchers have studied this exact question. Here's what they found: Kids need supportive adults, responsible friends, and a feeling of connectedness. They need adults who are warm, communicative, and who also establish clear boundaries around using alcohol or drugs. They need opportunities outside of school to learn and develop new skills and interests (like music, sports, theater, youth groups, volunteering, etc.). They need to feel valued by and valuable to the people around them. Kids who have a passion, a sense of purpose, and perseverance are more likely to be resilient in the face of challenges and to make healthier choices.

**Please visit [Up2Riverside.org/Learn/Substance-Use-and-Prevention](https://Up2Riverside.org/Learn/Substance-Use-and-Prevention) and follow us on Facebook at [/Up2Riverside](https://Up2Riverside) and Instagram [@Up2Riverside](https://Up2Riverside) to learn more.**







## It's Never Too Early to Talk About Alcohol and Drugs

### **Short, frequent discussions can have a real impact on your child's decisions.**

Talking to your child at an early age about alcohol and drugs—well before they are first exposed—is the first step toward keeping them alcohol- and drug-free. As they enter junior high and high school, the pressure to try alcohol and drugs increases. It's important to continue the conversation throughout adolescence.

### **Talking often builds an open, trusting relationship with your child.**

Children are more likely to avoid drinking and using drugs when they have a strong, trusting relationship with their parents. Get into the habit of chatting with your child every day. It will make it easier to have serious conversations about things like alcohol and drugs, and your child will feel more comfortable coming to you for advice.

### **How should I talk to my 8- to 12-year-old about alcohol and drugs?**

Children at this age are usually willing to talk openly to their parents about “touchy” subjects. Talking with them now about their thoughts and feelings helps keep the door open as they get older. Ask them questions about what they have heard about alcohol and drugs in a nonjudgmental and open-ended way. Provide them with a clear and straightforward presentation of facts and expectations.



## **How should I talk to my teen about alcohol and drugs?**

Teens are ready for conversations that explore pros and cons, use facts to form opinions, and weigh evidence to draw conclusions. At this age, they are likely to have peers that are using alcohol and drugs. Have conversations with them that explore their thoughts and feelings, show you respect them, and allow them to draw their own conclusions. As they may ask you more specific questions about alcohol and drugs, be prepared to answer them factually and straightforwardly or to say that you don't know and will get back to them with more information.

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## **As children get older, the conversation changes.**

What you say to a 9-year-old about alcohol and drugs is different from what you say to a 15-year-old. Children also can't learn all they need to know from a single discussion. Make sure that the information you offer your child fits their age. As they get older, you can give them more information and reinforce your rules.

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## **Lots of little talks are more effective than one “big talk.”**

Sitting down for the “big talk” about alcohol or drugs can be intimidating for both you and your child. Try using everyday opportunities to talk—in the car, during dinner, or while you and your child are watching TV. Having lots of little talks takes the pressure off trying to get all of the information out in one lengthy discussion, and your child will be less likely to tune you out.

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## **Remember that the conversation goes both ways.**

Although talking to your child about your thoughts about alcohol and drugs is essential, it's also important to hear their point of view. Give your child the opportunity to ask you questions and listen to what they have to say. Children who have parents who listen to their feelings and concerns are more likely to say “no” to alcohol and drugs.

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## **Leave the door open.**

Let your child know that they will at some point hear about or see kids experimenting with alcohol or drugs. Invite them to come and talk with you about it anytime. For example, “I just want you to remember that I am here for you and the best thing you can do is just talk to me about the stuff you hear or see. Don't think there's anything I can't handle or that you can't talk about with me, okay?”



## Tips for Positive and Productive Conversations About Alcohol and Drugs

Talking with your child about alcohol and drugs can be hard, but these are some of the most important conversations to have. The following tips can help set the stage for an effective conversation with your child. Before you talk, spend time learning about alcohol and drugs and the risks for young people. Kids who learn about the dangers of alcohol and drug use early and often are much less likely to misuse them than those who do not receive these important messages at home.

### Be Patient and Ready to Listen

Be prepared to do more listening than talking—it should feel like a conversation, not a lecture. It will be helpful if you can keep an open mind and show your genuine concern and interest. Ask open-ended questions to invite an open dialogue rather than just “yes” and “no” responses. It’s okay for your conversation to take place over time and in bits and pieces.

### Start The Conversation Naturally

Your child will likely be more receptive to a relaxed approach as opposed to anything that feels like a formal “sit-down meeting.” Rather than saying, “we need to talk,” you might ask them what they are encountering with their friends.

### If Your Child is Interested in Drinking or Using Drugs, Ask “Why?”

And ask what might happen if they do. This gets your child to think about their future—and some of the possible negative consequences of drinking or using drugs. For example, they may be late to practice, do something dangerous with their friends, or miss out on developing the skills needed for social settings. If you suspect that your child has been drinking, share your concerns without sounding accusatory. For example, “I have noticed your grades are dropping, and that you are hanging out with a new crowd.” Focus on the behavior that concerns you and explain why.



## Let Your Child Know They're Being Heard

Use active listening and reflect back what you are hearing from your child. For example, you might say to a younger child, "It sounds like you're curious about why people use alcohol and drugs at all if they're so dangerous. Is that right?" Or you might say to an older child, "It sounds like you are feeling anxious and that you think drinking helps people relax and fit in with their friends. Is that right?"

## Talk Openly About Your Family History

If there is a history of addiction in your family, then your child has a greater risk of developing a problem. Discuss this risk with your child as you would with any other illness.

## Be Positive

Be attentive, curious, respectful, and understanding. If you approach the situation with shame, anger, or scare tactics, your conversation may not be very productive. For example, let your child know that you are on their side and that you are here to help make sense of all the conflicting information about drugs and alcohol.

## Set Clear Expectations

Make sure your child knows your rules and the consequences for breaking those rules—and, most importantly, that you really will enforce those consequences if the rules are broken. Kids who are not regularly monitored by their parents are four times more likely to use alcohol and drugs.

## Offer Empathy, Compassion, and Support

Let your child know you understand: the pre-teen and teen years can be tough. Acknowledge that everyone struggles sometimes, but that alcohol and drugs are not a useful or healthy way to cope with problems. Let your child know that they can come to you for support and guidance. Model healthy ways of coping with stress such as exercising, eating well, and getting enough sleep.

## Teach Them How to Say “No”

Kids who don’t know what to say when someone offers them tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs are more likely to give in to peer pressure. Help them be prepared by role-playing different scenarios they might encounter. Let them know that they can always use you as an excuse, for example, “I can’t stay; I’ve got to go help my parents with something.” or “No way, my parents would kill me if they found out.” They can also just be honest with their friends: “I’m not into that.” or they can simply say, “No, thanks, I’ll pass.”

## Give Them The Facts

Don’t just leave your child’s anti-drug education up to their school. Educate yourself so you can share the most up-to-date information with them. Let them know how important it is to protect their brains during these years of growth and development. Help your child to understand the negative impact of drug use on their minds and bodies, not to mention on their college and career options; the unpredictable nature of dependency and how it varies from person to person; and more positive approaches to reducing their stress and anxiety.



**Important note:** *This resource guide focuses on alcohol, e-cigarettes, marijuana, prescription medications, and opioids. But it is not uncommon for young people to use other substances, either on their own or in conjunction with the substances covered in this guide.*

**To learn more, visit [teens.drugabuse.gov/parents](https://teens.drugabuse.gov/parents).**

# Opioids

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## Opioids and the Developing Brain

Opioid use triggers an unnatural flood of dopamine, which affects the brain's "reward circuit." These surges of dopamine lead individuals to continue pleasurable but unhealthy behaviors like taking opioids, leading one to repeat the behavior again and again. Over time, the brain may be rewired, needing higher levels of opioids to achieve a "high," as well as needing opioids to feel "normal." A young person's brain is more flexible and plastic, meaning it can create new neuronal connections and learned behaviors faster than an adult brain. This increases the risk of addiction or learned biological reliance on substances such as opioids. Long-term opioid use can cause changes in the brain's prefrontal cortex and medial temporal lobe. These areas of the brain affect nearly all aspects of life, from social interactions to the way we process and store memories.







## How to Handle Misinformation and Answer Tough Questions

### **“These pills are prescribed by a doctor, so they are okay for me to try right?”**

Prescription opioids are prescribed by doctors to treat severe pain, for example, pain resulting from a serious sports injury, dental work, or cancer. When prescribing opioids, doctors consider a number of different factors. Without talking to a doctor, you won't know how opioids would affect you. And even though they are prescribed by a doctor, they do have serious risks and side effects, especially when misused. You should never take prescription opioids from a friend or family member, even if you are in pain, as it is very dangerous. There are also fake pills that might look like a prescription pill you recognize but that did not come from a doctor. These fake pills often contain life-threatening drugs or chemicals.

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### **“I've heard of something called fentanyl. What is that?”**

Fentanyl is a type of drug that's a lot stronger than heroin. As a prescription, it's used to treat severe pain. But it's also made and used illegally. Today, it is one of the most common drugs involved in drug overdose deaths. Fentanyl is being put into other drugs such as marijuana, pills, and cocaine, often times long before it reaches the person selling or taking the drugs. You can't taste it, smell it, or see it, and an amount about the size of two grains of salt can potentially cause an overdose. While one pill may not be deadly, another one could be.

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### **“My friends are using opioids, but I'm not.”**

Opioids are a dangerous drug, and overdose is always a risk. Naloxone is an opioid overdose reversal drug that anyone can have, at any age, without an ID. By carrying naloxone you could potentially decrease the chances of a friend suffering a fatal overdose. If you would like, I can help you get Naloxone. If you ever do suspect one of your friends is overdosing, it's important to call 911. The Good Samaritan law protects you and the person overdosing from getting into trouble if you seek help during a drug-related overdose.

I am proud of your decision not to use opioids. You'll have a lot of decisions to make about what you want to do throughout school, and you might even make some mistakes. Just know that you can talk to me about anything, anytime—even if you DO make a mistake or feel stuck in a situation that you need help to get out of. I won't freak out, and I'll figure out a way to help you.

## Know The Facts: Opioids

The current opioid epidemic is one of the largest drug epidemics recorded in U.S. history for all racial and ethnic groups. Opioids include prescription medications used to treat pain, as well as illegal drugs such as heroin and fentanyl.

**Prescription opioids** are prescribed by doctors to treat severe pain, such as the pain resulting from, for example, a serious sports injury, dental work, or cancer. When taken as prescribed, opioids are relatively safe and can reduce someone's pain for the short term. But even when they are prescribed by a doctor, they do have serious risks and side effects, especially when misused. Common types of prescription opioids include oxycodone (brand name Oxycontin), hydrocodone (brand name Vicodin), morphine, Percocet, and codeine. Recently, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) issued a warning, alerting the public of a mass influx of counterfeit prescription pills containing fentanyl to the illegal drug market. Counterfeit pills can be manufactured to look almost identical to prescription medications such as Oxycontin, Xanax, Adderall, and other medications.

**Fentanyl** is a synthetic opioid, meaning it is made in a lab using the same chemical structure of the poppy plant. Pharmaceutical fentanyl is a synthetic opioid pain reliever that is many times more powerful than other opioids, including 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. It is approved for the treatment of severe pain and most commonly used for advanced cancer patients. Illegally made or distributed fentanyl is now one of the most common drugs involved in drug overdose deaths in the U.S., as it is being added to heroin, cocaine, counterfeit pills, and other drugs more frequently—with or without the user's knowledge—in order to increase its euphoric effects. Among adolescents, fentanyl was involved in 77% of overdose deaths.

**Heroin** is an illegal, highly addictive opioid made from morphine that is typically injected but can also be snorted or smoked. It is typically sold as a white or brownish powder but also sold as “black tar” heroin, which is sticky like roofing tar or hard like coal.

## Q&A

### What are the signs someone is using opioids?

Regardless of the strength and duration of opioid use, the physical signs and symptoms of intoxication from opioids are all the same. These signs include:

- Constricted/pinpoint pupils
- Flushed skin
- Agitation, drowsiness, or sedation
- Sleeping intermittently (“nodding off”)
- Runny nose or nose sores (if snorting opioids)
- Needle marks (if injecting opioids)
- Problems with coordination
- Slurred speech
- Slow reflexes
- Depressed breathing
- Mood swings
- Apathy
- Euphoria
- Depression

### You may also notice the following:

- Missing prescription medications
- Empty pill bottles
- Prescriptions filled at the pharmacy that you weren't aware of
- Paraphernalia used to prepare opioids for consumption such as syringes or needles, pieces of rubber hose, kitchen spoons, or aluminum foil.

### What if I have prescription opioids in the home?

Safe storage and disposal of medications within the home can help keep your loved ones safe. Studies have found that 53% of youth ages 12 and up who misused prescription opioids obtained them from a friend or relative.<sup>2</sup> Keep medications in their original packaging and securely stored. Consider storing medications in a locked cabinet, lockbox, or other location where they can't be easily accessed. It is also important to dispose of unused, unwanted, or expired medications at a local safe disposal site. In your internet browser, search the terms 'Safe Disposal Sites, US Department of Justice' to find ones near you.





# Alcohol

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## Alcohol and the Developing Brain

The legal drinking age is 21. This is based on the fact that a young person's brain is undergoing rapid growth and changes well into adulthood. Using alcohol or drugs during this developmental period can actually rewire the brain for addiction, as it interferes with the reward center of the brain. Research shows that when kids start drinking alcohol at a young age, they are more likely to continue the habit into adulthood. In fact, people who begin drinking before age 15 are six times more likely to develop a problem with alcohol later in life than those who begin drinking after age 21.<sup>3</sup>





## How to Handle Misinformation and Answer Tough Questions

### **“Underage drinking is not a big deal. There’s no reason to worry.”**

The age limit for alcohol is based on research that shows that young people react differently to alcohol. Young people get drunk twice as quickly as adults, and they have more trouble knowing when to stop. Drinking even a small amount can cloud your judgment and may cause you to put yourself in a risky situation where you or someone else gets hurt. I don’t want this for you.

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### **“I only drink once in a while. What’s the big deal?”**

Thank you for your honesty. I appreciate that you can be open with me about this. Right now, your brain is in the middle of a really important growth phase. Drinking during this time can actually interfere with this process and make you more prone to addiction. In fact, research shows that taking your first drink in your early teens puts you at a much greater risk of developing a serious problem with alcohol or other drugs later in life.

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### **“I know a lot of people who drink and they seem to be fine.”**

I am hoping you will make your own choice and I am here to help you with that. According to schoolwide data, the majority of teens in Riverside County don’t drink or use drugs. It’s a good thing because alcohol can cause permanent damage to your brain, particularly as it relates to memory, motor skills, and coordination. It is also a leading factor in sexual assaults. And it is a factor in the three leading causes of death for children and adolescents, which are car accidents, homicide, and suicide. I am not saying this to scare you. I want you to have the facts about alcohol’s effects.

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### **“What if my friends ask me to drink or try marijuana?”**

That’s a great question. Thinking about things like that in advance will allow you to be prepared when that happens and to say “no” with confidence. Let’s think of how you might handle this situation. You can simply say, “No, thanks,” or “I don’t drink,” or “I have a game tomorrow,” or “I have to go to work tomorrow.” What else might you say?

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### **“Did you drink/smoke when you were young?”**

When I was young, we didn’t know nearly as much about the risks involved. We now have more research showing how harmful it is to drink during the teen years when your brain is still developing.

## Know The Facts: Alcohol

There are many reasons why young people drink, including the social pressure to fit in, the idea that most of their friends are drinking, or because they simply don't realize how harmful it can be to their developing brain and body.

### Q & A

#### Why is the drinking age 21?

The age limit for alcohol is based on research showing that young people react differently to alcohol; their bodies respond twice as quickly as adults do and they have a hard time knowing when to stop.

#### What's the big deal?

Alcohol impairs people's judgment and lowers their inhibitions. People do things they otherwise might not do and are more likely to get into dangerous situations such as driving under the influence or riding with an impaired driver.

Underage drinking can also affect social development, especially if teens rely on alcohol as a means of coping. Studies show that young people who use alcohol may have difficulty making lasting friendships.

#### Can parents teach their children how to drink responsibly by giving them small amounts?

There's no evidence that this approach actually works; in fact, there is evidence to the contrary.<sup>4</sup> When young people feel they have their parents' approval to drink, they tend to drink more often and in larger amounts. When parents have concrete, enforced rules about alcohol, young people drink less.

**Drinking during childhood or adolescence can interfere with normal brain development and lead to issues with alcohol later in life.**



## Other Health Effects of Alcohol



Alcohol disrupts sleep. Alcohol can interfere with sleep patterns by reducing time spent in deep restful sleep.

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Alcohol is a diuretic causing the body to lose important vitamins and minerals required for athletic performance.

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Alcohol disrupts the muscle-building process as alcohol is metabolized first, pushing aside other nutrients needed for muscle recovery.

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Alcohol spikes the production of cortisol, the body's stress hormone, which impairs thinking, raises blood pressure, decreases bone density and muscle tissue, and increases abdominal fat.

With all of these effects, it's no surprise that alcohol reduces performance potential by as much as 20 to 30% in high school athletes. A night of drinking can erase two weeks of working out.





# Prescription Medication

## Prescription Medication and the Developing Brain

A young person's brain is still undergoing important development until they are in their mid-20s. Using powerful medications during this time can interfere with important brain development and may rewire the brain for addiction. Not only are children and adolescents at greater risk of becoming addicted to prescription medications, but misuse of prescription drugs also increases the risk of using and becoming dependent on other addictive substances.



## How to Handle Misinformation and Answer Tough Questions

**“I don’t know why we’re even having this talk.”**

This may not be a temptation for you now, but you may encounter someone offering you something that is harmful for your body down the road. If and when that happens, I want you to feel well equipped with the facts—for yourself or if you ever need to help a friend.

I also just want you to know that I'm here for you and the best thing you can do is just talk to me about the stuff you hear or see. Don't think there's anything I can't handle or that you can't talk about with me, okay?

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### **“What’s the big deal?”**

Your brain is enormously flexible, learns rapidly, and contains more neurons than an adult brain. That's why young people's brains can more quickly become addicted to medication or other drugs. It is very dangerous to take any medication that has not been prescribed to you—even if it has been prescribed to someone you know. There are also fake pills that might look like a prescription pill you recognize but that did not, in fact, come from a doctor. These may contain life-threatening drugs or chemicals.

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### **“You don’t understand. I am under a lot of stress right now.”**

I hear you are feeling very overwhelmed, but I don't want you making choices that can hurt you. I want you to be able to cope with life's ups and downs in a healthy way. If you are under a lot of stress, then let's brainstorm some ideas on how to reduce your stress. If you think it would be helpful, we can speak with a professional for more guidance.

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### **“Everyone does it. It helps with my anxiety.”**

These drugs are very addictive because they produce a flood of dopamine—the brain's “feel-good” messenger. When someone uses drugs to artificially raise their dopamine levels, it damages the brain's ability to produce it naturally, and it becomes much harder to feel good without the drug. This is one of the things that makes it very hard to stop using drugs. That's why it's important that these types of drugs be taken under a doctor's care, so that they can properly diagnose and prescribe the correct dosage.

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### **“Kids at school are using Adderall to get better grades.”**

I am proud of your hard work and that you earned your grades without relying on stimulants. I understand that there is a lot of pressure to do well. But using a drug to do better on tests (or in sports) is cheating, and research has shown it is actually tied to getting lower grades. And there are some serious side effects of misusing stimulants. How about we explore other relaxation and time management skills to help you?

## Know The Facts: Prescription Medication

Each year, it's estimated that more than half a million teens misuse or abuse prescription drugs for the first time—and that number is continuing to increase. Prescription drugs are thought to be less harmful than other kinds of drugs. But misusing prescription drugs can have serious short- and long-term health consequences.

### Q & A

#### What is problematic prescription drug use?

Prescription drug misuse is taking medication without following the medical instructions or without a prescription. Examples include taking a higher dosage than prescribed; mixing a medication with alcohol or other drugs; taking someone else's prescription, even if for a legitimate medical complaint such as pain; using a medication intended for a specific purpose (e.g., nausea) for something else (e.g., to alleviate a headache), or using a medication for the sole purpose of experiencing the feelings associated with the drug, such as relaxation or euphoria (i.e., to get high).

#### Why do young people misuse prescription drugs?

Young people misuse prescription drugs for a number of reasons, such as pain relief from an injury, to deal with the pressures of life, because they like the way it makes them feel, or because they think it will help them with school work. In fact, one in four teenagers believe that prescription drugs can be used as a study aid.

Boys are more likely to take stimulants to get high, while girls try to make up for lack of sleep or to lose weight.<sup>5</sup> Some young people may take prescription drugs to self-medicate when symptoms of depression or anxiety have gone untreated.



# Effects of Commonly Misused Prescription Medications

**Opioids:** Vicodin, OxyContin, or codeine are prescribed to relieve pain and can cause drowsiness, nausea, and constipation. In 2016, one in five deaths among young people were related to opioid.<sup>6</sup>

**Depressants:** Valium or Xanax are prescribed to relieve anxiety or help with sleep. They can cause slurred speech, fatigue, low blood pressure, disorientation, lack of coordination, and seizures.

**Stimulants:** Adderall and/or Ritalin are prescribed for treating attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). They have side effects in common with cocaine use, such as paranoia, dangerously high body temperatures, and an irregular heartbeat. High doses can cause heart failure and seizures.

These drugs are addictive because they produce a flood of dopamine—the brain’s “feel good” messenger. This can damage the brain’s ability to produce dopamine naturally, making it harder to feel good without the drug. With continued use, a larger dose of the drug will be needed to get the same feeling.<sup>7</sup>

**In 2021, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) issued a warning, alerting the public of a mass influx of counterfeit prescription pills containing fentanyl to the illegal drug market. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is many times more powerful than other opioids and is now one of the most common drugs involved in drug overdose deaths. Counterfeit pills can be manufactured to look almost identical to prescription medications such as Oxycontin, Xanax, Adderall, and other medications. Fake prescription pills are easily accessible and often sold on social media and e-commerce platforms, making them available to anyone with a smartphone, including youth and young adults. Young people who misuse prescription drugs are at a much greater risk for using other addictive drugs such as alcohol, marijuana, heroin, ecstasy, and cocaine.<sup>8</sup>**





# Marijuana

## Marijuana and the Developing Brain

Because a young person's brain is still developing until their mid-20s, using marijuana during this time can permanently damage the structure of their brain, specifically the areas dealing with memory and problem solving. Regular marijuana use by children or adolescents can lead to an IQ drop of up to eight points. Students who use marijuana regularly (defined as once a week or more) tend to get lower grades and are more likely to drop out of high school.<sup>9</sup>



## How to Handle Misinformation and Answer Tough Questions

**“Marijuana is legal now in California, so it’s okay for me to try it.”**

It’s still not legal for anyone under 21. This age limit is meant to protect adolescents from its harmful effects. Your brain is completing some very important development and using marijuana during this time can interfere with this development, specifically the areas dealing with memory and problem solving. Today’s marijuana is almost 300% stronger than it was when I was growing up. This is a real concern for me.

### **“Marijuana is a natural plant. That means it’s okay.”**

Just because it is “natural” does not mean it’s safe. Because it is still federally illegal, there are few regulations ensuring that it meets safety guidelines. The strength and potency of marijuana varies, and it often contains a large amount of pesticides, fungus, and even lead. Now that it has become “big business” funded by large tobacco companies, there is not much “natural” about it.

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### **“It helps with my anxiety.”**

I am sorry you are feeling anxious; I know that’s a difficult feeling. While marijuana may make you feel relaxed while you are using it, it can actually make you feel worse in the long run. A chemical in marijuana, THC, mimics one of the brain’s neurotransmitters that makes you feel good—reducing the amount your body makes on its own. Once you’ve become dependent on THC, you’ll feel good when you’re using it, but you won’t have enough of your own chemical messengers to feel good when you are not using it. Can we think of some other ways to help you relax?

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### **“Would you rather I drink alcohol? Marijuana seems safer.”**

Honestly, I don’t want you doing anything that can harm you. I’m interested in knowing why you think marijuana is safer than alcohol. There’s a lot of misinformation out there about marijuana and it’s important to understand that marijuana is as dangerous as alcohol on the developing brain. Kids who begin using marijuana often have difficulty with emotions, lose motivation for school, and jeopardize lifelong friendships. Right now, neither option seems like a healthy choice.

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### **“Is it okay to drive if you’ve smoked marijuana since it’s legal?”**

That’s a good question, and I’m glad you are asking. It is never okay to get behind the wheel of a car while under the influence, and getting in the car with someone who has been drinking or using drugs like marijuana is extremely dangerous. Just like alcohol, marijuana can impair your judgment, meaning it is not safe to drive while under the influence. Not only is it not safe, but it is also illegal to operate a car while under the influence of marijuana and can result in a DUI. This holds true for all drugs, including some prescription medications. If you are ever in a situation where you do not feel safe to drive or to get in the car with someone else, you can always call me.

## Know The Facts: Marijuana

There are physical and mental health consequences for people who use marijuana under the age of 24, while the brain is completing important development. Using marijuana during this time can actually rewire the brain for addiction as it interferes with the brain's reward center. Early marijuana use increases the risk of becoming dependent on other substances.

### Q & A

#### How strong is today's marijuana?

Today's marijuana is almost 300% stronger than it was in the 1980s and can contain around 18% THC (tetrahydrocannabinol)—the main psychoactive ingredient. This high level of THC poses a greater risk for young people and has been linked to depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses.<sup>10</sup>

It has also led to an increase in emergency room visits for increased heart rate, psychosis, vomiting, and panic attacks.

#### How does marijuana impact driving ability?

Marijuana reduces the ability to do things that require concentration, quick reactions, and coordination. These skills are impaired for at least four to six hours after using marijuana, long after the "high" is gone. The effects are made worse when combined with alcohol.

In Colorado, marijuana-related driving deaths increased more than 66% after the state legalized marijuana in 2013.<sup>11</sup>

**Adolescent use of marijuana can interfere with attention, motivation, memory, and learning.**



# Health Risks of Marijuana



The risk of a heart attack is several times higher after using marijuana, which increases blood pressure and causes the heart to beat about 50% faster.

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Using marijuana reduces oxygen in the blood, forcing the body to work harder to perform normal functions.<sup>12</sup>

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Marijuana use affects hormones in children and adolescents and interferes with testosterone production.<sup>13</sup>

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Young people may think that marijuana helps with anxiety. The chemicals found in marijuana mimic one of the brain's neurotransmitters, which makes the user feel good. Yet it reduces the amount the body makes on its own. Once dependent on THC, they will feel good when they are using it, but they may feel anxious and depressed without it.

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Marijuana smoke contains many of the same toxins and carcinogens as tobacco smoke and causes the same respiratory illnesses. It deposits four times as much tar in the lungs as tobacco because it is unfiltered and inhaled more deeply.<sup>14</sup>





# E-Cigarettes & Vapes

## E-cigarettes and the Developing Brain

Because a young person's brain is still developing until their mid-20s, it is easier for them to become addicted to nicotine. Nicotine is absorbed quickly into the body and goes directly to the brain, activating areas of the brain that make one feel satisfied and happy. Both smoking and vaping nicotine put young people at risk for becoming lifelong smokers.<sup>15</sup> Using nicotine during childhood or adolescence can rewire the brain to become more easily addicted to other drugs. It can also have long-lasting effects on brain development, making it harder for people to concentrate, learn, and control their impulses.





## How to Handle Misinformation and Answer Tough Questions

### **“Why don’t you want me to use e-cigarettes?”**

E-cigarettes might seem like a safer way to smoke, but they’re not. A lot of people think that they contain mostly flavored water and are harmless. But, in fact, the heated vapor contains all sorts of harmful chemicals that are inhaled directly into the lungs. Even breathing secondhand e-cigarette vapor is dangerous. I’m glad we’re talking about this because it’s a concerning trend, and I want you to have the facts.

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### **“I thought e-cigarettes didn’t have nicotine—just water and flavoring?”**

I used to think that, too. But many e-cigarettes have large amounts of nicotine—even if the packaging says otherwise. While vaping produces no actual smoke, the poisonous vapor has been found to contain more than 2,000 ingredients—including propylene glycol, formaldehyde, arsenic, and cadmium. These are chemicals that can cause cancer and damage your lungs.

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### **“What’s the big deal?”**

Your brain is still growing and changing, and it will be until you’re around 25. Smoking before then hurts your brain’s development and increases your chance of becoming addicted. Using nicotine at your age may make it harder for you to concentrate, learn, or control your impulses. I want you to know these things because nothing is more important to me than your health and safety.

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### **“Aren’t e-cigarettes safer than conventional cigarettes?”**

Because your brain is still developing, studies show that it isn’t safe for you to use any product that contains nicotine, including e-cigarettes. Whether you get nicotine from an e-cigarette or a cigarette, it’s still highly addictive and not good for you.

## Know The Facts: E-Cigarettes & Vapes

E-cigarettes, also known as vapes, vape pens, or e-cigs, are devices that heat liquid into an aerosol that is inhaled. This liquid often contains nicotine along with many other harmful ingredients. Vapes may look like pens, USB drives, or highlighters and may be used for highly concentrated marijuana and other drugs.

### Q & A

#### What's in them?

E-cigarettes may contain more than 2,000 chemicals, including propylene glycol, found in antifreeze; diacetyl, a chemical linked to lung disease; benzene, found in car exhaust; and heavy metal particles, such as lead.<sup>16</sup> These chemicals are particularly harmful when they are heated and inhaled directly into the lungs, bypassing the body's filtration system.

#### Why are they marketing to young people?

Vapes come in flavors that appeal to kids because the younger they use them the more likely they will become customers for life. Young people are more sensitive to nicotine and can feel dependent earlier than adults. About three out of four adolescents who try tobacco products will end up addicted to nicotine as adults.<sup>17</sup>

#### What are the signs that someone is using an e-cigarette or vape?

Flavored e-cigarettes may give off a sweet smell of fruit, mint, or bubble gum. The chemicals found in them may result in a dry mouth, cough, and even nose bleeds. Being virtually odorless and smoke-free, they can be hard to detect. Finding chargers or empty e-liquid containers may indicate that a family member is using them.

#### Why aren't they regulated?

In 2017, the FDA ruled vapes should be regulated; however, companies have until 2022 for their products to comply with FDA standards.

# The Dangers of Second & Thirdhand Smoke



Secondhand smoke from vapes contains nicotine, volatile organic compounds, and other harmful chemicals, which can cause cancer, asthma, and heart disease.



Thirdhand smoke is the residue left behind on surfaces and in the air contaminating everyone that comes into contact with it—and is especially dangerous for young children and animals.



In California, the minimum age to purchase tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, e-juice, and all vaping accessories, is 21. All tobacco products are prohibited anywhere smoking is prohibited. This provides protection from dangerous secondhand smoke.



**Young people who use e-cigarettes are three times more likely to smoke traditional cigarettes.**





# Responding to a Drug Overdose

Taking drugs (legal, illegal, prescribed, or over the counter) in amounts higher than necessary or recommended can lead to overdose, injury, or death. It's important to identify the signs of an overdose and act quickly. Signs and symptoms of overdose depend on a variety of factors including what drug(s) was taken, how much was taken, how it was taken, the person's age, and more.

## Symptoms of a drug overdose:

- Passing out or loss of consciousness
- Abnormal or difficulty breathing
- Changes in body temperature
- Changes in skin color (pale bluish tint or flushed red tint)
- Fast, slowed, or irregular pulse
- Severe chest pain
- Seizures
- Severe headaches
- Nausea and vomiting

## How to respond to a suspected drug overdose:

It's important to identify the signs of overdose and act quickly. It can be difficult to tell whether a person is under the influence or experiencing an overdose. If you're not sure, it's best to treat it as an overdose and follow the steps below:

- 1 Call 911 immediately. All you have to say is "someone is unresponsive and not breathing" and provide an address and/or description of your location.
- 2 If you know the individual has taken opiates, you can administer Naloxone, if available.
- 3 Try to keep the person awake and breathing, perform rescue breathing if needed.
- 4 Put the person in the recovery position on their side.
- 5 Stay with the person until emergency responders have arrived.

## Some things not to do when responding to an overdose:

**DON'T** hit or try to forcefully wake or move the person—it will only cause further injury. If you're unable to wake the person by shouting, rubbing your knuckles on their sternum, or light pinching, it's likely that they have lost consciousness.

**DON'T** put the person in a cold bath or shower. This increases the risk of falling, drowning, or going into shock.

**DON'T** try to make the person vomit. This increases the risk of choking or inhaling vomit into the lungs and can cause fatal injury.



### More information about Naloxone:

Naloxone (brand name: Narcan) is a safe and effective medication that can quickly reverse an opioid overdose. It can be injected into the muscle or sprayed into the nose to rapidly block the effects of the opioid on the body. Due to its lifesaving abilities, all law enforcement, practitioners, providers, family, and friends that may encounter an individual who uses opiates are recommended to carry it. Similar to how you might have an EpiPen on hand if you have a known allergy, households with known opiate use should have Naloxone on hand, or at least know how to get it when needed. You can obtain Naloxone from most pharmacies without a physician's prescription, and often at no cost with insurance.



## Mental Health

Youth who are struggling with anxiety, depression, stress, or other emotional problems often turn to alcohol or drugs to help them manage their feelings. While this may temporarily alleviate their symptoms, it can make them feel worse in the long run, as substance use and addiction can contribute to the development of mental health disorders. Children's mental health problems are real, common, and treatable. Parents and family members are usually the first to notice if a child has problems with emotions or behavior. Your observations, along with those of teachers and other caregivers, can help to determine whether you need to seek help for your child.

**While all children struggle from time to time and may experience one of these issues to some degree, the following signs may indicate the need for professional help, especially when one or more is present, or if a single issue is persistent and/or interfering with school, friendships, or home life.**

Decline in school performance

Poor grades despite strong efforts

Constant worrying or anxiety

Repeated refusal to go to school or take part in normal activities

Hyperactivity or fidgeting

Persistent nightmares

Persistent disobedience or aggression

Frequent temper tantrums

Depression, sadness, or irritability

**Although these may seem like individual issues, they could be an indication of something bigger, especially if they persist. Early identification, diagnosis, and treatment can help children reach their full potential. If you suspect a problem or have questions, reach out for help.**



# Resources

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## Access and Crisis Lines

### **CARES Line: 1-800-499-3008**

The Community Access, Referral, Evaluation and Support line (CARES Line) is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and provides screening and linkage to both Substance Use and Mental Health programs. Calls are answered by compassionate trained staff who can provide information and referral in English and Spanish.

### **Crisis Line: 1-800-706-7500**

This is a 24/7 crisis line operated by Riverside University Health System – Behavioral Health. This line is available for those that may be in an acute crisis situation that requires an immediate intervention. Mobile teams can be dispatched to the location where the crisis situation is unfolding.

### **Inland SoCal Crisis Helpline: (951) 686-HELP (4357)**

**Website:** <https://inlandsocaluw.org/crisishelpline>

The regional Inland Southern California Crisis and Suicide Helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The phone lines are answered by trained professionals to provide support and resources to best help you and the call is free and confidential.

### **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 or 988**

**Website:** <https://988lifeline.org/>

If you or someone you care about is in crisis and needs immediate help, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-8255 or 988. The phone lines are answered by trained professionals; the call is free and confidential.

### **2-1-1 Community Connect: 2-1-1**

**Website:** <https://inlandsocaluw.org/>

This information and referral hotline connects Riverside County residents in times of critical needs with those who can help. Every call is answered by a trained referral specialist who will connect individuals with the appropriate agency providing the services and information they need.

### **What's Up Safehouse**

A 24/7, free, anonymous mental health crisis texting line. Get immediate support from a licensed mental health professional. Dedicated to helping support the residents of Riverside County through issues surrounding anxiety, substance abuse, depression, school pressure, peer pressure, LGBTQ struggles, relational issues, suicidal thoughts, bullying, and any other issue that is causing trouble.

**Text SHHELP to 844.204.0880 24/7 for immediate support and resources.**

# Local Resources

## **RUHS Behavioral Health Operated Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Clinics**

Treatment Clinic Locations and Hours

Bilingual & Evening Hours Available, Closed on Holidays

### **SAPT Administration**

3525 Presley Ave.  
Riverside, CA 92507  
**(951) 782-2400**  
**M - F, 8am to 5:30pm**

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### **CARE Coordination Teams**

Riverside **(951) 955-2286**  
Desert **(760) 863-8262**

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### **Blythe**

1297 W. Hobsonway  
Blythe, CA 92225  
**(760) 921-5000**  
**M - F, 8am to 5:30pm**

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### **Corona**

2813 S. Main St.  
Corona, CA 92882  
**(951) 737-2962**  
**M - F, 8am to 5pm**

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### **Desert Hot Springs**

14320 Palm Dr.  
Desert Hot Springs, CA 92240  
**(760) 770-2264**  
**M - Th, 8am to 5pm**  
**F, 8am -4:30pm**

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### **Indio**

83-912 Avenue 45, Suite 9  
Indio, CA 92201  
**(760) 347-0754**  
**M - F, 8am to 5pm**

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### **Lake Elsinore**

31764 Casino Drive, Suite 200  
Lake Elsinore, CA 92530  
**(951) 471-4649**

### **Moreno Valley**

23119 Cottonwood,  
Bldg A, Ste. 100  
Moreno Valley, CA 92553  
**(951) 413-5130**

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### **Palm Springs**

191 N. Sunrise Way  
Palm Springs, CA 92262  
**(760) 770-2286**  
**M - F, 8am to 5pm**

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### **Perris**

450E. San Jacinto Ave.  
Perris, CA 92571  
**(951) 210-1660**  
**M - F, 8am to 5pm**

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### **San Jacinto**

1370 S. State St., Suite A  
San Jacinto, CA 92583  
**(951) 791-3350**  
**M - Th, 8am to 5pm**  
**F, 8am -4:30pm**

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### **Temecula**

40925 County Center Dr,  
Ste 200  
Temecula, CA 92591  
**(951) 600-6360**  
**M - F, 8am to 5pm**

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### **Riverside**

2085 Rustin Ave., Bldg 3  
Riverside, CA 92507  
**(951) 955-2105**  
**M - Th, 8am to 5pm**  
**F, 8am -4:30pm**

**Individual Prevention Services (IPS)** - This program is designed for individuals aged 12 to senior citizens who are starting to see negative consequences of drug or alcohol use, but are not yet to the point of requiring treatment. Participants and their families meet with a Prevention Specialist to set up a plan of action. The intervention is custom designed and individualized, and there is no charge for the service. This service is provided at all County Operated Substance Abuse Clinics.

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**Impaired Driver Screening Program** - This program is designed to provide a referral for clients convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol and other drug substances. The program serves as a point of entry into a system of education and counseling for these individuals. The screening program monitors client progress, evaluates client participation, and suggests additional support services that may be needed or required. This program is offered at Blythe, Riverside, and Indio County Operated Substance Abuse Clinics.

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**Friday Night Live: (951) 782-5000**

**Website:** <https://fridaynightlive.tcoe.org/>

Friday Night Live is a state-wide youth development program for youth in grades 4-12. The program focuses on deterring youth from the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs while providing them with opportunities to be active leaders and resources for their community.

**Located at:**

23119 Cottonwood Ave. Bldg A-100  
Moreno Valley, CA 92503

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**Residential Treatment and Detoxification Services: 1-800-499-3008**

Riverside County contracts with a number of private agencies to provide residential recovery care for individuals struggling with substance abuse and addiction. These are unlocked, 24 hour recovery programs which utilize group support and sponsorship to help clients give up their substance use habits and learn how to live a life of sobriety. The County also contracts for women specific services. These programs are designed to meet the special needs of women, especially those that are pregnant. Riverside County also contracts with several residential programs who provide drug and alcohol detoxification services in a social model or medical model program. Clients who have co-occurring mental health disorders in addition to their substance use are allowed to take their medications as needed to stabilize their mental health.

### **The Substance Use Treatment And Recovery Team (START): (951) 782-2400**

START is an intensive case management team designed to reduce repeated admissions to County Mental Health Programs. Referrals are made to START by the Inpatient Treatment Facility (ITF) and Emergency Treatment Services (ETS). START provides referrals to appropriate Substance Abuse programs (who accept co-occurring disorder clients), as well as, assisting the client to remain in the appropriate outpatient Behavioral Health program.

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### **MOMS Perinatal Program**

MOMS Perinatal Program is an intensive outpatient treatment program for pregnant and parenting substance abusing women. Transportation is provided for women and their children. A child learning laboratory is provided as part of treatment, where women learn hands-on parenting skills. Groups cover a variety of topics specific to pregnant and parenting mothers. Special speakers are also used to provide information and referrals to other community programs available for women.

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### **Arlington Recovery Community & Sobering Center: (951) 358-4382**

The ARC provides a community-based continuum of care treatment and wrap-around support program that assists in the prevention of incarceration with the intent to break the cycle of recidivism.

**Located at:**

10001 County Farm Rd.  
Riverside, CA 92503

## **National Resources**

### **Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

**Website:** <https://www.samhsa.gov/>

**SAMHSA's National Helpline:** 1-800-662-HELP(4357)

Offers research, resources, and publications related to mental illness, mental health, prevention, treatment and recovery.

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### **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)**

**Website:** <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>

NIAAA supports and conducts research on the impact of alcohol use on human health and well-being. A section of their website offers easy-to-read material for the public covering a wide range of alcohol-related topics.

## The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

**Website:** <https://nida.nih.gov/>

NIDA's mission is to advance science on the causes and consequences of drug use and addiction and to apply that knowledge to improve individual and public health. A section of their website features downloadable full-text publications on a range of topics, including addiction science, medical consequences, trends and statistics, and the link between drugs and HIV/AIDS.

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- 6) The Truth Campaign. <https://opioids.thetruth.com/o/the-facts/all>
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- 8) National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. <https://www.centeronaddiction.org/>
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