



Talking about Substance Use & Addiction

The U.S. is facing a significant opioid crisis. Since 2000, opioid overdoses have quadrupled. Approximately 11.5 million people mis-use prescription opioids, and 948,000 use heroin. In 2017, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared the crisis a public health emergency.

Tips for talking about substance use disorders and addiction in supportive, solutions-based ways:

- Share the facts about what opioids do and how they alter a person's brain, body, and behavior to make it hard to stop without **ongoing** treatment and support.
 - Substance use disorders are complex diseases, and recovery usually takes more than good intentions or strong will.
 - Repeated alcohol and drug use can lead to brain changes that may challenge self-control and interfere with ability to resist intense urges.
 - People who begin to use substances before the age of 15 are 5 times more likely to develop substance use disorders.
 - Addiction to opioids is treatable and can be successfully managed.
- Use language that is person-centered, non-discriminatory, and not judgmental. While person first language can feel unwieldy, it communicates respect and is worth the effort.
 - Substance use disorders are chronic diseases like diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and asthma.
 - People experiencing addiction and substance use disorders are people first—describe and refer to them using terms such as:
 - » Person with an active addiction or substance use disorder
 - » Person addicted to opiates
 - » Person in recovery
 - » Person abstaining from drugs/alcohol

Recovery is possible for everyone.

WORDS MATTER

“When you call me an addict, you take away everything that is lovely about me.”

—A man who was a son, father, partner, and friend and who died from a drug overdose; quoted by Alison Jones Webb, President of Nautilus Public Health

