

# Flip The Script

## AWARENESS OF PAIN MEDICINE MISUSE

A GUIDE FOR CARE PARTNERS



Sometimes prescription pain medicines called opioids are needed to control pain. They can help treat pain when taken for a short time and as directed by a health care provider or pharmacist. But they can cause harm if they are misused or taken for a longer time.

With adults who are older, there is an increased risk for harmful side effects and drug interactions, because of physical changes that happen in the body.

In general, misuse means to take in a way that was not directed by a health care provider, such as taking too much medicine or confusing pills. Misuse can also include taking a medicine to feel its feel-good effects.

When it comes to the misuse of prescription pain medicine, everyone can be at risk.



**When it comes to pain medicine misuse, it is hard to tell when a problem exists. People may even mistake signs of misuse or addiction as normal behaviors associated with aging.**

**But knowing what to look for can help.**

**Take action. Flip the page for tips on understanding and talking about pain medicine misuse.**



**There are certain useful questions family members and care partners can ask themselves. Think about the following questions.**

1. Have there been any major life changes, such as the death of a spouse or a forced retirement?
2. Has the person's mood changed? Do they want to be alone, seem down, or sleep more often than usual?
3. Is the person burdened by the number of medicines they have to take? Do they run out of medicine early? Do they borrow medicine from others?
4. Does the person often have trouble remembering or making decisions? Do they care less about personal tasks or activities?
5. Does the person have unexplained falls, bruises, or burns? Has their ability to take care of themselves changed?
6. Has the person been on the same strong pain medicine for a long time?

**If you think your family member or friend may need help, here are some steps to take.**

**Be Sensitive.** Prepare what to say in advance to get the message across in a caring way.

Avoid questions that judge or place blame.

For example, ask if they sometimes take an extra pill to fall asleep or cope with pain.

Discuss changes in specific activities.

For example, say I have noticed you don't walk in the morning like you used to. Why not?

Being sensitive to others' concerns and feelings can help with open communication.

**Be Proactive.** Seek expert advice from a health care provider. Call the primary care doctor to discuss concerns or offer to go to the doctor's visit to share what you have noticed.

**Seek Help.** Call SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357). This Helpline provides information and referral services to individuals and family members facing mental health or substance use disorders.

The Helpline is free and confidential. Information is available in English and Spanish.