



The Opioid Crisis and K-12 Schools: Supporting Students at School WEBINAR TIP SHEET

This tip sheet is designed as a supplement to the webinar, “The Opioid Crisis and K-12 Schools: Supporting Students at School.” It provides a very short summary of warning signs to look for in children and youth impacted by opioids, alcohol, and other substance abuse as well as tips on how educators can help students. For more information, refer to the webinar and accompanying resource list.

How do I know who needs help?

Opioid use, as well as alcohol and substance abuse, can impact children and youth when:

- Family members and/or peers are using.
- The student is using.

Here are some warning signs that a student may be impacted by opioid, alcohol, and/or substance use. (Note that these warning signs could be an indication of a variety of challenges a young person is facing. You are not expected to “diagnose” the cause of the student’s behavior, but rather serve as a valuable source of information for student support personnel who can respond to your observations.)

Toddler/pre-school	Elementary	Middle school	High school
Mental/motor deficits	Poor mental/motor development	Anxiety	Mood and personality changes (sullen, withdrawn, angry)
Cognitive delays	Memory and perception problems; speech and language problems	Depression	Depression; unable to focus; more frequent health problems
Hyperactivity	Developmental delays	Secretive behaviors, difficulty sleeping, or changes in physical appearance or poor hygiene	Hyperactive; unusually elated; increased hygiene issues; endless excuses
Behavior disorders	Reduced decision-making abilities and behavior regulation	Disruptive behavior	Behavioral changes; changing relationships with family or friends
Aggressiveness	Impaired self-regulation	Rapid changes in mood or hostile outbursts	Problems with police

Toddler/pre-school	Elementary	Middle school	High school
Poor social engagement	Poor response to stressful situations	Changes in peer group or failing to introduce peers to parents	Unhealthy peer/dating relationships; engaging in unprotected sex
Failure to thrive	Impaired school performance	Decline in academic performance; school avoidance	Disengagement from school; dropping out

How do I help?

What can I do to support students who may display some of the above warning signs? Listen, encourage, share, and support. Building and maintaining good relationships with students can help nurture their positive qualities and build a positive climate, fostering resilience while increasing the likelihood students can learn to make better choices and ask for help when they need it.

- First, find out what kinds of resources are available in your school or district, so you know where to turn to get help for a student.
- Talk with school counselors, nurses, and/or administrators to find out how best to support students for whom you are concerned.
- Learn to recognize the signs of opioid, alcohol, and substance abuse so you can refer students appropriately.
- Integrate basic alcohol and drug prevention skill-building into everyday teaching so students can learn to:
 - Make good decisions
 - Solve problems
 - Become more assertive and practice learning refusal skills
 - Be more self-aware
 - Build positive relationships
- Help students learn coping and stress management skills such as:
 - Self-control
 - Standing up to peer pressure
 - Time management
 - Dealing with difficult situations like conflict or loss
 - Setting goals
- Talk with students about opioid, alcohol, and substance abuse.

Citations: California Safe and Supportive Schools, *What Works Brief No. 8*

https://data.calschls.org/resources/S3_WhatWorksBrief8_AOD_final.pdf

Maryland Public Schools, *Heroin and Opioid Awareness & Prevention Toolkit*

<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/Documents/heroinprevention/HeroinOpioidToolkit.pdf>

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, *Understanding the Links Between Adolescent Trauma and Substance Abuse*

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/understanding_the_links_between_adolescent_trauma_and_substance_abuse.pdf.

[Partnership for Drug-Free Kids](#)

Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, *Look for Warning Signs*

<https://drugfree.org/article/look-for-warning-signs/>