

## Talking about OUD with family, friends, & concerned significant others

*A reference guide to UW ADAI's Guide for Family and Friends: [Supporting the Health of Youth Who Use Fentanyl/Opioids Guide](#)*

### Getting Started

Family, friends, and other concerned significant others may reach out to your organization for help when a young person is using fentanyl. While only the patient can speak directly with a treatment provider, loved ones can help them access and stay in treatment.

This guide helps people and organizations use the [Guide to Supporting the Health of Youth Who Use Fentanyl/Opioids](#) to teach family and friends about opioid use disorder (OUD) and how to support their loved ones who are using opioids.

### Explore and educate

Ask family and friends what they already know. They may have past experience or have heard advice like "tough love."

Key points to share:

- Staying connected helps.
- Medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) are the best treatment.

### Support and empower

Even if the youth isn't ready for treatment, it is helpful for family and friends to learn and prepare. The information and resources can help their loved ones when they are ready.

The Guide includes links to learn more about [Community Reinforcement and Family Training \(CRAFT\)](#). CRAFT is a counseling approach that teaches family and friends how to care for themselves and talk more effectively with a youth who use drugs.

## Using the Guide to address the primary concern

The Guide includes sections on:

- Staying connected
- Medications are the best treatment for Opioid Use Disorder
- How to get help
- Health & Safety: Preventing fatal overdoses and infectious diseases
- How to help youth who have stopped using fentanyl
- Resources for support
- Information about opioids, overdose and treatment
- Relevant research

You don't need to cover every section. Focus on the family member's main concerns and tailor your approach. Share the guide link so they can read more:

<https://www.learnabouttreatment.org/supporting-youth/>.

### Staying connected

Isolation is harmful. Staying connected doesn't make drug use worse. Family and friends may benefit from understanding how their bond can help their loved one get help, avoid unsafe situations, and reduce overdose risk.

This challenges a long-standing belief in "tough love" or the idea that people need to face harsh consequences, such as losing support from loved ones, to recover or seek help. This is a myth, but it remains a strong myth in our culture.

Let family and friends know that staying connected is crucial for the safety of the young person and the well-being of the support people.

#### *Sample questions and statements*

- *"Have you felt pressured to disconnect from your loved one?"*
- *"How do you stay connected to your loved one?"* (e.g., phone calls, social media, living together)
- *"It sounds like staying connected is really important to you."*
- *"It sounds like you have heard advice that does not feel right to you."*

## Medications are the best treatment for Opioid Use Disorder

People often have ideas about what treatment is, shaped by personal experience, the community, or the media. Some people think “treatment” means residential inpatient treatment, but that is not the best option for OUD, and can actually increase the risk of overdose.

Medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD), like buprenorphine and methadone, are the gold standard. Family or friends might not be aware of MOUD or may question if it is the best treatment. Some people may worry that MOUD is replacing one drug with another. Explain that prescribed MOUD is safe and reduces the risks of fentanyl use, including overdose.

Our goals are to reduce disorder and overdose risk, and these can be met with MOUD.

### *Sample questions and statements*

- *“What do you know about Suboxone or MOUD?”*
- *“MOUD has been proven to reduce overdose risk and improve quality of life.”*
- *“MOUD is the gold standard for OUD treatment.”*
- *“Recovery takes time. If your loved one doesn’t stop using opioids right away, that doesn’t mean treatment isn’t working.”*
- *“Your loved one will likely benefit from being on MOUD for at least several months or longer. People should stay on MOUD as long as they are getting more benefit than harm.”*

## How to get help

Getting help for any substance use disorder can be hard. People may have been trying to get help for a long time. If they have reached your organization, it means that they have found a way to connect with MOUD - that’s great! Tell them that they have started in the right place.

In addition to MOUD, high-quality counseling can help youth and their support systems.

Family and friends may be working hard to keep their loved ones safe and may not be taking care of their own mental and emotional health.

Connecting family and friends with CRAFT resources is a great way to help them learn the skills to support their loved one.

### *Sample questions and statements*

- *“Youth can get MOUD without counseling, but counseling can be helpful in addition to MOUD.”*
- *“Do you have counseling or other support for yourself? May I provide you with resources to build your skills and knowledge?”*

### **Health and Safety: Preventing fatal overdoses and infectious diseases**

Family and friends can help prevent overdose death by having naloxone and staying connected. [They should have their own naloxone and know how to use it](#). It’s important that they tell their loved ones that they have naloxone as a safety measure.

Drug checking can also reduce overdose risk. Drug checking can be done at home with test strips or at [community drug checking sites](#). Family and friends can be informed about the resources available for checking drugs to help loved ones access these services.

New supplies for injecting or smoking drugs can help lower infection risk. Family or friends can be informed about these resources.

The [Never Use Alone Hotline](#) is an important resource. They stay on the phone with people while they are using drugs and will send emergency medical services if the person becomes unresponsive.

### *Sample questions and statements*

- *“Do you have naloxone and know how to use it?”*
- *“Do you want information or resources about drug checking or drug use supplies?”*  
*“These can reduce fatal overdose and infectious disease risk. People sometimes think these things encourage drug use, but they actually support safer drug use.”*
- *“I’m glad to hear you have naloxone and know how to use it. Have you told your loved one that you have naloxone?”*