



**PRESCRIPTION TALK GUIDE FOR COACHES**

# **THE COACH'S CLIPBOARD**

Coaches can further their players' development and lead them to make successful decisions in and out of their sport. Important life skills and values acquired through participation in athletics often extend beyond the field and influence decision making abilities of athletes. When it comes to prescription education and awareness, coaches can encourage safe and informed chemical health decisions from athletes, parents, and other individuals in the community.



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# Education and awareness provide the foundation for individuals to make safe and informed decisions.

Prescription opioids are powerful medications that can provide relief for pain. Unfortunately, they can also be prescribed inappropriately and misused. Adolescents can acquire opioid pain relievers from dental surgeries such as wisdom teeth removal, injuries that require medical attention, prescription diversion from their peers, or medicine cabinets at home.

[Learn more from the Illinois Department of Public Health <sup>1</sup>](#)

# THE COACH'S ROLE

## PRESCRIPTION EDUCATION

### Why is opioid education and awareness necessary?

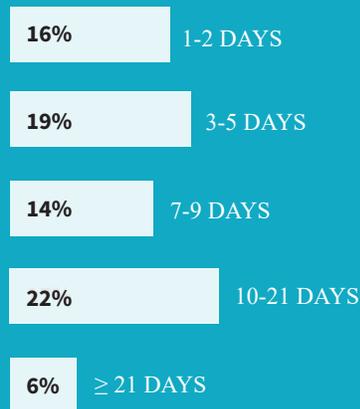
Prescription education is necessary for adolescents because they are **at risk to access** certain types of highly addictive pain medications such as prescription opioids. Most adolescent athletes do not report misuse of opioid pain relievers, but athletes in certain sports may be more likely to access or misuse prescription opioids than non-athletes.<sup>2,3</sup> Even with lower reported rates of prescription opioid misuse from adolescents in recent years, the risk of misuse or abuse in the foreseeable future is not entirely eliminated. Rates of opioid misuse have increased exponentially in post-adolescence (18-25) with nearly 1.7 million young adults who misused prescription pain relievers in the past year.<sup>4</sup> It is important for adolescents to receive the appropriate education and awareness of opioid pain relievers to equip them with the knowledge and skills to make healthy decisions as they grow and develop.

### What can I do as a coach for prescription education?

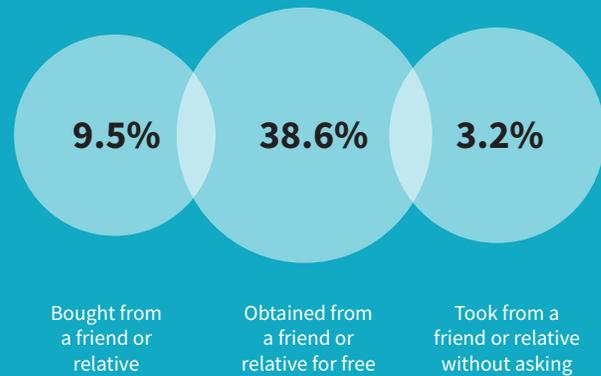
A coach's role is to influence positive choices that have a lasting impact on their athletes. Coaches are leaders that athletes trust, look to for support, and are willing to take advice from on important topics of discussion. Whether it is offering support and guidance for players or starting simple conversations about prescription drugs with parents to encourage them to continue talking with their athletes, a coach's role is influential in creating a safe and informed community. Coaches have the ability to be knowledgeable of methods for safe use, safe storage, and safe disposal of prescription drugs. Their position enables them to foster a strong connection between athletes and their parents, and allows them to easily share information while bridging conversations across audiences.

Coaches have a considerable influence on their athletes and should look for ways to help them succeed even after their athletic careers. Regardless of whether an adolescent athlete continues to play a sport after high school in a collegiate or professional setting, the need for education of prescription drugs is crucial in the early stages of adolescence while the brain is growing and developing. Misuse of prescription drugs, especially highly addictive drugs such as opioid pain relievers, during adolescence can alter development, affect the reward system, and lead to increased risk of addiction as an adult. Coaches have the ability to instill healthy mindsets and behaviors in athletes before they find themselves in situations where they are prescribed opioids or are pressured by peers to divert (the sharing or selling one's own prescription) or misuse medications. Early reinforcement of positive behaviors can have a tremendous impact on adolescents' response to any given situation.

## Average time lost for injuries among high school athletes <sup>5</sup>



## Sources of pain reliever access for most recent misuse (of those aged 12 and older) <sup>4</sup>



\*Please refer to Figure 34 in the appendix to view other sources of pain reliever access

## WHY ATHLETES & PARENTS?

Due to the emotional and physical nature of athletics, many athletes are exposed to pain through sport related injuries. On average there are nearly two million injuries that occur each year as a direct result of participation in high school athletics.<sup>6,7</sup> Of the eight million athletes who participate in high school sports each year, almost a quarter report pain to varying degrees.

The elevated level of pain experienced in certain sports can lead athletes to seek pain management solutions. Common types of medications used to help treat pain include over the counter (OTC) drugs and prescription drugs. More serious injuries expose athletes to a wider array of stronger pain management medications such as prescription opioids, which have shown to be addictive and fatal if used improperly. Because of the potential for exposure to prescription opioids, it is important that athletes, parents, and coaches are all educated and aware of safe use practices for these drugs if prescribed by a doctor or healthcare professional. Education and awareness provide the foundation for individuals to make safe and informed decisions. By encouraging safe use, safe storage, and safe disposal of all prescriptions, coaches can influence athletes and their parents to responsibly use all medications.

Participation in sports can act as a protective factor against the misuse of certain drugs for adolescent athletes. However, athletes are still at risk to access certain types of medications, which may leave them susceptible to potential drug diversion to peers and/or misuse. According to an exploratory study that assessed the risk of lifetime opioid use among college students, students who participated in at least one interscholastic sport during high school had greater odds of lifetime medical prescription opioid use on multiple occasions and greater odds of being approached to divert their prescribed opioid medications compared to peers that did not participate in a sport.<sup>8</sup> Providing athletes with the knowledge to safely use their medications and not divert them to others is essential in allowing them to make healthy decisions.

Parents have opportunities to support their athletes as they encourage them to be champions for each and every decision they make. A significant way that parents can make a difference is by speaking with their doctor, asking questions, and starting informative conversations with their athletes about these types of drugs. According to the Partnership for Drug Free Kids, during the last conversation teens had with their parents about substance abuse, only 16 percent said they discussed the abuse of prescription pain relievers with their parents.<sup>9</sup> It is necessary for parents to have a complete understanding of prescription opioids and be willing to have appropriate conversations with their athletes about these types of drugs.

# DON'T BE A SPECTATOR

WHEN IT COMES TO **EDUCATING** YOUR ATHLETES AND THEIR PARENTS ABOUT PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS

1

**SAFE USE STARTS WITH YOU**

2

**SAFE STORAGE IS WITHIN REACH**

3

**SAFE DISPOSAL IS A SOLUTION**

Coaches have important roles in ensuring that athletes make safe chemical health decisions. Coaches can be knowledgeable of methods for safe use, storage, and disposal of prescription drugs. By sharing these methods with parents, this will encourage parents to begin having necessary conversations with their athletes themselves. Safe decisions begin with simple conversations.

# COACH'S CHECKLIST

## INFLUENCE SAFE CHEMICAL HEALTH DECISIONS

 Complete each checkpoint as you educate and provide awareness on safe chemical health decisions for your athletes, parents, and others in the community.



### **Learn from Healthcare Professionals and Educate Yourself**

Speak up and ask questions about various types of prescription drugs that your athletes, parents, or others in the community might have access to. Learn about medications and have a complete understanding of safe use, storage, and disposal.



### **Start the Conversation With Parents and Others**

Help others learn more about prescription drugs from the information you have acquired from doctors, healthcare professionals, and other credible resources. Initiate meaningful conversations that influence healthy prescription decisions.



### **Bring Awareness to Safe Use, Storage, and Disposal**

Continue the conversation by disseminating information to others through e-mails, flyers, social media posts, and newsletters. This will highlight safe prescription use for others, and will help address the implications of improper prescription use.



### **Inform Community Members About Drug Take Back Locations**

There are free prescription take back locations across the United States, with many offering 24/7 anonymous drop off capabilities. Inform others on how they can get involved and discard unused medications that might be lying around the house.



### **Get Involved in National Drug Take Back Days**

National drug take back days are typically sponsored by the DEA and occur twice each year. Find ways to get your athletes, schools, and entire community participating in these events to help with safe disposal of prescription drugs.



### **Brainstorm Ideas With Your Athletes and Their Parents**

Work with your athletes and their parents to brainstorm initiatives to get others to make healthy decisions when it comes to safe use, storage, and disposal of prescription drugs and other medications.

# QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR ATHLETES AND PARENTS



## WHAT ARE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS?

How many types of prescription drugs can they name? Assess your athletes' and parents' knowledge of prescription drugs and look to fill in areas where they are lacking information or are misinformed.



## WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES?

Do they know the differences between prescription drugs and over the counter (OTC) drugs? Explain how these drugs might be different in terms of accessibility and strength per medication.



## WHAT IS AN OPIOID?

Can athletes and their parents identify an opioid if given the opportunity? Explain various types of legal and illegal opioids and detail how these drugs might be used.



## WHEN MIGHT THEY BE USED?

Can athletes and their parents provide examples of how they may come in contact with prescription opioids or other prescription drugs? Look to see if they can identify how these drugs can be safely used if prescribed.



## WHAT IS MISUSE AND ABUSE?

Do athletes and parents know the consequences that can result from improper use of prescription opioids? Explain how misuse and abuse of prescriptions can hold them back from achieving optimal performance.



## WHERE SHOULD THEY BE STORED AND DISPOSED?

Where are medications stored in the household? Educate about the implications of improper storage and teach safe storage practices. Explain how medications can be safely disposed once they are no longer needed.

Visit [ilhpp.org/prescription-playbook/toolkits/](http://ilhpp.org/prescription-playbook/toolkits/) to download additional worksheets to help you start the conversation with your athletes and parents.

## ANSWER SHEET

1

Prescription painkillers, prescription depressants, and prescription stimulants are all types of prescription drugs. Examples include Vicodin®, Oxycontin®, Percocet® (prescription painkillers), Valium® and Xanax® (prescription depressants), and Adderall® and Ritalin® (prescription stimulants).

2

Prescription drugs are typically prescribed by a doctor and can be purchased at pharmacies with a prescription, whereas over the counter (OTC) medications are substances that can be purchased normally off shelves in stores without a prescription. When prescribed, prescription drugs are intended for one person at a time. Certain types of prescription drugs can be stronger than some over the counter drugs depending on the dose, time period, and medication taken.

3

Opioids are a class of powerful and potentially addictive drugs that include the illicit drug heroin and legal prescription pain relievers, such as oxycodone (OxyContin®, Percocet®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, and morphine. Opioids work in the brain to reduce pain and can also produce feelings of relaxation and euphoria.

4

Athletes can be prescribed drugs such as opioid pain relievers if they experience a severe injury and require pain management solutions. These drugs can also be prescribed from doctor and dental visits. Prescription opioids might be accessed through friends, family members, or medicine cabinets at home.

5

Prescription misuse is using a prescription in a way other than how it is prescribed by a healthcare professional. This may include taking a dose at the wrong time, accepting and taking prescription medications from a friend, taking drugs for reasons other than what they were prescribed for, and not following medical instructions as labeled or directed. Prescription abuse can occur when users attempt to experience a “high” associated with taking a prescription drug. The most recognizable difference between prescription misuse and abuse is the intention that a user has when taking a drug.

6

Choose a safe location to store your medications that is up and away and out of sight from others in the household. Sometimes the medicine cabinet is not the best location to store prescriptions because of its ease of accessibility. If you choose to store medications in a cabinet, install a locking mechanism or find a lock equipped medicine cabinet to replace your old one. Other options include prescription lock boxes, household safes, and counting the doses of medication that remain after each use.

# COACH'S PRACTICE GUIDE

## START THE CONVERSATION

Brainstorm a list of ways that you can teach methods of safe use of prescription drugs to your athletes throughout the week. Use the examples below as a reference. Set goals and see how you can work important conversations into practice and game day scenarios. **You can influence healthy decisions and behaviors by starting the conversation.**

### WEEK 1

*Distribute prescription education worksheets to your athletes and their parents to assess their knowledge of prescription drugs. Provide understanding for any misinformation or lack of information on the topic. Disseminate flyers and opioid identification materials to parents.*

*(Ideally at a pre-season meeting)*

### WEEK 2

*Send emails and newsletters to your parents to encourage them to begin having conversations about prescription drugs with their adolescents. Help them begin incorporating methods of safe use, storage, and disposal of prescription drugs in their household.*

*(Utilize the coach's letter template at [ilhpp.org/prescription-playbook/toolkits/](http://ilhpp.org/prescription-playbook/toolkits/))*

### WEEK 3

*If any of your athletes experience an injury, use this as an opportunity to inform the entire team about medications that might be given to them and explain how they can safely use a medication.*

*(Work with athletic trainers at your school or club to help assist the conversation)*

### WEEK 4

*Help your athletes, parents, and the larger community participate in National Prescription Take Back Day. Collaborate with local non-profits and police departments to get involved in prescription take back events.*

*(Suggest prescription lock box giveaways for community members)*

# Safe Decisions

## *Begin With Simple Conversations*

1

### *Learn the Facts*

Educate yourself about substances that your athletes may have access to, and be aware of methods for safe use, storage, and disposal of prescription drugs. Know common types of opioid pain relievers such as Oxycodone (OxyContin®) and Hydrocodone (Vicodin®) that might be prescribed to your athletes for pain. By learning the facts, you can teach your athletes and their parents how to make safe chemical health decisions.

2

### *Start the Conversation*

Initiate conversations about safe use of prescription drugs and other medications with your athletes and their parents. If your athletes are prescribed medications or are pressured to divert or misuse a prescription drug, they need to know how to react appropriately. Proper education and awareness of prescription drugs including opioid pain relievers will allow your athletes to continue making safe and informed decisions on their own.

3

### *Know the Signs*

Coaches can be the first line of defense in recognizing questionable decisions or behaviors from their athletes. Always be aware of how your athletes are handling their busy academic and extracurricular schedules. By carefully monitoring your athletes, offering support and guidance, and setting a positive example, you can keep them on a path to achieving optimal performance.

# References

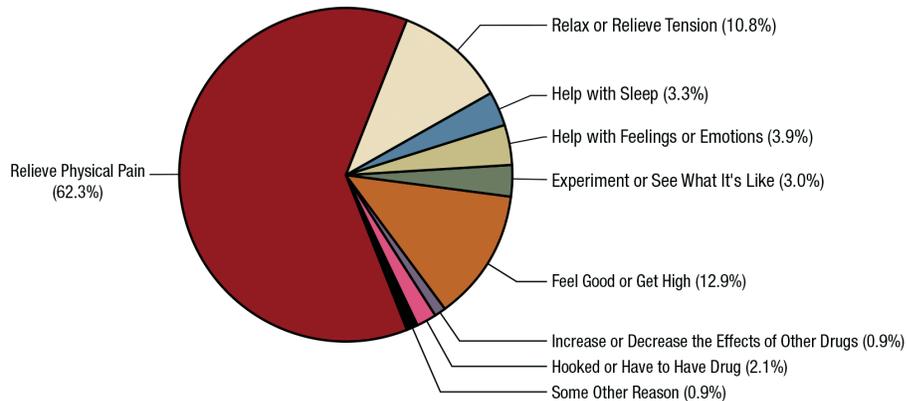
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# Other Resources

- NIDA for Kids - [teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/prescription-pain-medications-opioids](https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/prescription-pain-medications-opioids)
- CDC - [cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/index.html](https://cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/index.html)
- FDA - [fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/InformationbyDrugClass/ucm337066.htm](https://fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/InformationbyDrugClass/ucm337066.htm)
- Partnership for Drug Free Kids - [drugfree.org/drug/prescription-pain-relievers-opioids/](https://drugfree.org/drug/prescription-pain-relievers-opioids/)
- Illinois Youth Survey - [iys.cprd.illinois.edu/](https://iys.cprd.illinois.edu/)
- Monitoring the Future - [monitoringthefuture.org/](https://monitoringthefuture.org/)

# Appendix

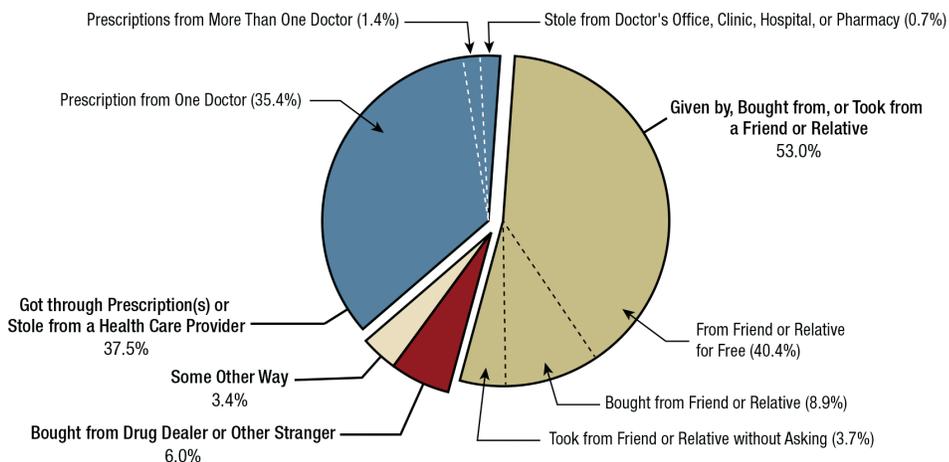
**Figure 33. Main Reason for the Most Recent Prescription Pain Reliever Misuse among People Aged 12 or Older Who Misused Prescription Pain Relievers in the Past Year: Percentages, 2016**



**11.5 Million People Aged 12 or Older Who Misused Prescription Pain Relievers in the Past Year**

Note: The percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

**Figure 34. Source Where Pain Relievers Were Obtained for Most Recent Misuse among People Aged 12 or Older Who Misused Prescription Pain Relievers in the Past Year: Percentages: 2016**



**11.5 Million People Aged 12 or Older Who Misused Prescription Pain Relievers in the Past Year**

Note: Respondents with unknown data for Source for Most Recent Misuse or who reported Some Other Way but did not specify a valid way were excluded.  
Note: The percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

\*Data results from the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

Access full SAMHSA data reports from [samhsa.gov/data/](http://samhsa.gov/data/)



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