

OPERATION PREVENTION

On the Frontlines of the Opioid Epidemic: A Community Fighting Back

Operation Prevention VFT Educator Guide

Each day, more than 90 Americans die after overdosing on opioids.¹ The misuse of and addiction to opioids—including [prescription pain relievers](#), [heroin](#), and synthetic opioids such as [fentanyl](#)—is a public health crisis with serious social and economic consequences. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the total "economic burden" of prescription opioid misuse alone in the United States is \$78.5 billion a year, including the costs of healthcare, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice involvement.² Prescription opioid misuse and addiction can hit anyone, and the impact on families, neighbors, schools, and public health can be devastating. Now, communities are fighting back.

Join us as we take students to the community of Huntington, West Virginia as they bring to light their story of hope, healing, heart, and a hard-won stake against this national epidemic. During this 45-minute Virtual Field Trip (VFT), students will meet Huntington's Mayor, hear from students in recovery, and see firsthand how young people are leading the way to change the narrative in their schools and homes. The activities in this companion guide have been designed to connect and extend the learning to classroom concepts. Activities are flexible enough to be used before or after the VFT.

Students will:

- discuss what they know about the prescription opioid crisis.
- design a creative education project to share with their peers.
- research programs that exist in their community.
- create an advocacy/awareness campaign to provide greater awareness and support peers struggling with physical dependence or addiction.

Pre VFT Activity: True or False

Materials:

- Flip charts set up or posted around the classroom
- Markers or pens

Prepare each flip chart ahead of time by writing one of the following statements, assumptions, or misconceptions about the opioid crisis or prescription medications. This will be the starting point for students to discuss and reflect on.

Assumptions

- Certain towns are more likely to be impacted by the prescription opioid crisis.
- Anyone can become addicted to prescription opioids.
- My community is impacted by the prescription opioid crisis.
- My school is impacted by the prescription opioid crisis.
- It's okay to share prescription painkillers to help a friend who is in pain.
- Becoming addicted to prescription opioids is a choice.
- I know the signs to look for if someone is struggling with addiction.

Invite students to review the statements on the flip chart papers around the room. Note that some are true and some are false, and many of them will be explored during the Virtual Field Trip. Explain to students that you will give them a series of statements that prompt them to stand by one of the flip chart papers. After each statement, encourage students to discuss with others at the same chart the reasons for their choice. Finally, invite groups at different signs to justify their answers.

1. Stand by a chart that you believe to be a true statement.
2. Stand by a chart that you believe to be a false statement.
3. Stand by a chart that you are not sure is true or false.
4. Stand by a chart that you would like to learn more about during the Virtual Field Trip.

Activity 1: What Do You Want to Know?

Materials:

- Flip chart papers
- Markers
- Tools, apps and materials to summarize the results of their survey into a school awareness campaign (these may include graphs and infographics, a written report, posters, PowerPoint, podcast, blog, and/or video)

After considering how much they know and are interested in learning about the opioid crisis, students will be asked to design and implement a survey to determine the level of interest on the subject in the wider school community. What do other students want to know or learn about the opioid crisis?

1. Put two charts in opposite corners of the room: one that says, "strongly agree" and one that says, "strongly disagree." Explain to students that they will be creating a human barometer by standing at the place on the barometer that most closely represents their opinions on a series of statements. Read each of the following prompts, and invite students to move to the place on the barometer that

represents their opinions. After each statement, debrief, asking students to explain their choices and to share questions or comments they may have for others.

- I understand how the opioid epidemic can impact a community.
 - I am interested in learning about the prescription opioid epidemic.
 - I think it's important for kids our age to understand the opioid epidemic and what we can do to help.
2. Ask students if they think their responses are representative of other kids at their school or around the nation. Then, challenge student groups to design and implement a survey to learn what students in their school know and want to learn about the opioid crisis. They may use some of the prompts from the human barometer activity, or they may come up with additional questions that have grown out of the class discussion.

Step 1: What do you want to learn? Below are potential survey questions that can help get them started:

- On a scale of 1-5, how much do you know about the prescription opioid crisis?
- On a scale of 1-5, how much do you care about the prescription opioid crisis?
- What would you be most interested in learning about related to the prescription opioid crisis? (choose as many as applicable) What are opioids? Why are they prescribed? How do opioids affect the body and brain? Why do people misuse these medications? Can someone become addicted to a prescription medication? Is addiction a disease? How does opioid abuse impact families and communities? Are there ways to help someone who is struggling with addiction?

Step 2: Who and how do you want to respond? Invite each group to decide whom they will survey. All students? Certain grades? Males vs. females? To consider: Are approvals needed? Should the responses be anonymous? How much time will it take to tabulate and analyze the results? What is the best mechanism for administering the survey? Social media? Google docs? Survey Monkey?

Step 3: Review and analyze the results. Have students tabulate and analyze the responses. What conclusions can they draw? What most surprises them?

3. Based on the results of the survey, invite student groups to select one of the following projects to inform their peers about the opioid epidemic and to educate them about why learning about the epidemic should matter to their generation. Their project must address at least three points that students wanted to learn about, as indicated from the survey, and two sources from credible sites. They should be encouraged to consider their audience and to include at least one piece of data that supports the importance of learning about this topic.

- a. Infographic
- b. Blog post
- c. Digital story
- d. Photo essay
- e. Graffiti wall
- f. YouTube video
- g. School assembly
- h. Social media site

Activity 2: Peer-to-Peer

Materials:

- Sticky notes
- List of online resources, articles and media about the opioid crisis and ways to help others (below)
- Internet access
- Peer-to-Peer Action Plan student activity sheet (one per student)
- List of Resources handout (one per student)
- Tools, apps, and materials to create a public awareness outreach campaign (these may include graphs and infographics, a written report, posters, PowerPoint, podcast, blog, and/or video)

During the Virtual Field Trip, students are challenged to create and implement strategies to help family and friends in their own communities who may be faced with decisions related to opioid misuse, or who may be struggling with dependence or addiction. In this activity, they will conduct research and design an action plan to meet that challenge.

1. Distribute sticky notes, and challenge students to write down one strategy or idea they saw in the Virtual Field Trip that could help someone who is faced with a difficult decision related to opioid misuse or who may be struggling with dependence or addiction.
2. Invite students to post their sticky notes on a wall and to categorize the answers into buckets. Sample buckets could include education about the risks associated with misusing opioids and understanding consequences; sharing personal stories so others might learn from them; learning about and practicing refusal strategies; developing strategies to make healthy choices; enlisting support from family and friends; mentoring younger students; identifying prevention programs that are proven to work in schools and in the community; and researching mental health resources available to students and families to address problems that, when left unaddressed, can lead to a spiral of addiction.

3. Remind students that during the Virtual Field Trip, they were challenged to come up with strategies that could help others in their school or community who could be faced with a difficult decision or struggling with dependence or addiction. Explain to students that, in this activity, they will have an opportunity (individually, in pairs, or in groups) to work toward meeting that challenge.
4. Distribute the “Action Plan” activity sheet and the “Resource List” to students, and review the assignment. Note: Students can complete the assignment as a class, individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Some students may need ideas or guidance about the types of projects that could help others. You will want to make sure that students set reasonable expectations for what they hope to accomplish with their activities. Some ideas include:
 - a. Forming a school-sponsored club or support group where students can ask questions and learn more by inviting in law enforcement, treatment professionals, and/or members of the community who are dealing with the opioid crisis.
 - b. Creating an information center in the school media center or guidance office with information about the crisis, lists of local organizations involved in education, prevention, treatment, and support.
 - c. Holding a series of community nights or assemblies.
 - d. Developing a series of fact sheets about the crisis, what opioids are, how they impact the brain and body, and the science behind the cycle of addiction.
 - e. Holding role-playing sessions that allow students to learn about and practice refusal skills.
 - f. Compiling a list of community resources where students can get help and advice
 - g. Organizing a school-wide campaign around the topic.
 - h. Inviting members of the local community who have been directly affected by the crisis to share their stories and participate in a question and answer session.
 - i. Inviting a school counselor, social worker, mental health worker to talk about the struggles of someone who is experiencing addiction and to address questions students may have.
5. Give students ample time to conduct research and complete their action plans. If appropriate, invite students to evaluate which ideas and action plans should be presented to school and community administrators and stakeholders and to survey class members on which plans or strategies to implement once approved.

National Standards

National Health Education Standards

- 1.12.7 Compare and contrast the benefits of and barriers to practicing a variety of healthy behaviors.
- 2.12.7 Analyze how the perceptions of norms influence healthy and unhealthy behaviors.
- 8.12.1 Utilize accurate peer and societal norms to formulate a health-enhancing message.
- 8.12.2 Demonstrate how to influence and support others to make positive health choices.
- 8.12.3 Work cooperatively as an advocate for improving personal, family, and community health.
- 8.12.4 Adapt health messages and communication techniques to a specific target audience.

Common Core State Standards: ELA

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of science and technical texts, attending to the precise details of explanations or descriptions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; trace the text's explanation or depiction of a complex process, phenomenon, or concept; provide an accurate summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.9-10.7

Translate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text into visual form (e.g., a table or chart) and translate information expressed visually or mathematically (e.g., in an equation) into words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.9-10.9

Compare and contrast findings presented in a text to those from other sources (including their own experiments), noting when the findings support or contradict previous explanations or accounts.

Note:

- At different points in the activities, students may be tempted to share personal information regarding misuse by themselves or others. As always, be sure to follow school or district policies about the sharing of personal information about minors.
- Based on their own unique situations and experiences, some students may feel uncomfortable discussing this topic or they may need additional guidance about where to turn for help if they or someone they know is struggling with prescription drug misuse, heroin use or addiction. It can be really upsetting and scary to have friends or family who are struggling. If you sense that students may need additional guidance, here is a list of resources:

- Talking to a trusted adult -- like a parent, teacher, guidance counselor, coach, or friend's parent-- is important. He or she can help connect to resources and figure out the best way forward.
- Community and teen centers and local health clinics may offer programs to help people get help with addiction and drug misuse.
- Communities of worship, such as churches, mosques, or synagogues, may have support services available.
- There are many online and phone services that can also help with drug misuse problems. Here are a few national resources, and there may also be additional resources available to you in your state or region:
 - NIDA for Teens <https://teens.drugabuse.gov>
 - [Alanon](#) and [Alateen](#) , among others, provide support for friends and family members of people with addiction
 - Partnership for Drug-Free Kids_ www.drugfree.org
 - SAMHSA Treatment Services Locator (or call 1-800-662-HELP)
<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>
 - Narcotics Anonymous <http://www.na.org/>

Student Activity Sheet: Peer to Peer Action Plan

During the Virtual Field Trip, you learned about strategies that the residents of Huntington, West Virginia have implemented to help tackle the opioid crisis in their community. In this activity, you will have an opportunity to create your own strategy that could help peers at your school who may be faced with difficult decisions related to opioids or who may be struggling with physical dependence or addiction. Follow the steps below to create your action plan:

1. **List ideas you learned about in the Virtual Field Trip** that could help to give you ideas for your own action plan.
2. **Research programs that already exist** in your school or community. You may need to interview your school administration, guidance counselors, or health teachers. Your community may also have resources in place that may be involved in some aspect of the crisis. Here are a few places to check:
 - Police or Sheriff's department
 - Fire and Rescue
 - Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT)
 - Local Hospitals and Emergency Rooms
 - Addiction treatment clinics
 - Local Public Health authorities
3. Think about your own school community and what you think would most resonate with your peers who may be faced with difficult decisions related to opioids or struggling with dependence or addiction. **List your idea below.**

4. While it's important that your ideas meet the needs of your peers, it is also important to involve an adult at your school (a teacher, guidance counselor, or administrator) in the implementation of your idea. Present your ideas to an adult at your school and get their approval to move forward with research and an action plan. Ask them to sign in the space below.

5. Consider what you will need to learn or research in order to implement your idea. List your research plan below. Consider the resources on the “Resource List” handout.

6. Now it’s time to tackle your idea! In the space below, create a list of action steps and dates to turn your idea into a reality.

Student Activity Sheet: Resource List

Following is a list of online resources, articles, and media about the opioid crisis where students can find evidence-based information on prescription medication abuse and addiction, prevention, treatment, getting help, and related topics.

Prescription medications and their effects:

- Get Smart about Drugs, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)
<https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com/>
- Drug Facts, National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts>
- Healthy Minds and Bodies, NIDA <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/category/healthy-minds-and-bodies>
- National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week, NIDA <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/category/national-drug-alcohol-facts-week>
- Real-Life Drug Abuse Stories, NIDA <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/category/real-life-stories>
- Opioid Basics, Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/index.html>

About the epidemic:

- Drug Overdose Deaths Are Rising Faster than Ever, *New York Times*
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/05/upshot/opioid-epidemic-drug-overdose-deaths-are-rising-faster-than-ever.html>
- “Studies Suggest Cautious Optimism about Declines in Teen Opioid Use, NPR
<http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/03/20/520536729/studies-suggest-cautious-optimism-about-declines-in-teen-opioid-use>
- The Opioid Epidemic, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
<https://www.hhs.gov/opioids/about-the-epidemic/index.html>
- How the Nation’s Opioid Epidemic is Morphing and Growing, *ProPublica*
<https://www.propublica.org/podcast/how-the-nations-opioid-epidemic-is-morphing-and-growing>

The Disease of Addiction

- What is Addiction? NIDA <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/drug-abuse-addiction>
- Addiction is a Disease, NIDA <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/addiction-disease>

- “Shatter the Myths,” National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week (NDAFW), NIDA <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/national-drug-facts-week/order-free-materials>
- BrainU, University of Minnesota Department of Neuroscience and Department of Curriculum and Instruction, NIDA <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/teachers/lessonplans/brainu>

Risk and Warning signs:

- Adolescent Substance Youth, Youth.gov <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/substance-abuse/warning-signs-adolescent-substance-abuse>
- Risk and Protective Factors, Youth.gov <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/substance-abuse/risk-and-protective-factors-substance-use-abuse-and-dependence>

Prevention programs:

- Prevention, Youth.gov <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/substance-abuse/evidence-based-programs-youth-substance-abuse-prevention-and-treatment>

Treatment and reversing overdose:

- Treatment, Youth.gov <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/substance-abuse/critical-elements-substance-abuse-prevention-efforts>
- SAMHSA Treatment Locator <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>
- State Information, CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/states/index.html>

Help and Resources:

- SAMHSA tools and resources <https://www.samhsa.gov/capt/tools-learning-resources/finding-evidence-based-programs>
- CDC Injury Center <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prevention/help.html>
- National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week, NIDA <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/national-drug-alcohol-facts-week/get-activity-ideas/peer-peer-counseling>
- Choose Your Path, NIDA <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/videos>
- Real Teens Ask (Chat Day), NIDA <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/real-teens-ask-how-can-i-help>