

Overdose Risk Self-assessment: A Guide for Peer Specialists

Overview

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing, in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has created this tool to support peer recovery support specialists (PRSS) within justice settings who provide overdose prevention and linkage-to-care as they engage in overdose risk reduction and safety planning.

Purpose

This overdose risk self-assessment is intended for people who use drugs (PWUD). Once complete, the PRSS and PWUD will discuss the results. The tool includes discussion points and resources to reduce overdose risk.

Target audiences¹

- Peer recovery support specialists working within the justice system.
- Organizations providing peer recovery support services.
- State and local justice agencies in the U.S.
- Harm reduction organizations in the U.S.



¹ For a tool for clinicians, see The Overdose Safety Planning Intervention: Clinical Tools and Support Materials from the Zero Overdose: <http://www.zerooverdose.org/>

For the Peer Recovery Support Specialist

Instructions

Hand the “Self-assessment” checklist on Page 4 to the person who uses drugs (PWUD) to fill out. Once they are done, use the discussion points provided below to engage in overdose risk reduction and safety planning. The table below indicates the level of risk that the PWUD is exposed to when they answer “Yes” to each question. For questions with a higher risk level, spend more time discussing risks and ways to prevent overdose. If it is helpful, you can use the additional resources to share more information about each item or provide more resources to the PWUD.

Overdose Risk Level ■ At Risk ■ Moderate Risk ■ High Risk		This column offers discussion points based on the risk level of each question.	This column includes links to resources you can use or refer the PWUD to when they answer “Yes” to a question.
Questions	Overdose Risk Level	Discussion Points	Additional Resources
1. I don't use dope/heroin, but I do use other street drugs (e.g., coke, crack, stimulants, etc.).	At Risk	Fentanyl is increasingly contaminated into other drugs. How comfortable are you with testing your supply? Do you know where to get drug testing supplies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xylazine in the Drug Supply • Drug Checking DanceSafe
2. I am currently using dope, heroin, fent, or tranq.	At Risk	The dope supply is contaminated with other substances. How comfortable are you with testing your drug supplies? Do you know where to get drug testing supplies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xylazine in the Drug Supply • Drug Checking DanceSafe
3. I often use alone , or I am hiding my use.	High Risk	Using alone makes you more likely to die from an overdose. If you are not able to use with others, the Never Use Alone hotline (800-484-3731) is an option. You can share your location with a volunteer who will stay on the line while you use. If you become unresponsive, the volunteer will call 911 on your behalf. Are there people you feel comfortable using around?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never Use Alone
4. I have recently had a period of time when I used less or stopped my use .	High Risk	Your tolerance level goes down after a period of stopping or slowing your drug use. If your tolerance level has gone down, you are more likely to overdose. Start low and go slow. Consider doing a “test shot” first, trying an alternative method of administration (e.g., snorting as opposed to injecting), and/or using less to lower your overdose risk. What amount might be safer for you to use?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never Use Alone • Naloxone Access
5. I don't care if I overdose.	High Risk	Are you suicidal? Do you have a plan to harm yourself? If the PWUD answered yes, notify your supervisor and follow organizational policies for responding to suicidal ideation or threat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline • Columbia Suicide Risk Scale

Questions	Overdose Risk Level	Discussion Points	Additional Resources
6. I have other health problems like hepatitis, asthma, COPD, open wounds.	High Risk	Certain drugs can cause shallow breathing which can trigger asthma. Other medical conditions can also make it more likely to have an overdose. Do you have a doctor or go to a health clinic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to find low-cost health care in your community • Find a CCBHC
7. I am pregnant or postpartum.	High Risk	There are medical options for pregnant and postpartum women. Do you have a medical provider? If not, what can we do to help connect you to medical care?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pregnancy and Substance Use: A Harm Reduction Toolkit
8. I have overdosed within the last three months.	Moderate Risk	You are more likely to have an overdose if you have recently overdosed. What can you do to help prevent another overdose?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-Up Care After Drug Overdose
9. I seek out fentanyl or the strongest dope.	Moderate Risk	Fentanyl is one of the most common drugs involved in overdose deaths. Start low and go slow. Consider doing a “test shot.” Other routes of administration could reduce overdose risk. Is smoking or sniffing an alternative option? What kind of supplies do you have on hand in case you overdose?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fentanyl Use and Overdose Prevention Tips • Never Use Alone • Naloxone Access
10. I am mixing dope/heroin and other street drugs.	Moderate Risk	Mixing illicit drugs/street drugs are linked to higher chances of overdose. Consider using one drug at a time and reducing the amount you take. What else could you do to decrease your overdose risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opioid Overdose Basics, Overdose Risks + Prevention
11. I use different amounts of drugs, types of drugs, or dealers.	Moderate Risk	If possible, being consistent with your drug use is safest, but that is not always possible. What are some ways to stabilize your use?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe(R) Drug Use • Getting Off Right
12. I am currently taking methadone/buprenorphine or some other medication-assisted treatment .	Moderate Risk	While on these medications, your tolerance has gone down. If you were to have a recurrence of illicit use, you are more likely to have an overdose. How has being on MAT impacted your drug use?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opioid Overdose Basics, Overdose Risks + Prevention
13. I do not test my drugs first.	Moderate Risk	Testing your supply gives you more power in deciding how much to use. How open are you to learning more about testing your supplies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drug Checking DanceSafe • Fentanyl Test Strips Fact Sheet
14. I am injecting substances.	At Risk	Injection increases risk of overdose. Do you have clean supplies to use with?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe(r) Drug Use 101 • Getting Off Right
15. I do not have my basic needs covered, like housing, food, clothing or connection to others.	At Risk	What basic needs are not met? How can we work to improve these areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get Help with Housing Expenses • Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Self-assessment

Instructions

Please answer the questions below about your substance use. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. Answering honestly can help us support you better. After you are finished with the questions, bring back the results for a discussion with your peer supporter.

	Yes	No
1. I do not use dope/heroin, but I do use other street drugs (e.g., coke, crack, meth, other).		
2. I am currently using dope, heroin, fentanyl or tranq.		
3. I often use alone, or I am hiding my use.		
4. I have recently had a period of time when I used less or stopped my use.		
5. I don't care if I overdose.		
6. I have other health problems like hepatitis, asthma, COPD or open wounds.		
7. I am pregnant or postpartum.		
8. I have overdosed within the last three months.		
9. I seek out fentanyl or the strongest dope.		
10. I am mixing dope/heroin with other street drugs.		
11. I use different amounts of drugs, types of drugs, or dealers.		
12. I am currently taking methadone/buprenorphine or some other medication-assisted treatment.		
13. I do not test my drugs before using them.		
14. I am injecting substances.		
15. I do not have my basic needs covered, like housing, food, clothing or connection to others.		

Skip this question if it does not apply to you.