

# How to help people with opioid addiction

**AMY KOTLARZ**  
HEALTH CHECKUP

Maybe you have seen signs of an opioid addiction: empty prescription bottles, needle marks on an arm, or money gone missing and unexplained.

What steps can you take if a family member or friend is struggling with an addiction?

If you strongly suspect an addiction is present, Jennifer Faringer, director of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-Rochester Area, suggests having a "carefrontation" with the person. One way to do this is to present your concerns and to listen non-judgmentally — and don't be deterred if the person has an explanation for unusual behaviors.

"Addiction is typically a disease of denial," Faringer said. "Say to the person, 'Let's go get a drug evaluation for our peace of mind.'"

A person may also be referred to treatment via Drug Court or through another connection with the legal or crimi-

nal justice system.

Here are some steps you can take to help:

**Be honest about the addiction with the person's primary care provider.** An opioid addiction is an illness that can be treated, and treatment can start with a referral from your primary care provider. Authorize the release of treatment records to the provider. Medical and dental providers need to know about addiction histories when they prescribe medication and perform procedures.

**Research different forms of treatment available.** Treatment options, explained in depth at [oasas.ny.gov/treatment](http://oasas.ny.gov/treatment), include detoxification during the three-to-five day withdrawal period, inpatient treatment programs, outpatient programs and residential programs. Some treatment programs use medications to assist. There are also some programs that are for specialized populations, such as veterans, adolescents and the elderly. For instance, Lifespan has a geriatric addictions program; call (585) 244-8400.

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## Opioid

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**If someone is overdosing or is in immediate danger, call 911.** Good Samaritan laws in New York protect those who call to report an overdose from prosecution for misdemeanor drug possession.

**If the person is covered by your insurance, find out what benefits you have.** Call your insurance company to find out if you need a prior authorization or referral, and if you need to choose an in-network provider.

**Know your rights.** It is illegal in New York state for insurance companies to tell patients they must fail first at outpatient treatment before the company will pay for inpatient treatment; if this happens, file a complaint with the state Department of Financial Services. Insurance customers can also appeal if an insurance company denies coverage for treatment on the grounds that it is not medically necessary.

**As loved ones leave treatment, help them build a new life away from triggers and temptations.** For instance, consider minimizing alcohol and gambling around a person who has struggled with addiction. Help those in recovery find employment and housing away from people and places that trigger the addiction.

**Clean out your medicine cabinet.** Stolen medicine is regularly sold to those who are addicted. Remove unused prescription medication from medicine cabinets and

properly dispose of it. Monroe County's pharmaceutical waste disposal collection schedule is here: [www2.monroecounty.gov/des-PharmaceuticalWasteDisposal.php](http://www2.monroecounty.gov/des-PharmaceuticalWasteDisposal.php).

**Connect with others.** Help is available from the Monroe County Recovery Support Navigator, a new free resource with family navigators and peer advocates. Families can call (855) 778-1200 and individuals struggling with addiction can call (855) 788-1300. There's also the Families Recover Together support group. Register at [recoverycoachuniversity.com](http://recoverycoachuniversity.com).

**Learn how to administer Narcan (naloxone).** Anyone over the age of 18 can be trained in administering naloxone, which reverses an opioid overdose. Naloxone is available from large-chain pharmacies in the state without a prescription, and there are also free training sessions at several locations in the community. Find out more at [recoverynavigator.org](http://recoverynavigator.org).

**Finally, have compassion.** Treatment advocates stress that relapses are part of the lifelong process of recovery. "I think it's important for folks to have compassion for themselves and for the person that they love," said Elizabeth Kingsley Curran, director of admissions at East House. "Addiction impacts everyone. It's important to know that there's hope and that people are very resilient."

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