



# Living Substance Free!

Rady Children's Hospital Substance Awareness Patch



## The Facts

Teenagers turn to drugs and self-medication for various reasons, such as anxiety, boredom, peer pressure, etc. There's a common misconception that "experimentation" with drugs is natural for high schoolers, but the severity of addiction is often overlooked. Substance misuse is when someone's use of substances leads to problems with their health or other parts of their life, like school, family or friendships. Prolonged use leads to addiction and substance use disorder--a physiological and psychological dependence on drugs that makes it extremely difficult to get clean.

On a neurological level, our brain's limbic region, which controls emotions, develops faster than the cortex region, which controls critical thinking. Although teens are able to detect risky behaviors, their emotions tend to outweigh logic, leading to issues including drug use. Additionally, drugs can cause the release of dopamine, the main neurotransmitter that activates parts of the brain that make us feel good, as well as other neurotransmitters within the brain, just on a much larger scale. When drugs synthetically produce this high, it can make the natural release of pleasure hormones seem inadequate. Suddenly, activities that make a person happy, like being with friends, playing a sport, or listening to music, become indifferent.

Recently, the fentanyl crisis has been on the rise. Fentanyl is an extremely dangerous drug whose lethal dose is smaller than the tip of a pencil. Drugs bought illegally can be laced with fentanyl in varying amounts, meaning you have no idea what's in the pill you're taking.

Although the topic of drug use and addiction is intimidating, there are ways to address the issue, improve communication, and live healthier lifestyles, starting with this badge!

## The Activities

**To complete this patch, all of the \* items must be completed for each section (Discover, Connect, Take Action and Reflect).**

### Discover Activities:

Pick at least one of the three activities listed below to complete. Be sure to complete the starred item.

1. Research what has been done in your own community/school district to address teen substance misuse. Has anything been done to address Fentanyl specifically? (Helpful tip: Start by searching what Narcan is and how available it is in schools).

A. My community has done:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

B. If your community hasn't done much to address the issue, discuss the most prevalent needs you have seen and brainstorm different ways you could help. (Hint: Use these ideas when you complete the Take Action section).

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. With your troop, friends, or family, discuss times you have faced peer pressure. How did it make you feel? What were you pressured to do? How did you handle the situation? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. \*Research what Fentanyl is and how dangerous it can be. (Helpful tip: Watch this video from the CDC - <https://youtu.be/zu WtBrmScs>) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Connect Activities:**

Please complete at least one of the activities below.

1. Interview an Expert
  - A. An expert is anyone with first-hand knowledge about a specific topic; in this case, teen substance misuse. You can either connect with a teen specialist or an individual who has been through recovery in order to gain a new perspective.
  - B. Create a list of questions before conducting the interview.
    1. \_\_\_\_\_
    2. \_\_\_\_\_
    3. \_\_\_\_\_
    4. \_\_\_\_\_
    5. \_\_\_\_\_
    6. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. Take notes and discuss what you have learned as a troop.
  
2. Create a Dream Board
  - A. This dream board should include your aspirations, goals, and future plans. Cut out pictures, draw, or write out different ideas. You can even include dreams that your younger self had, like being a famous singer or going to space.
  - B. Share your boards with your troop!
  - C. Drug use not only affects the present, it impacts the future too. When people turn to substance abuse, they often jeopardize their goals and opportunities. How would drug use affect the different aspects included in your own dream board? Do you think substance use is worth it if it means not achieving your dreams?
  
3. Try out some different coping mechanisms as an alternative to drug use
  - A. Find a quiet spot and sit for 10 minutes. Focus on the world around you; what do you hear, smell, feel, or notice? Also keep track of your own thoughts. Oftentimes, teenagers are focused on music, social media, or homework that their own thoughts, feelings, and questions get overlooked. Come back together as a troop and discuss how being better able to listen to yourself can help improve decision making and mindfulness.
  - B. Be Active! Our body has natural opioids called endorphins. These hormones produce the feeling of happiness and euphoria that all humans crave. Drug users create this “high” with Vicodin, Morphine, and Fentanyl, but our brain naturally produces a “high” when we exercise. With your troop, plan a hiking trip, pool party, or another fun activity that will kick start endorphin production!
  - C. Find a new hobby. Some teens begin to use drugs out of boredom. They are bored with school, with friends, with sports, and with life in general. Instead of turning to drugs, try to discover a new hobby. Pick at least three activities to complete as a troop: <https://www.boredombusted.com/definitive-list-of-hobbies-interests/#creative>. You can pick from this list or research some fun hobbies on your own!

### **Take Action Activities:**

Please complete at least one of the activities below.

1. Address the need you identified in Step 1 - Discover
  - A. If there is something you feel could be improved on within your community regarding teen substance misuse, then expand upon that and turn it into a lasting project. No one knows more about how to reach teens than teens themselves!
  - B. Remember, a Take Action project needs to make a lasting impact and involve planning. Make sure to run your idea by a troop leader or adult before continuing with the project.
2. Lead a teen drug-use information meeting at your school, church, or library. Connect with a school counselor or community leader and plan a meeting to educate teens about substance misuse/the dangers of Fentanyl.
3. Implement your new hobbies. As a troop, dedicate monthly meetings towards trying your new hobbies.
4. Create a plan on how you will handle peer pressure and say no to drug use in the future. Present this plan to your troop leaders, parents, or friends.

### **Reflection Activities:**

The topic of drug use and addiction can be difficult to discuss. However, completing this badge is one step closer to destigmatizing substance misuse. What can you do to remind yourself of this process? For reflection activities, pick one of the following items which allows you to ponder what you have learned.

1. Create a personal journal. While it's always encouraged to seek help from a peer or trusted adult when facing troubling issues, debriefing with yourself first can help facilitate conversation. Write down any time you've faced peer pressure or anything you wish you could share with someone but feel embarrassed or judged.
2. Continue your hobby individually. How does it make you feel? How often do you want to do it? Does it serve as an outlet for anxiety or boredom?
3. Continue to implement the coping mechanism learned in Step 2 - Connect in your everyday life.
4. Connect with a friend or family member and discuss what you have learned in this badge. How has it impacted you? How do you think knowing the dangers of substance misuse could also impact your friend/family member.

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This patch was developed by Emily Hays as part of her Girl Scout Gold Award Project.