

A GUIDE FOR FAITH LEADERS

Helping people with opioid disorders in Gaston County

BACKGROUND

You are in a special position to help congregants with opioid disorders, or whose family and friends have these conditions. As affected persons turn to you, this document will help you provide advice and support to people in need.

WHERE THERE MAY BE A PROBLEM

Many people became addicted to opioids prescribed by physicians, dentists, podiatrists, and advance practice providers. Today, we know it is not true but, for years, providers believed people in pain could not become addicted to opioids and they commonly prescribed: oxycodone (Percocet, Percodan, OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin Locte, Lortab), pethidine (Demerol), hydromorphone (Dilaudid), fentanyl (Duragesic), and Tylenol with Codeine. Individuals who depend on these medications often turn to heroin, opium, and morphine when they are less expensive and easier to get than prescription pills. People of all economic and social backgrounds have opioid disorders across Gaston County.

UNDERSTANDING OPIOID ADDICTION

EFFECTS: Opioids stimulate specific areas in the brain, causing addicted persons to feel "high" and a numbing of physical and emotional pain. Two to three days after quitting, these brain centers scream for opioids and as they begin withdrawal, they also have intense flu-like symptoms. For another three to six months their cravings are less intense as the brain heals. This process is called detoxification or detox. In the early phases of recovery, physical and emotional pain comes rushing back, and they often have limited coping skills for managing their lives.

TREATMENT: After detox, individuals typically need 12-18 months of therapy to achieve recovery, through physical, psychological, and spiritual healing. Even when they succeed, they must never use opioids again, as a single use can cause them to relapse and become addicted again.

RESOURCES

- Partners Behavioral Health Management has an easy-to-use resource for finding behavioral health and addiction treatment services: <https://www.partnersbhm.org/find-a-provider/>
- The Gaston Controlled Substances Coalition website posts information on helping resources: www.gastoncsc.org
- The HOPE support group is for all persons with a friend, family member, or loved one in active substance addiction, substance recovery, or lost to substance addiction. The group meets on Thursdays at 6:30PM at Phoenix Counseling Center in Gastonia. Call 704/460-8786 for more information.



What can clergy and lay leaders do?

LISTEN.

If a member of your congregation speaks with you about opioids, they've probably spent a good deal of time building the courage for this conversation. Above all, listen to their story, do not pass judgment, and convey hope, and treat all information confidentially.

LOOK FOR CLUES.

When someone describes a loved one they fear is misusing opioids, listen for signs of possible addiction: The person - is suddenly mismanaging money or has fallen into debt; is in constant crisis; is not getting along with others; is frequently going to doctors for medical issues and pain; has isolated himself/herself from others; naps much of the time; and, the pupils in their eyes are dilated, or small.

HOW TO HELP.

1. Counsel them to have faith and hope. Pray with them if they are addicted, and for the affected persons in their lives.
2. Counsel them to contact Partners Behavioral Health Management (888/235-HOPE) or the Resource Connection Gateway (gastonymca.org/gateway) to find high-quality and affordable drug treatment services. Both programs help people, including those with low income or no health insurance.
3. Ask if he/she wants to reveal their situation to others, including their congregation.
4. Understand that drug treatment works best when the addicted person achieves physical, psychological, and spiritual health.
5. Advise family and friends to never give their loved one money, as cash is often a trigger to buy drugs. If they elect to pay their loved one's bills, send the money directly to the vendor.
6. Family and friends of opioid-addicted persons are at risk of doing harm, even when they mean well. People who live with or are waiting for loved ones to enter treatment, must set and hold firm boundaries so they do not enable addiction. They must:
 - Prohibit the use of drugs in their home, set hours the loved one must be at home, not allow visitors they suspect are abusing drugs, and count and lock all medications. Make it clear if the addicted person violates any of these rules, they will have to leave the home. This may be difficult, but it is best for the loved one.
 - Help the addicted person stay busy so he/she is less likely to seek drugs while waiting for treatment. If willing, invite them to go to church and to read the Bible. Encourage them to spend time with sober people in a safe environment and to attend self-help groups such as Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Celebrate Recovery, and Alanon. Be aware not all self-help groups are effective.



*The Gaston Controlled Substances Coalition is an initiative of the
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