

## When a Nap Isn't a Nap

Overdoses touch people and communities in many ways. International Overdose Awareness Day, August 31st, 2023, is the world's largest annual campaign to end overdose and remember those who have died without stigma while also acknowledging the grief of their loved ones. An overdose means having more of a drug(s) than the body can handle. Unfortunately, opioid misuse is now the leading cause of unnatural death in Fairfax County according to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Don't allow it to go unnoticed in your home, in our community.

Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers available legally by prescription, such as Percocet, oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, morphine, and many others (NIH).

Opioids slow the central nervous system to produce a calming effect. When taken in excess amounts or in combination with other central nervous system depressants, they greatly suppress breathing and the heart rate.

**Signs of an overdose include:** Loss of consciousness. Unresponsive to outside stimulus. Awake, but unable to talk. Breathing is very slow and shallow, erratic, or has stopped. For lighter skinned people, the skin tone turns bluish purple, for darker skinned people, it turns grayish or ashen. Choking sounds, or a snore-like gurgling noise (sometimes called the "death rattle"). Vomiting. Body is very limp. Face is very pale or clammy. Fingernails and lips turn blue or purplish black. Pulse (heartbeat) is slow, erratic, or not there at all

A person may appear as though they are just napping. It may be difficult to tell if someone is napping or potentially overdosing, especially if they are snoring.

**If someone is making unfamiliar sounds while "sleeping" it is worth trying to wake him or her up.** Many loved ones of users thought a person was snoring, when in fact they were overdosing. These situations are a missed opportunity to intervene and save a life. Snoring and gurgling can indicate that a person is having trouble breathing. With substance use, especially with opioids which slow down the systems of the body, snoring may indicate a serious and potentially life-threatening obstruction of the airway.

In the context of substance use, snoring is not something that should be seen as "normal". Don't let someone "sleep it off" if they are snoring; this may be a sign of a significant and life-threatening emergency. You should attempt to wake them immediately.

If they do wake up, then the snoring (airway obstruction) will resolve. If they do not wake up, call 911 immediately.

As we are about to embark on another school year, it is important to bring awareness to our families and students about what to look for in regard to substance use. Take confidence in the fact that you know what is normal for your student and what is not in terms of their behavior.

Potential signs that something may be off with your student:

A student who starts acting withdrawn or seems tired, depressed, or mad for no reason •  
Changing friends • Not caring about personal appearance • Slipping grades, skipping classes •  
Losing interest in favorite activities • Behavioral or academic trouble at school or with the law •  
Changes in eating or sleeping habits • Not getting along with family members • Lying or stealing

These signs do not always mean there is a drug or alcohol problem, but they may be cause for concern. Try to find out what is going on. Do not be afraid to have open and non-judgmental conversations with your student. Get to know their teachers, friends, and their friends' parents. A new school year means new opportunities. Let's work together to make this year great.

Resources:

[Everything you Need to Know about Opioids](#)

Spanish: Todo lo que necesita saber sobre los opioides en menos de una hora

[Narcan Training \(English & Spanish\)](#)

[Office of Student Safety and Wellness](#) or 571-423-4270

[Fairfax County Public Schools: Alcohol and Other Drugs](#)

For further Information & support:  
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