



Completing the Overdose Risk Assessment and Safety Planning Worksheet With Participants

Overdose Risk Assessment and Safety Planning Worksheet

Purpose

The worksheet is intended to be used as an engagement tool by case managers, harm reduction specialists, substance use counselors and other staff with participants who use drugs. It helps participants self-define their drug-use behaviors, review different aspects of their risk of overdose, affirm protective measures they are already engaging in and consider additional ways they can reduce their risk of overdose. The worksheet also allows staff to deepen their working relationships with participants, engage in affirmative goal-setting processes and offer referrals as needed.

The worksheet is voluntary. Participants can skip questions they do not want to answer at any time. Participants should not provide any personally identifying information, such as their name, date of birth or address. The worksheet is confidential; any information participants provide will not result in punitive actions regarding reported drug use. Participants' information should be stored securely, either by the participant or the case managers. Participants should not be asked to provide information about drug use that may affect their residency or services they receive.

How To Implement

The worksheet is **not** intended to be used as a mandated activity. Ideally, the worksheet should be used with participants with whom there is some level of trust or rapport. Be sure to communicate to participants that what they write on the worksheet is confidential and will not result in any punitive action regarding their reported drug use. Do **not** use the worksheet with any participant where a conversation about drug use will result in a loss of residency or services.

Although some parts of the worksheet focus on opioids, it can be used to assess and reduce the risk of overdose, overamping and other adverse reactions related to any drug. Safety plans are most effective when they are periodically revisited and revised, either on a regular timeline or as the participant's circumstances change.

What You Should and Should Not Do

What You Should Do	What You Should <u>Not</u> Do
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Utilize a harm-reduction framework: Withhold judgment. Elicit information from the participant to understand their situation, what options they have and what decisions they can make to reduce their health risks. Affirm the participant’s openness to making positive changes that may reduce their risk of overdose. Participants may have to adjust their safety plan depending on their current situation or environment.• Practice confidentiality: Talk with participants in a private room or isolated area. Keep the completed worksheet in the participant’s confidential chart so it can be referred to in future counseling sessions. Facilitators may offer a copy of the worksheet to the participant for their own reference but should recommend that it is kept in a safe, private place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell participants what to do: Ask participants if they are open to brainstorm ideas or hear options. Avoid instructing or lecturing participants – people are experts of their own lives.• Expect perfection: Ongoing conversations with participants will help them recognize and discuss challenges and successes related to reducing their risk of overdose or implementing changes in their drug-use practices. Think of an individualized overdose safety plan as something aspirational. People may not be able to commit to everything in their safety plan all the time. Even if a participant expresses disappointment in themselves, make sure they know you are not disappointed in them.

Sections of the Worksheet

The worksheet contains sections that address various categories that contribute to the risk of overdose. Each section includes questions about drug-use practices followed by an area where participants can write in strategies to reduce their risk of overdose. Before completing the worksheet, it might be helpful to summarize the sections and work with participants to prioritize the sections most important to them. If the worksheet is too lengthy or there are sections that do not apply to the participant, it is OK to skip certain sections.

Drug-Use Practices

This section assesses which drugs participants use and how they use them and helps determine potential risks of overdose and steps participants can take to reduce them. The remaining sections do not have to be completed in any order and can be completed based on applicability or participants’ priorities.

Drug Testing Strips

This section can help guide conversations with participants about how drug testing strips can help them take steps to reduce their risk of overdose. Staff members can explain when and how

fentanyl and xylazine test strips should be used. If participants want to know where to access test strips, staff members can refer them to a syringe service program (SSP), an overdose prevention center (OPC), a fentanyl test strip public access point, an opioid overdose prevention program (OOPP) or the MATTERS Network. For more information about the MATTERS Network, visit mattersnetwork.org.

Staff members may also discuss point-of-care drug-checking services offered at some SSPs in NYC. For more information, visit nyc.gov/alcoholanddrugs or email drugchecking@health.nyc.gov.

Combining Drugs

This section assesses whether participants are using more than one drug and how that increases their risk of overdose. This includes combining different types of drugs (such as opioids, stimulants and sedatives) and using multiple central nervous system (CNS) depressants (such as opioids, alcohol and benzodiazepines). Potential points of discussion include:

- Stimulants can increase heart rate.
- CNS depressants can cause slowed breathing and heart rate.
- Using multiple CNS depressants can increase the risk of fatal overdose by slowing down breathing and heart rate.
- Combining stimulants with CNS depressants (for example, cocaine or crystal meth with heroin or benzodiazepines) can increase the risk for overdose, as stimulants increase the need for oxygen, while depressants slow down the body's ability to take in oxygen.
- Combining alcohol with cocaine produces cocaethylene, a psychoactive metabolite that enhances the effects of both drugs and increases the risk of heart damage, in the body.

Tolerance and Medication for Opioid Use Disorder

This section allows staff members to discuss with participants:

- Tolerance and scenarios that can lead to lower tolerance (such as exiting substance use treatment, hospitalization or entering a correction setting)
- How changes in tolerance affects the risk of opioid overdose
- The role of medications for opioid use disorder (OUD) in managing withdrawal symptoms and reducing the risk of overdose
 - Methadone and buprenorphine (bupe) are the most effective medications for treating OUD and proven to reduce the risk of overdose.

Naloxone

This section allows staff to discuss with participants naloxone access and how having naloxone nearby can reduce the risk of fatal overdose. If a participant does not have naloxone and your organization provides it, you can dispense a kit to the participant. If your organization does not

provide naloxone, you can help participants find an OOPP near them by visiting nyc.gov/naloxone or calling **311**.

If your organization is interested in becoming an OOPP to distribute naloxone, visit nyc.gov/health and search for [overdose prevention resources](#) or email naloxone@health.nyc.gov.

Setting

This section assesses participant's risk of overdose based on where they use drugs. Staff members can ask guiding questions to encourage participants to consider the safety of the setting and whether someone would be able to find them and intervene in the event of an overdose. Potential points of discussion include:

- Is the setting accessible to potential first responders?
- Does the setting have a door that closes and locks?
 - Does the door open outward to allow access if someone is inside?
- Does the setting allow for safer drug use?
- Is the setting well-lit and ventilated to allow for safer injections and smoking practices?
- If the setting is outdoors, does it offer protection from weather and other elements (for example, is there overhead shelter such as a highway overpass)?

Staff members may also discuss OPCs, where people can bring preobtained drugs to use under supervision. For more information on safer use strategies, see *Take Care, Take Charge: Safety Tips for People Who Use or Inject Drugs* (available at on.nyc.gov/tctc-booklet) and *Safety Tips for People Who Use Stimulants* (available at on.nyc.gov/stimulants-booklet).

People Who Can Help

This section allows participants to identify who may be able to assist in case of an overdose. Staff members can discuss with participations using drugs with other people and taking turns so someone is available to administer naloxone in case of an overdose. For participants who do not use with other people, staff can discuss options such as calling the Never Use Alone hotline at 877-696-1966 and making sure the setting is accessible to first responders.

Overall Health

This section covers other health conditions that may impact participants' risk of overdose. Existing conditions that affect breathing can increase the risk of overdose or be made worse by smoking drugs.

My Overdose Safety Plan

This part of the worksheet allows participants to identify actionable steps they can take to reduce their risk of overdose. When completing this section, it is important for participants to focus on realistic and practical steps. Here are some questions to consider with the participant:

- Are these actions something the participant is willing and able to do?
- What happens if one of the steps cannot be completed?

Safety plans may change over time and should be revisited whenever a participant's circumstances or drug-use behaviors change.

Overdose Safety Planning Poster

This poster provides general questions to consider when thinking about the risk of overdose. It can be posted in an office or workspace to signal it is a safe space to talk about drug use. The poster can also be used as a starting point for a conversation, after which the safety planning worksheet can be introduced. This poster is available online at on.nyc.gov/od-safety-plan and to order by calling **311**.

Additional Resources

For more information on:

- Drug-checking services in NYC, including at SSPs and OPCs, visit nyc.gov/alcoholanddrugs
- Naloxone, visit nyc.gov/naloxone
- Treatment for OUD, visit nyc.gov/health and search for [opioid treatment](#)
- Smoking cessation, visit nyc.gov/nycquits

To view the:

- New York State (NYS) Department of Health's overdose safety planning card, visit health.ny.gov/publications/9895.pdf
- NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports' treatment locator, visit findaddictiontreatment.ny.gov