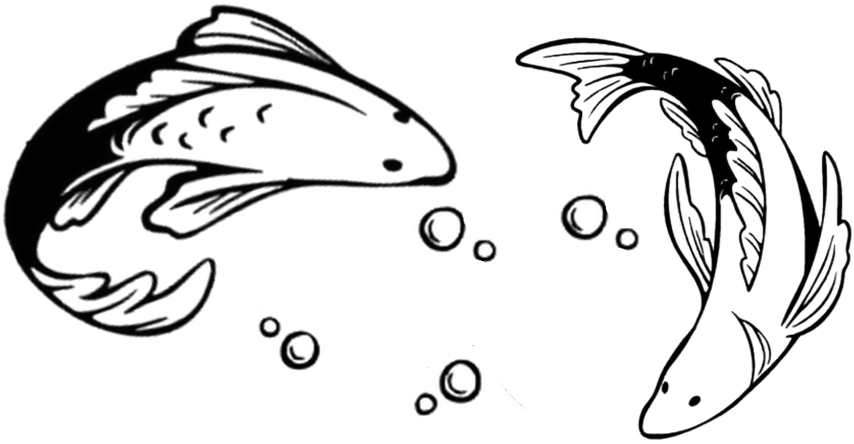

OVERDOSING CAN BE A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE AND KNOWING HOW TO CARE FOR SOMEONE AFTERWARDS IS ALMOST AS IMPORTANT AS KNOWING WHAT TO DO IN THE MOMENT OF CRISIS!

RISING WATERS MUTUAL AID

OVERDOSE AFTERCARE

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General Info

Providing safe and effective aftercare for someone who has experienced an opioid overdose is both critical emotionally, and necessary to ensure they don't experience harmful medical complications.

Every situation surrounding an overdose is unique and comes with its own challenges.

We primarily work in communities of unhoused folk so that is where our experience comes from. If the aftercare you are providing is for a loved one or a housed member of your community, it will likely look very different than what is described here.

There are overarching themes that we believe are worth taking away no matter the situations you expect to encounter!

Context of this Zine

Important Note

We are not covering the emotional aftercare YOU might need as someone who just experienced someone else overdosing. It is very important that you ensure you are able to access resources to manage the emotional toll this type of event can cause.

It is important that you are able to self regulate in moments where your focus needs to be on the person in crisis and that means taking care of yourself at all other times.

If you intend to stand in solidarity with unhoused folk as a more active part of your life, things like ensuring you are hydrated and well fed are also very important as a continuous practice.

Take Care of You

How to Behave

People who have experienced an overdose often have no idea that they have overdosed until they are told. They also express that the moments after they 'wake up' are filled with stress and fear. People are shouting; people are touching them with rough hands; in some situations, they are being told how selfish and inconsiderate they are. None of these are helpful, especially if the person doesn't yet know about the overdose.

No matter what is happening around or within you, make sure that you are providing as soft and caring an environment for the person coming out of an overdose as possible.

Explain what is happening in a calm, low voice. Narrate everything you are doing before you do it so they know what is happening to their body. Ask consent for everything if they are conscious and *respect a No!*

Kindness and Calmness

What is Happening?

For people who have a physical dependence on opioids, being given naloxone will put them into withdrawal as the opioids are prevented from binding to the receptors. Withdrawal symptoms are rarely life-threatening, but are often agonizing to experience. **They include:**

- Aches and pain.
- Anxiety.
- Chills and fever.
- Diarrhea.
- Dilated pupils.
- Elevated heart rate and blood pressure.
- Heavy sweating.
- Insomnia.
- Intense desire or craving for opioids or opiates.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Despondence or Dread.
- Generalized Dysphoria.

Withdrawal

What Should I Have?

While all medications should be taken in consultation with a doctor, some over the counter meds can be very useful in combating some of the effects of withdrawal.

Ibuprofen and **acetaminophen** can be used to combat the aches and pains caused by withdrawal as well as those caused by CPR.*

Pepto Bismol, **Imodium**, or **Tums** can be used to combat the stomach upset and diarrhea that is sometimes caused by withdrawal.

Always ensure that all medications are taken as directed on the packaging and that someone who is not in withdrawal is available to continue monitoring the dosing going forward.

*If the pain is more than expected or if mobility seems to be affected please call 911. CPR can crack ribs and those need to be identified and treated at a medical facility with an X-ray machine.

Medications

What Should I Have?

Overdoses can be quite messy. Vomiting, urination, defecation, and the amount of stuff that comes with a medical emergency can make the environment and the person who overdosed feel unkempt or out of control.

These are some tools that can help you provide dignity and spacial cleanliness to the individual.

PPE like Gloves and CPR Masks: These are used to protect you or others from biohazards present in the environment.

Ziploc/Trash Bags: These can be used to dispose of any/all trash. Ensure you are disposing of bodily fluids, other biohazards and sharps in appropriate containers!

Paper Towels/Wet Wipes: These can be used to clean up messes both in the environment and directly affecting the individual.

Hand Sanitizer/Alcohol Swabs: The swabs can be used to sterilize the injection location for the naloxone and the sanitizer can be used after a wet wipe to clean and sanitize after the crisis has passed.

Disposables 1/2

What Should I Have?

These are some tools that can help you provide physical cleanliness and dignity to the individual who just experienced the overdose.

Mouthwash: This can be used to provide dignity and reassurance for the individual who may have vomited.

Water/Hydration Packets/Pedialite/Gatorade: Replacing electrolytes and providing a good flavor can be very important post overdose.

Ice Packs/Heating Packs: Temperature regulation is often difficult in withdrawal. Having tools to help the individual manage their temperature can remove that discomfort after an overdose.

Disposables 2/2

What Should I Have?

These items can often be difficult to come across in an unhoused encampment, or on the street; but, if you have them on hand, they can make a world of difference.

A change of clothes: clothing can be soiled in any number of ways during an overdose and being able to change out of a soiled set into a clean one can be wildly beneficial.

Towels/Blankets: These can be used as blankets to help with temperature regulation as well as padding or pillows to make laying down more comfortable.

Soft Goods

What Should I Watch Out For?

Naloxone is a fast acting medication that stays in the body for between 30-90 minutes. This is true no matter how much naloxone was administered, adding more at the same time does not lengthen the effective timeframe.

Opioids can stay active in the body for up to 17 hours depending on the type and release mechanism. This means that it is possible for someone to overdose, be revived using naloxone and then overdose again from the original dose still in their system after the naloxone wares off.

Additionally, people who have been put into withdrawal may seek out their substance to stop the pain they are experiencing and may use again. The additional dose may be enough to cause an overdose after the naloxone wears off, either alone or in combination with the original dose.

There are also the medical complications caused by the symptoms of withdrawal that you should watch out for. Dehydration can be caused by vomiting/diarrhea, especially for someone who was not well hydrated beforehand.

Withdrawal can also exacerbate preexisting conditions like seizures. The trauma combined with some physiological causes can also make mental health symptoms worse.

What Do I Do?

If you have successfully revived someone using naloxone/Narcan and they have refused calling 911, here are some things you should do.

Speak calmly and without judgement; ask those around the person to do the same, and ask anyone who cannot do that to move elsewhere. Folk may not be able to manage their emotions but they can often remove themselves from the situation if asked.

Ask for consent for every action you take.

Offer any resources you have as you explain what they might be experiencing and why. You can also ask if they have had an experience like this before, and if they know of anything that is likely to help them.

Explain about the effective time of naloxone and remind them that it is possible to overdose again, even if they don't use, because opioids last longer in the system than naloxone.

Offer to stay with them or ask them if anyone they trust/would prefer is available to stay with them to help them manage their withdrawal symptoms, and ensure they have support if they do overdose again.

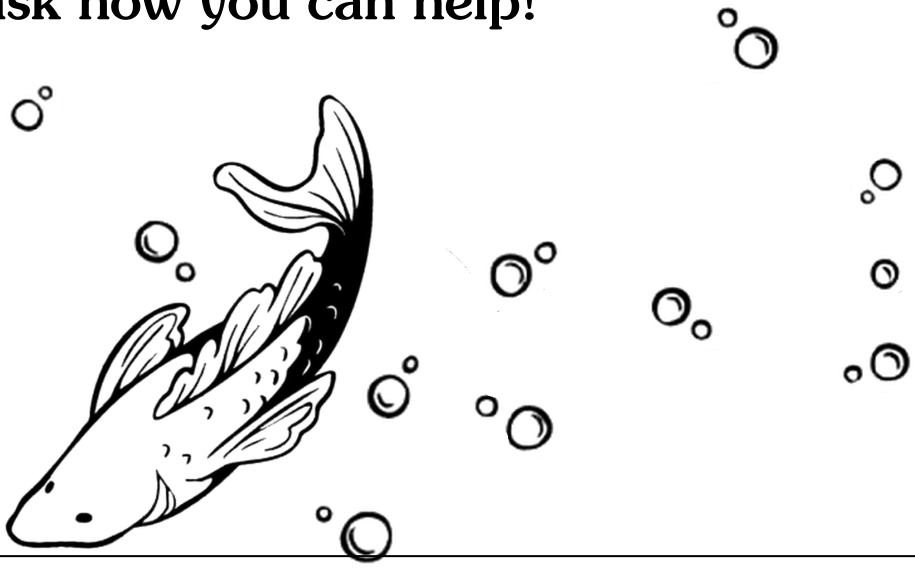
Remember to stay regulated to be able to provide the individual with the safest environment possible to make it the least traumatic experience possible.

After the Overdose

What Next?

Organizations doing the work to educate about, and respond to, opioid emergencies are chronically under-staffed and underfunded.

Find an organization in your area and ask how you can help!



Support Orgs in Your Area

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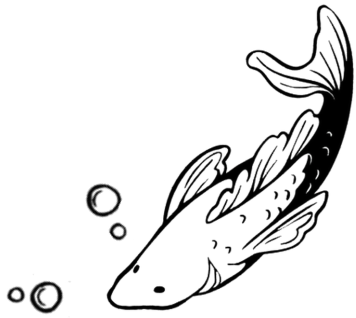

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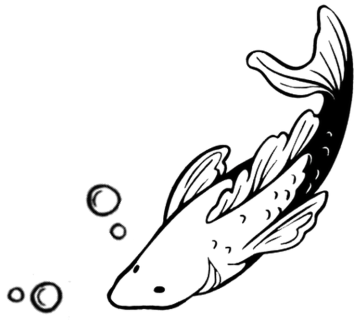

Want More Information?

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Website

Paypal

We are a fiscally sponsored 501c3 but still no questions asked!

Thank you for your solidarity!