

New Survey Finds Knowledge Gap Between California Youth and Parents on the Dangers of Illicit Fentanyl

The survey, commissioned by Song for Charlie and funded by the California Department of Health Care Services, shows four-in-10 Californian young adults, and half their teen counterparts, aren't knowledgeable about the misuse of prescription pills.

DHCS acts to better educate and inform parents about the current risk factors and update the way parents talk with their kids about drugs.

Pasadena, Calif. Sep. 12, 2023 – Only three-in-10 young Californians, both teens and young adults, report having talked to their parents about the misuse of prescription pills, reveals a new survey commissioned by [Song for Charlie](#), the national family-run nonprofit charity dedicated to raising awareness about fake pills made from fentanyl.

However, parents overwhelmingly tell a different story, with 70 percent saying they have had at least one conversation with their child about prescription pill use. This disconnect between parents and their children is one of the important issues addressed in a new partnership between Song for Charlie and the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS). [The New Drug Talk: Connect to Protect](#) is a first-of-its-kind educational web platform designed to equip California families to educate themselves about the widespread availability of fentanyl-laced pharmaceutical pills (“fentapills”), the dangers of self-medication and experimentation, and how to have meaningful, high-impact conversations about the rapidly changing drug landscape.

This new critical data and platform come as California teens and young adults are exposed to potent chemicals like fentanyl and many are suffering with stress and anxiety. The result has been record overdoses in recent years, overwhelmingly driven by fentanyl, which has been involved in more than 80 percent of youth drug deaths nationally. Song for Charlie began after founders Ed and Mary Ternan’s son, Charlie, passed away after taking a pill he didn’t know was laced with fentanyl. Ed and his wife Mary have now dedicated their lives to increasing awareness of fentapills.

“Opioids are killing our kids. Song for Charlie was borne out of loss and devastation. Charlie’s parents have turned that loss into action, working to warn other families about the risks of fentanyl and laced substances often being sold on social media,” said **Governor Newsom**. “Far too many families have been ravaged by the opioid crisis – we will continue our work to keep Californians safe.”

“The California Department of Education is leading education, substance abuse prevention, and intervention efforts to ensure our students are safe as it relates to drugs,” said **California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond**. “We’re incredibly grateful that with *The New Drug Talk*, our state can lead the charge in reshaping the way education is used as a tool for families to have honest, informed discussions that keep our kids safe.”

The survey, conducted by strategic communications and insights consultancy, Breakwater Strategy, was designed to assess this deadly gap in knowledge given the rapidly changing drug landscape and the prevalence of deadly synthetic drugs. Key findings include:

- Nearly 46 percent of young adults and 34 percent of teens are broadly aware of people taking prescription pills without prescriptions.
- Less than 60 percent of parents, while having awareness that people take pills without a prescription, know that people their children's age are taking prescription pills without prescriptions.
- Four-in-10 young adults and half of teens say they aren't knowledgeable about the issue.
- Young adults cite fear of judgment, lack of comfort, and potential consequences as some of the most significant obstacles to discussing prescription pill misuse with their parents.
- Parents report "lacking enough knowledge" as a key barrier that keeps them from talking with their children about the issue.

"There is a clear and pressing need to provide an easy way for parents to understand the drug scene their kids are facing and to get the tools they need to connect with them on a topic that can be challenging," said **Song for Charlie President Ed Ternan**. "We are giving parents and caregivers the confidence they need to have an informed discussion with their kids. In the current environment, it can be a matter of life and death."

TAKING ACTION: To help parents navigate the crisis alongside their children, DHCS has partnered with Song for Charlie to create *The New Drug Talk* portal. Also collaborating on this effort are a variety of corporate and nonprofit partners, including Meta, AdCouncil, Wondros, PeachJar, BeMe, Playbl, Dopa.ge and Massimo Medical. The portal is organized into sections entitled "What to Know", "What to Say", and "What to Do", and features video lessons, toolkits, and resource guides.

The goal of *The New Drug Talk* is to inform parents about the current risk factors and update the way parents talk with their kids about drugs based on current best practices around effective communication strategies. The portal's content, which leverages the expertise of professionals in youth mental health, addiction science, adolescent medicine, and drug education, is designed to help families connect so that both parents and kids feel heard and engaged in protecting each other from harm. Anchoring the portal is an original film, *Drugs in the Age of Fentanyl*, which serves as a compelling tool for families, teachers, and communities to understand and help educate about the fentanyl crisis.

"California has dedicated significant resources for various opioid prevention and treatment grant activities to fight the opioid crisis," said **DHCS Director Michelle Baass**. "Song for Charlie will support our efforts with a parent/caregiver tool to help make it easier for families to talk about the current drug landscape, substance use, and mental health."

The California survey and portal are just the first steps in Song for Charlie's state-by-state effort to increase fentanyl education and awareness. They are in conversations with states across the country to create bespoke programs for their constituents.

View the [full set of survey questions and results](#) across key audiences. For more information about the educational platform, visit <https://songforcharlie.org/the-new-drug-talk/>.

About Song for Charlie

Song for Charlie is a national family-run nonprofit charity dedicated to raising awareness about 'fentapills' — fake pills made of fentanyl. After the sudden loss of their son, Charlie, Ed and Mary Ternan created Song for Charlie with one goal: to bring awareness to illicit fentanyl in the drug supply, and specifically in counterfeit prescription pills being sold online targeting young people. Song for Charlie partners with experts, educators, parents, and other influencers to reach the most vulnerable group: young people between the ages of 13-24 and the people who love them. Its programs highlight the emerging dangers of self-medication and casual drug use in the fentanyl era and encourage healthier strategies for coping with stress. For more information, please visit songforcharlie.org.

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