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Protecting Your Family: Opioid addiction, overdoses and recovery

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By WAFF 48 Digital Staff [CONNECT](#)

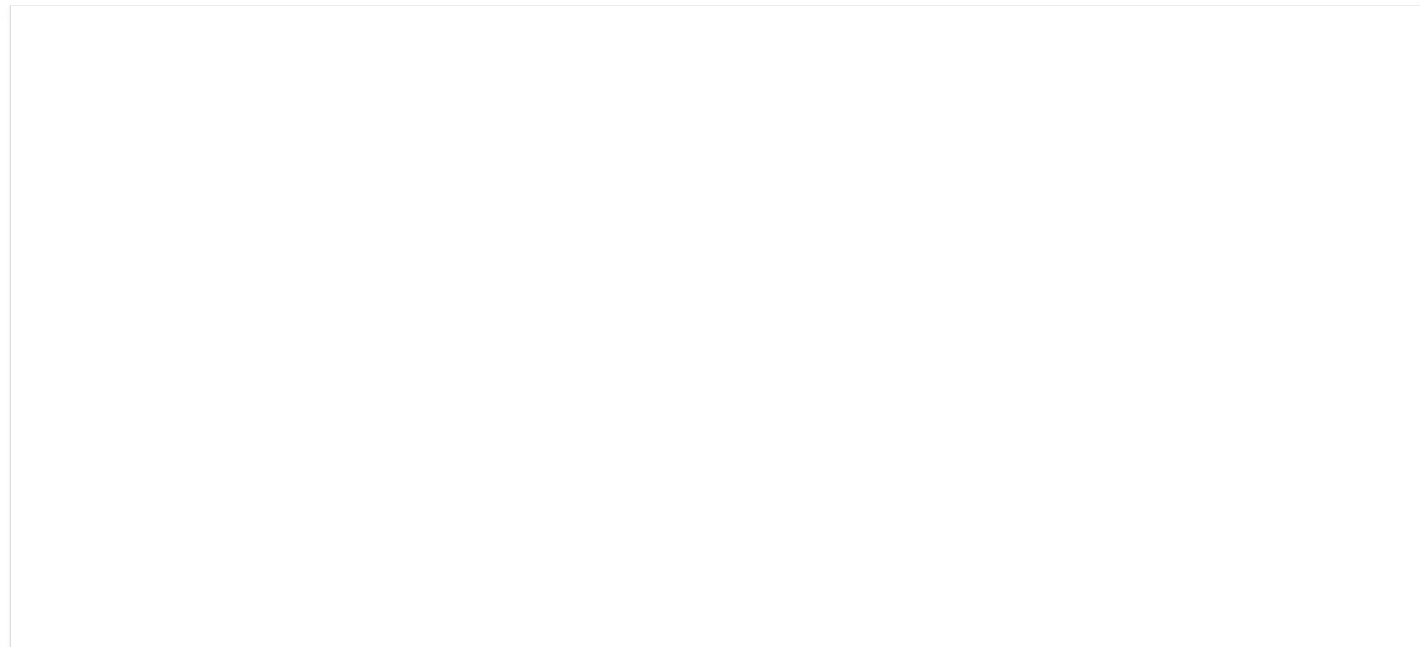
HUNTSVILLE, AL (WAFF) - WAFF 48 is dedicated to helping you protect your family. That's why we've started a new weekly series on our morning news program dedicated to that important goal.

Every Tuesday morning, we'll bring in one of our hand-picked experts to talk about what you need to do to keep your loved ones safe. Whether it's physical safety, financial security or online protection, we'll have you covered.

We began our series by talking with Don Webster from HEMSI. Recently, HEMSI and WAFF 48 teamed up for a [special investigation into the opioid epidemic sweeping the Tennessee Valley](#).

[READ MORE: Pregnant mom talks dangers of heroin, opiate addiction following latest overdose](#)

Madison County experienced 75 opioid-related deaths in 2017. That's one every five days. On Tuesday morning, Mr. Webster came in to give you even more information you need to know about the deadly problem.



The first step to helping a loved one with an addiction is recognizing that the addiction is there in the first place.

"Basically, you've got to watch the reaction to people, their behavior, their attitudes changing," Webster told WAFF 48. "What are they doing with their money? Do you have prescription pills in your medicine cabinet that may be disappearing mysteriously?" Webster says the biggest thing is to communicate with someone you think needs help.

Once you've identified the problem, you need to also realize that overdosing on opioids is a very real possibility, and be ready to deal with the situation if it happens.

"They may be vomiting, but the biggest thing is their level of consciousness. Do you find them unconscious or unresponsive? That is when it becomes a crisis." Webster says many overdoses are accidental. "It's not that they intentionally overdose, it's that they have to keep taking more and more of the opiate to reach their high and the body just can't deal with it and it just causes them to quit breathing."

If you encounter an overdose, the first thing you need to do is call 911. Emergency dispatchers are trained to help guide you through the steps you need to take to maximize the chances of the victim's survival.

"You want to get them flat on their back, get them off of sofas, open their airway, tilt their head back and then check for breathing. The biggest thing is that their breathing stops, so you want to make sure you start rescue breathing. Try stimulating them."

Webster says it's also helpful to gather up any medications that the victim may have taken recently, even if they're not narcotics, to hand to the emergency responders. This can prevent unforeseen complications once treatment starts.

The ideal outcome for any addict is rehabilitation and recovery. "Wellstone Mental Health Center in Huntsville has an access careline at (256) 705-6444, and basically you can also go to [Wellstone](#).

That's a good entry point. They guarantee you'll be assessed within 24 hours after making notification on heroin and opioid usage. They can forward you to other access, in-patient and out-patient services.

It doesn't cost a lot of money." Webster also recommended Bradford health services. You can visit their website [here](#) or call them at 1-888-577-0012.

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