

2026 College Radio and TV Copywriting Copy Points

Client: Overdose Lifeline

Title: What Students Should Know

Radio: 60-second script (See Contest Rules for specific requirements)

TV: 30-second script, two-column format (See Contest Rules for specific requirements)

Target Audience: High School and College Students

Current Challenge: Prevention, education, and combatting misinformation

Available Copy Points:

- Substance use is preventable when students have the right knowledge and tools.
- Counterfeit pills and street drugs are often laced with fentanyl — even one pill can be fatal. Any pill/drug not provided by a pharmacy or trusted adult cannot be trusted. Fentanyl or other substances are in most substances not provided by a doctor or pharmacy and can be fatal.
- Most young people are not using substances. The idea that “everyone is doing it” is a myth.
- Stress, anxiety and depression are real challenges. Turning to substances for relief creates more harm. Healthy coping skills and support are available.
- Naloxone (Narcan) saves lives. Knowing about it and how it works is an act of care and leadership, not a sign of use. Harm reduction saves lives.
- Young voices matter – students are the most powerful messengers to their peers.
- Open conversations about mental health and substance use create connection and reduce shame.
- Saying “no” to substances is strength. Asking for help is courage. Supporting others is leadership.
- One person can inspire many. Every student has the power to create a ripple effect of positive change.

Call to Action: Learn more at OverdoseLifeline.org

Stigmatizing Language to Avoid

Stigmatizing Language	Preferred Language	Reason
Addict, junkie, druggie	Person with a substance use disorder	Emphasizes the person first, not their condition. Labels like "addict" reduce individuals to their disease.
Alcoholic	Person with an alcohol use disorder	Person-first language respects the individual beyond their diagnosis.
Clean (referring to sobriety)	In recovery or abstinent	"Clean" implies that those who use drugs are "dirty" or morally corrupt.
Dirty (referring to a positive drug test)	Tested positive for [substance]	"Dirty" dehumanizes and implies a moral failing. Focus on the test result rather than character judgment.
Drug abuser, substance abuser	Person with a substance use disorder	"Abuse" carries negative moral judgments. The preferred term centers on the clinical nature of the condition.
Relapsed	Experienced a recurrence of use	"Relapse" can be harsh or judgmental. "Recurrence" views the situation as part of the recovery process.
Habit	Substance use disorder	"Habit" trivializes the severity and medical nature of addiction.
Former addict	Person in recovery	Focuses on recovery as an ongoing process rather than defining someone by their past condition.
Opioid substitution	Medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD)	Recognizes medications like methadone or buprenorphine as part of treatment, not a substitution.
Clean needle program	Syringe services program (SSP)	"Syringe services" is a neutral term that doesn't carry moral judgment like "clean" might.
Drug-seeking	Person with a substance use disorder exhibiting drug-seeking behavior	Separates the person from their behavior, acknowledging that it's a symptom of a disorder.
Self-destructive behavior	Health-compromising behavior	Focuses on the impact on health, avoiding blame or judgment about the individual's motives.
Compliant/non-compliant patient	Engaged/not engaged in treatment	Focuses on participation without labeling the person as "bad" or "good" based on their actions.

Detox	Withdrawal management	"Detox" often focuses narrowly on clearing substances from the body, whereas "withdrawal management" refers to a more comprehensive process.
Addiction (as a standalone term)	Substance use disorder (SUD)	Using the medical term "SUD" reflects the clinical nature of the condition, and avoids negative connotations of "addiction."
User	Person who uses drugs	"User" can be dehumanizing; "person who uses drugs" emphasizes the person first.
Hooked on [substance]	Has a substance use disorder related to [substance]	"Hooked" implies lack of control or moral failing, whereas describing the medical condition is more neutral.
Clean from drugs/alcohol	In recovery/achieved abstinence	"Clean" implies moral judgment; focusing on recovery removes that connotation.
Crackhead, meth head, etc.	Person with cocaine/methamphetamine use disorder	Derogatory terms like these dehumanize and stigmatize. A clinical approach is more respectful and accurate.
Enabler	Supporter of someone with a substance use disorder	The term "enabler" suggests blame; focusing on support recognizes the complexities of these relationships.
Failed treatment	Treatment was not effective	This avoids implying personal failure, focusing instead on the need for different or additional interventions.
Failed rehab	Returned to use after treatment	"Failed" language suggests personal inadequacy, while "returned to use" acknowledges the ongoing process of recovery.
Substance abuse treatment	Substance use disorder treatment	"Abuse" implies voluntary misbehavior; focusing on treatment of the disorder destigmatizes the need for medical care.
Abuse drugs	Misuse substances	"Misuse" is less judgmental and recognizes that substance use disorder is not a voluntary action but a medical issue.
War on drugs	Public health approach to substance use	A "war" suggests criminalization; a public health approach emphasizes care, prevention, and treatment.

Drug habit	Substance use disorder	"Habit" trivializes the condition, while "substance use disorder" reflects its medical seriousness.
Treatment failure	Not fully engaged in treatment	Shifts responsibility from the person to the process of treatment and its ability to meet individual needs.
Criminal/addict	Person involved in the criminal justice system with a substance use disorder	Separates criminal behavior from substance use disorder, removing moral judgment.
Methadone maintenance	Medication-assisted treatment (MAT)	MAT recognizes methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone as part of a legitimate treatment process, not "maintenance."
Rock bottom	At a critical point in their substance use	"Rock bottom" suggests a punitive approach; this alternative focuses on the medical need for intervention.
Overdose victim	Person who experienced an overdose	Avoids labeling someone solely by their experience. Focusing on the event rather than identity is less stigmatizing.
Sober (only in certain contexts)	In recovery or living substance-free	"Sober" can sometimes carry social connotations of judgment, whereas "in recovery" is more empowering.
Enabling drug use	Implementing harm reduction strategies	Harm reduction focuses on reducing negative consequences without judgment. "Enabling" is judgmental.
Safe injection sites	Supervised consumption services	"Safe injection" is misleading; these services reduce harm, prevent overdoses, and connect people to care.
Narcan is a crutch	Naloxone saves lives	Narcan (naloxone) is a life-saving drug that reverses overdoses; referring to it as a "crutch" minimizes its importance.
Shooting gallery	Supervised injection facility	The term "shooting gallery" is derogatory and implies reckless behavior, whereas supervised facilities focus on health and safety.
Dual diagnosis patient	Person with co-occurring disorders	Person-first language emphasizes that they are not defined by their diagnosis.
Mentally ill substance abuser	Person with a co-occurring mental health and	Reduces stigma by treating both issues as medical conditions, rather than moral failings.

	substance use disorder	
Failed treatment plan	Treatment plan needs to be adjusted	Shifts responsibility from the individual to the treatment process.
Sobriety is the only success	Recovery is a personal journey	Recognizes that recovery can take different forms, including harm reduction, medication-assisted treatment, and abstinence.
One-size-fits-all approach	Tailored treatment plan	Recovery is individual, and treatments should be personalized to meet a person's unique needs.
Personal choice to use drugs	Influenced by social, economic, and environmental factors	Recognizes that addiction often stems from a combination of personal, social, and health factors.
Willpower problem	Chronic condition influenced by many factors	Treats SUDs as a medical issue rather than a matter of self-control or morality.
Inner-city drug problem	Substance use disorder in underserved communities	Reduces racial or socioeconomic stereotyping and recognizes that addiction is a health issue everywhere.
At-risk youth (generalized)	Young people vulnerable to substance use due to various factors	Acknowledges the broader factors that contribute to vulnerability without labeling youth negatively.
Hopeless case	Person in need of comprehensive support	"Hopeless" reinforces despair; emphasizing support highlights the potential for change and recovery.
Lost cause	Person with potential for recovery	Avoids framing any individual as beyond help and reinforces a hopeful, recovery-focused message.