

# BRAIN INJURY AFTER OVERDOSE

A Quick Guide for Deflection Teams: Recognize hidden injuries, reduce harm, and support safe next steps.



## WHY IT MATTERS

Brain injury can occur during overdose even without visible trauma, due to lack of oxygen, seizures, or falls. These injuries may affect awareness, behavior, and decision making and can have lasting effects in the days that follow.

People with brain injury face a higher risk of repeat overdose and death:

- Substances can have stronger, more dangerous effects on an injured brain.
- Repeat overdoses compound damage and reduce the brain's ability to heal.

Many people who use substances have also experienced domestic or other forms of violence, which can contribute to brain injury.

## REMEMBER

Deflection teams play a vital role after crisis. Recognizing when someone is struggling - and offering steady presence, pacing, and partnership - can make a real difference. Healing takes time, especially after experiences that affect the brain, and small adjustments in communication and support can meaningfully aid recovery.

FIND MORE RESOURCES: NALOXONE,  
LOCAL REFERRALS, AND TOOLS



## WHAT YOU MIGHT OBSERVE

- Trouble with memory or concentration
- Slow processing or difficulty understanding
- Shifts in mood or emotional expression
- Repeats questions or forgets plans
- Becomes tired or overwhelmed quickly

## HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT

- Meet in quiet, calm places
- Go slow; break down next steps and paperwork
- Offer reminders and brief check ins
- Pair written information with visuals
- Ask permission before offering information
- Use CHATS Screening Tool\*\*

**(Scan to access CHATS tool)**



## HOW YOU CAN ADVOCATE

- Help the individual communicate needs or attend appointments
- Suggest helpful adjustments to providers (extra time, simple instructions, visual cues)
- Connect individual with brain injury resources for recovery support
- When safe and appropriate, help family or support persons understand brain injury impacts

## HOW YOU CAN REDUCE HARM

- Offer naloxone and encourage safer use (test drugs, go slow, never use alone)
- Reinforce time and rest between uses to support healing
- Emphasize that an injured brain is more vulnerable to overdose



The Center on  
Partner-Inflicted  
Brain Injury



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