UNDERSTAND OPIOID RISKS
More than 46,000 people died from opioid-involved overdoses in 2018. In fact, for the first time in U.S. history, a person is more likely to die from an accidental opioid overdose than from a motor vehicle crash.

Even when taken as prescribed, opioid painkillers have the capacity to cause impairment – a significant safety risk that increases the chances of workplace incidents, errors and injury. These risks can affect you, your co-workers and others around you, whether you’re at your workstation or driving on your commute. The more we work to prevent opioid misuse, the safer we’ll all be.

IDENTIFY SIGNS OF OPIOID MISUSE
It can be hard to tell if you or someone you know is misusing opioids. It can also be difficult to identify when impairment is caused by opioids, because it can look similar to impairment caused by alcohol, other drug use, fatigue and more. To help prevent opioid misuse, watch for these signs:

- Taking prescribed opioids more frequently than directed by a doctor
- Inability to stop taking opioids even when they are no longer needed for pain
- Continuing opioid use despite negative consequences to personal life or job
- Obtaining opioids from more than one source, such as going to multiple doctors or taking a friend’s prescription
- Crushing, chewing, snorting or injecting opioids to increase their effect
- Seeking out and using illicit opioids, such as pills bought on the street or heroin
- Withdrawal from important relationships, activities or responsibilities, such as work, school or financial obligations

Remember, these are signs and symptoms that can be caused by more than one situation. Avoid jumping to conclusions about why someone is acting differently.

ASK FOR ALTERNATIVES
Though prescription opioids can create serious safety concerns in the workplace, many of these risks can be reduced by asking for alternatives or limiting your prescription. While it can be difficult to discuss issues like this with your doctor, you don’t have to be an expert to stay safe. Use these questions to spark a conversation about your prescription, risks and options:

- Am I being prescribed an opioid?
- If so, is there a non-addictive alternative?
- If not, is a short-term prescription possible?
- Do I have any medical conditions that could increase my risk?

These questions can help you learn more about alternatives and reduce the risk of opioid misuse for yourself and those around you. Visit nsc.org/TakeAction to order free Warn Me labels for your insurance and prescription cards.

UNDERSTAND STIGMA
Substance use disorders (SUDs), including opioid use disorder (OUD), are long-term, relapsing brain diseases characterized by use despite harmful consequences. They are also some of the most stigmatized medical conditions, frequently considered a character flaw or a natural consequence of a bad decision. Society can stereotype people with SUDs as immoral, violent, dangerous, lazy, or from a certain ethnic or racial background or region.
This stigma towards people with SUDs results in shame and isolation, preventing them from seeking help early on. We can prevent further opioid misuse by understanding this stigma, and keeping in mind that:

- Reactions of fear, judgment, disgust and dismissiveness all stigmatize people who have SUDs
- People who are ashamed of their drug use are more likely to hide it; they often wait until their SUD has progressed and become more serious before seeking help
- Though medication assisted treatment (MAT) is the gold standard for treating OUD, stigma exists against it, including the belief that it is “just substituting one drug for another” or doesn’t lead to recovery
- When families have a loved one with an OUD, they may try to keep it a secret to avoid judgment and embarrassment, and not reach out for help and support

- Stigma against opioid use can affect people who have an appropriate opioid prescription; people who have legitimate opioid prescriptions for chronic pain may be forced off of a successful treatment regimen, leading to other consequences including increased pain and decreased quality of life, even though they do not have an OUD

Most of us would never intentionally stereotype or stigmatize people who have an SUD, but it can happen anyway. Remember these signs of misuse, talk to your doctor before taking opioids, and show compassion for people with SUDs and their families when they need support by avoiding stigma and letting them know you are there for them.