

Advice for Parents & Caregivers

Benzodiazepines Explained



Before we start

If benzodiazepines are on your mind, it's worth paying attention. Because they're medicines, they can feel less risky than other substances, even when they're not.

This guide isn't here to alarm you. It's here to explain where the real dangers are, and how harm can build quietly over time.

Who this guide is for

This is for parents and carers who want clear, grounded information about benzodiazepines and practical ways to reduce harm through calm, open conversations rather than fear.

Why this matters

Benzodiazepines are prescription medicines, but they are increasingly used without prescriptions. Serious harm often occurs when they are mixed with alcohol or other depressants.

What benzodiazepines are

Benzodiazepines are sedative medicines often prescribed for anxiety, sleep problems, or muscle relaxation. Common examples include diazepam and alprazolam.

What benzodiazepines do

Benzodiazepines slow activity in the central nervous system. They can reduce anxiety and cause relaxation, drowsiness, and memory problems.

At higher doses, or when mixed with alcohol or other sedatives, they can suppress breathing.

What we see in real life

In real life, benzodiazepines are often used to calm anxiety, help sleep, or 'take the edge off'. Because they are medicines, people may assume they are safer than they are.

Access: Non-prescribed benzodiazepines are widely available online and through social circles. Some products sold as 'diazepam' or 'Xanax' are counterfeit and unpredictable.

Contamination risk: In the UK, some non-prescribed benzodiazepines have been found to contain nitazenes. These are very strong synthetic opioids that are not meant to be there. This means someone may think they are taking a sedative, but their breathing is being affected by an opioid instead. The risk is higher with tablets bought online or through social contacts, and especially dangerous when mixed with alcohol.

How they're commonly used: Benzodiazepines may be taken occasionally at first, then more regularly as tolerance builds. Doses can increase without the person realising how dependent the body is becoming.

Why harm slips under the radar: Drowsiness, memory gaps, emotional flatness, or reduced motivation can look like stress, tiredness, or low mood rather than drug effects.

The hidden risks: Mixing benzodiazepines with alcohol or other depressants greatly increases the risk of breathing suppression, collapse, and overdose. Withdrawal after regular use can also be dangerous if not managed properly.

Why early conversations matter: Calm conversations about mixing, frequency, and reasons for use can reduce harm and help prevent dependence from developing unnoticed.

What's changed and what people often miss

Non-prescribed benzodiazepines are widely available online and in social settings. Because they are medicines, their risks are often underestimated or downplayed.

Why harm happens

Harm often happens when benzodiazepines are mixed with alcohol, opioids, or other sedatives. Tolerance can build quickly, leading to escalating use and dependency.

How to talk to your child about this

Focus on safety and health rather than legality. Acknowledge that these are medicines while clearly explaining why misuse is risky.

Peer pressure and the need to fit in

Because benzodiazepines are prescribed medicines, peers may describe them as safe or normal. This can increase pressure to try them and minimise real risks.

When to be concerned

Frequent sedation, memory gaps, mixing with alcohol, escalating use, or signs of withdrawal are reasons to seek advice. Trust patterns rather than single moments.

A final note

Being prescribed does not mean something is safe to misuse. Staying calm, informed, and available reduces harm more than confrontation ever will.

Educational use only. Not medical advice. If someone is unwell or at risk, seek professional medical help or call 999 in an emergency.