



SPLIT SECOND

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Use this guide to help adolescents examine the pressures, choices, harms, and paths to recovery portrayed in *Split Second*. The goal is a calm, honest conversation that strengthens safety, risky behavior avoidance, refusal skills, empathy, and help-seeking as opposed to a test of recall or an invitation to disclose personal experiences.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Prepare the conversation

- Read the novel first and choose a private, unhurried setting.
- Expect content involving overdose, death, substance use, family stress, treatment, and the justice system.
- Know your school or organization's reporting and emergency procedures.

Set conversation agreements

- Participants may pass, pause, or take a break.
- Discuss characters and situations without guessing about anyone in the room.
- Listen without shaming; correct misinformation respectfully.
- If someone may be in immediate danger, get adult or emergency help.

OPENING THE CONVERSATION

Start with a low-pressure observation: **"What image, moment, or decision stayed with you after reading?"** Follow with "What made that moment important?" Let the adolescent do most of the talking. Ask curious follow-ups rather than correcting every statement immediately.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 The characters face different pressures to include injury, anxiety, family conflict, money, fitting in, academic expectations, and fear of disappointing others. Which pressure seemed most powerful, and why?
- 2 Where did you notice a "split second" decision? What happened just before it, and what safer choices or supports were available?
- 3 Skylar recognizes that the pills may be fake or contain fentanyl. What made it hard for the group to act on that warning? What could a bystander say or do?
- 4 Jayden hides an injury because he fears losing his role and scholarship. How can achievement pressure affect health decisions? Which trusted adult or professional could help?
- 5 Miguel initially goes along with the group. What are realistic refusal phrases that protect both safety and friendships?
- 6 The story shows fatal and survivable overdose, treatment, probation, and incarceration. Which consequences affect people beyond the person using a substance?
- 7 How does the recovery section challenge the idea that one medication, appointment, or promise instantly fixes everything? What does steady support look like?

FROM DISCUSSION TO ACTION

- 1 What could a friend do if a person is pressured to take an unknown pill? Identify one sentence, one exit strategy, and one adult to contact.
- 2 What signs suggested someone needed help sooner? How did stigma, secrecy, or fear of consequences delay help, and how could we respond without blame?
- 3 Which support systems mattered during recovery? Where can a young person in our community find medical, mental-health, or substance-use support?

PRACTICE THE WORDS

Invite the adolescent to consider, not memorize one or two phrases. Practice in a neutral tone, then switch roles.

REFUSE	"I have a test in the morning, so I'm going to pass."
EXIT	"Let's get out of here and do something else."
INTERRUPT	"I'm not sure what's in that. Maybe we should hold off and think about it."
GET HELP	"They aren't waking up. Call 911 and bring naloxone now."
SUPPORT	"I've got you. Let's find someone we trust who can help"

IF AN OPIOID OVERDOSE IS SUSPECTED

Treat it as an emergency. The novel's safety page directs readers to try to rouse the person, call 911 if there is no response, give naloxone, support breathing, give another naloxone dose after 2–3 minutes if there is no response, and stay until emergency help arrives. Follow dispatcher instructions and local training. Naloxone can temporarily reverse an opioid overdose; the person still needs emergency medical care. Possible warning signs include inability to wake, very slow or absent breathing, choking or gurgling sounds, pinpoint pupils, or blue/gray lips or skin. When in doubt, always call 911.

CLOSE AND FOLLOW UP

- Ask: "What is one idea you are taking with you, and what question remains?"
- Name two trusted adults and one professional resource the adolescent could contact.
- Check in later. A young person may need time before asking a question or sharing a concern.
- If a disclosure suggests immediate risk, stay calm, do not promise secrecy, and follow emergency and safeguarding procedures.

RESOURCES

Emergency	Call 911
Crisis support	Call or text 988 (24/7/365)
Texas treatment referral	Dial 211 or call 877-541-7905
Naloxone information	naloxonetexas.com
TOPS materials	tops.health.tamu.edu

Source note: Prepared from the TOPS Split Second graphic novel and the official Split Second Details page, Texas A&M University. Accessed September 22, 2026. This guide supports discussion and does not replace medical advice, emergency services, or trained counseling.