Partnership™ for Drug-Free Kids

Where families find answers

Preventing Teen Abuse of Prescription Drugs Fact Sheet

What is prescription drug abuse?
The use of prescription medication to create an altered state, to get high, or for reasons — or by people — other than those intended by the prescribing doctor.



How many teens are doing this?
According to research conducted by Partnership for Drug-Free Kids (as well as other reputable national studies) as many as one in five teens say they have taken a prescription drug without having a prescription for it themselves. This behavior cuts across geographic, racial, ethnic and socioeconomic boundaries.

Why are some teens doing this?
For a variety of reasons. To party and get high, in some cases, but also to "manage" or "regulate" their lives. They're abusing some stimulants such as Ritalin and Adderall to give them additional energy and ability to focus when they're studying or taking tests. They're abusing pain relievers like OxyContin and tranquilizers such as Xanax to cope with academic, social or emotional stress. They're abusing prescription amphetamines to lose weight, or prescription steroids to bulk up.

What are the risks?
There are both acute (immediate) and longer term risks. In the short term, overdosing (especially on prescription pain relievers) can be fatal, as can mixing prescription drugs with over-the-counter medication and/or alcohol. In the longer term, prescription opioids (pain relievers) and other prescription medicines are potentially addictive. Coming to rely at a young age on prescription medicine (or any drug) to "manage" your life risks establishing a learned, lifelong pattern of dependency and limitation and prevents learning coping skills.

Where are teens getting these prescription drugs?
The vast majority of teens abusing prescription drugs are getting them from the medicine cabinets of friends, family and acquaintances. Some teens traffic among themselves – handing out or selling "extra" pills of their own, or pills they've acquired or stolen from classmates. A very small minority of teens say they get their prescription drugs illicitly from doctors, pharmacists or over the internet.

Are parents educating their children about the risks of this behavior?
Research conducted by Partnership for Drug-Free Kids shows that parents are not communicating the risks of prescription drug abuse to their children as often as they talk about illegal drugs. This is partly because some parents are unaware of the behavior (it wasn't as prevalent when they were teenagers), and partly because those who are aware of teen abuse of medicine tend to underestimate the risks just as teens do. Finally, a recent study by Partnership for Drug-Free Kids showed that 28% of parents have themselves taken a prescription drug without having a prescription for it themselves. This is not necessarily abuse, but it sets a dangerous example for kids – that the recommended dosage of prescriptions need not be strictly followed.

What should parents do?
1. Educate yourselves – drugfree.org has lots of support, tools, resources and answers.
2. Communicate the risks of prescription drug abuse to your kids. Children who learn a lot about the risks of drugs are up to 50% less likely to use drugs.
3. Safeguard your own medicines. Keep prescription medicine in a secure place, count and monitor the number of pills you have.

Learn more at **www.drugfree.org**

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