

Many of today's teens are turning away from "street drugs", and turning to prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, and inhalants to get high. Past year abuse of prescription pain killers now ranks second, only behind marijuana, as the Nation's most prevalent illegal drug problem. Parents and caregivers are the first line of defense in addressing this troubling trend.

- Every day 2,500 youth age 12 to 17 abuse a pain reliever for the very first time.
- In 2006, more than 2.1 million teens ages 12 to 17 reported abusing prescription drugs.
- Among 12- and 13-year-olds, prescription drugs are the drug of choice.
- Friends and the family medicine cabinet are the major sources of these drugs. More than 70% of people who abuse prescription painkillers say they get them from family or friends.
- Teens also report that these drugs are not hard to find. About 40% of 12th graders say that painkillers are fairly or very easy to get, and more than half say the same of stimulants.

Because these drugs are so readily available, and many teens believe they are a safe way to get high, teens that wouldn't otherwise touch illicit drugs might abuse prescription drugs. Not many parents and caregivers are talking to teens about these drugs, even though teens report that parental disapproval is a powerful way to keep them away from drugs. The following contains some information about prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, and inhalants, as well as some resources and tips for parents and caregivers to help you in addressing this issue with your teen(s).

Signs and Symptoms of Prescription and Over the Counter Drug Abuse

(A few examples Xanax, Lortab, Percocet, Prescription cough syrup, Ritalin, Benadryl, Sudafed, Robitussin, Theraflu, Ibuprofen, Acetaminophen (Tylenol), and Aspirin)

- Visits internet sites that offer information on how to obtain or abuse medication
- Cough, cold or other medication among your child's personal effects
- Unexplained disappearance of medications from your medicine cabinet
- Declining grades, loss of interest in hobbies and usual activities
- Suspicious changes in friends, physical appearance, hygiene and general behavior
- Disrupted eating or sleeping patterns
- Running out of a prescription medication before a refill is permitted
- Not taking prescribed medication (palming)

Signs and Symptoms of Inhalant Abuse

(Gasoline, Super Glue, Permanent Markers, Hair Spray, Cleaning fluids, Spray Paint and any Aerosol product)

- Unusual breath odor or chemical odor on clothing
- Slurred or disoriented speech
- Drunk, dazed or dizzy appearance
- Red or runny eyes or nose
- Spots or sores around the mouth

- Nausea and or loss of appetite
- Anxiety, excitability, irritability, or restlessness
- Sitting with a pen or marker near nose
- Constantly smelling clothing
- Paint or stain marks on face, fingers or clothing
- Rags, clothes or empty aerosol containers hidden in closets and other places

Helpful Household Habits for Prescription and Over the Counter Drugs: Both at your home and family homes (grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc..)

- Do not save unused prescription medicine or out of date over the counter drugs.
- Use proper disposal of medications; when you are no longer taking a medication: dissolve in water, mix with either cat litter, saw dust, or used coffee grounds then seal in a bag and discard in the trash.
- Lock medications up (make sure they are in a secure place where anyone that is not supposed to take them cannot get to them).
- Your child maybe old enough to take the medication correctly; make sure he/she is taking the correct amount.
- Monitor medications your child is taking. Read labels of over-the -counter drugs and prescription information guides. Mixing drugs can cause dangerous side effects.

Web Resources for Parents

- www.npin.org (National Parent Information Network)
- www.theantidrug.com/dangerzones
- www.parenting.ivillage.com (Parent's Place)
- www.toughlove.org (Tough Love International)
- www.theantidrug.com (Parents: The Anti-Drug)
- www.family.samhsa.gov (Parenting is Prevention)
- www.parentsday.com (National Parent Day)
- www.yougottaloveparents.org (Ohio Parent's Week)
- www.connectforkids.org (Connect for Kids)
- www.parentsresource.org (Parent's Resource)
- www.parentshelpingparents.net (Parents Helping Parents)
- www.informedfamilies.org (Informed Families)
- www.youcanhelpkids.org (You Can Help Keep Kids Off Drugs)
- www.notnrhouse.org (Not In Our House)

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Encourage your child to talk. Most importantly, give your child a chance to talk. Use door-opening statements that invite a response (e.g. "Tell me what is going on," "Tell me what you think of that.") Your child may need to think and process the discussion. Stop talking and let him/her absorb the conversation. Listen to the complete message. Listen before forming a response.

- Be clear, direct, and specific. Let your child know exactly what is acceptable and unacceptable when it comes to alcohol and other drugs. Be clear about your expectations.
- Take advantage of the media to discuss alcohol/drug related issues. (e.g. long-term impact on brain development such as memory loss and loss of fine motor skills; ask what your child thinks when you see someone drinking or using drugs on TV or in a movie)
- Leave an opening for future discussion and make your child feel comfortable. Your child will look for signs such as the tone of your voice, facial expressions and body language.
- Talk about personal, family, social, or religious values. These might provide additional reasons for your child not to drink or take drugs.
- Talk about ways to handle peer pressure. Teach your child how to say “no” and to suggest a safe alternative. To feel comfortable talking openly with you, your child needs to know that you will not punish him/her for being honest with you.
- Be a role model. If you drink, make low-risk choices. Never drink and drive.
- Get to know your child’s friends. Know where they hang out and what they’re doing. Also, get to know the parents/guardians of your child’s friends.
- Keep track of your child’s activities. Be aware of your teen’s plans and whereabouts. Generally, your child will be more open to your supervision if he/she feels you are keeping tabs because you care, not because you distrust him/her.
- Monitor alcohol use in your home. If you keep alcohol in your home, keep track of the supply. Do not keep alcohol in an accessible place. Never serve alcohol to underage youth.
- Monitor your prescription drugs. Keep track of the supply and do not keep prescriptions in an accessible place. Properly dispose of prescription drugs that are out of date or no longer needed.

Resources for more information:

Poison Control 1-800-222-1222

Department of Mental Health BADA - Scott Sumrall (601) 359-6838

DREAM of Hattiesburg, Inc. (601) 545-2102

Pine Belt Mental Healthcare Resources (601) 264-2111