



Are You Prescribing Your Child A Death Sentence?

Provided by Blair Crawford

EVERYONE USES THEM. They're safe, given to you by a person in a white coat. They're FDA approved, readily available in almost every medicine cabinet in the US. They're also killing our teens. What are we talking about? Prescription drugs.

You've probably talked to your kids about drugs and alcohol, but have you talked to them about what's in the cabinet at home? Currently, prescription drugs are a popular trend in teen substance abuse.

There have probably been instances when you've been prescribed a painkiller for something minor and didn't need to finish the

prescription. Well, if you're like most people, that little orange bottle of pills would sit in your bathroom or kitchen until it expired.

While teen drug use is down overall, one category is actually on the rise. In fact, excluding marijuana, more teens now abuse prescription drugs than any illicit drug. Many teens assume that prescription drugs are a "safe" way to get high, and are easy to access at home and from friends. When used to get high or to "self-medicate," they can be just as dangerous and addictive as street drugs. Many prescriptions can mimic the effects of heroin, meth and other drugs.

Your teens know this and you should too.

There are three types of prescriptions that are most commonly abused by teens. First, there are painkillers like codeine, oxycodone, fentanyl, morphine, and brands such as Vicodin, Tylenol with Codeine, OxyContin, and Percocet. Depressants such as barbiturates, benzo-diazepines, and brands such as Klonopin, Nembutal, Soma, Valium, and Xanax are also extremely common. Lastly, teens can abuse stimulants (mainly prescribed to treat ADD and ADHD) including amphetamines, methylphenidate, and brands such as Adderall, Concerta, Dexedrine, and Ritalin.

Teenagers are not only "self medicating" with prescription drugs, but a growing number of teens are taking stimulants to aid weight loss and studying. Much like "speed" was used in the 1990s, teens are misusing stimulants to help cope with academic and athletic pressures. When not used as directed, stimulants will decrease appetite while keeping them focused and awake. These pills are also highly addictive, and many teens are not aware that if they are misused, they can lead to convulsions and cardiovascular collapse.

Doctors and addiction centers are also seeing a disturbing rise in teen heroin use. Adolescents are becoming addicted to OxyContin and when they can't find any pills in the medicine cabinet or from friends, they move to heroin. To most people, that may seem like a stretch, but unfortunately it is not. Because they are both opiates, OxyContin gives the same high as heroin, but heroin is more accessible, much less expensive and more potent. Kids can buy heroin on the street for less than a bag of popcorn at the movie theater. Parents may have a fake sense of security, believing that their kids would never use heroin because of a fear of needles. But don't be fooled: heroin can be smoked, sniffed and ingested. Although it was once seen as "hard-core," heroin is making its way into mainstream society because of this exact scenario.

There are a few warning signs parents can look for if they're concerned about their teen abusing drugs. Has your child changed peer groups? Are their grades slipping, and are they acting defiant or deceitful towards you or other family members? Do they stay up late or go out with no explanation? Teens who struggle with drug problems may have frequent mood swings, reject parental values, or exhibit antisocial behavior. And of course, they may be very defensive about drug use if questioned.

Aside from warning signs, there are often

physical and mental symptoms of prescription drug abuse. Painkillers and depressants can cause drowsiness, apathy, nausea/vomiting, constriction of the pupils, flushing of the face, slurred speech, confusion, irritability and dizziness. Symptoms of stimulant abuse may include dilated pupils, decreased appetite, loss of coordination, increased heart rate, flushed skin, anxiety, inability to sleep, restlessness, paranoia and upset stomach.



Parents and family are the first line of defense against prescription drug abuse. There are many practices adults should follow to keep children safe.

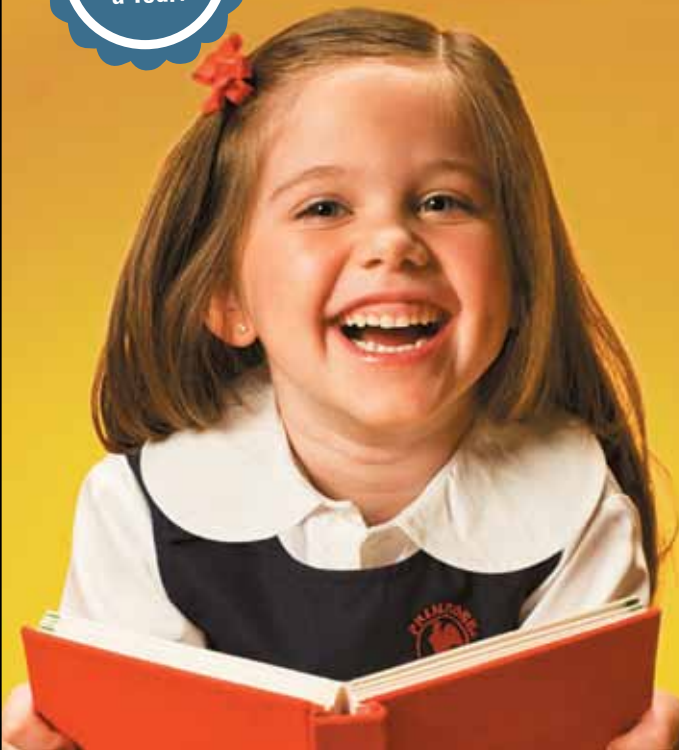
1. Talk to your kids about the dangers of prescription drugs! Let them know why prescription drugs are as dangerous as street drugs if they're not used properly.
2. If you notice any of the signs or symptoms listed above or suspect your child of abusing prescription drugs, investigate! Remember the notMYkid motto: "It's not snooping, it's parenting."
3. Dispose of any unused drugs immediately. Leaving them in the cabinet with a curious teen in the house may lead to experimentation and addiction.
4. If your child takes any medications, dispense them to your child yourself, watch them take

their medicines, keep them in a secure location and count the pills daily. This way, your child can refuse peer pressure or curiosity with the knowledge that they will be caught if they abuse or dispense any prescriptions.

5. Know what your pills look like. A trend with teens is to replace stolen Rx's with shaved down over-the-counter pills in the same color.
6. Invest in a prescription pill safe or locker.
7. Know the parents of your child's friends and ask them to conceal prescription medication in their homes as well.
8. Preventatively drug test your child. This serves as a "way out" for your kids when approached to try drugs (of any type) and will allow you to "verify" that your child is on the right track. At-home drug tests are readily available at drug stores.
9. Keep informed! The following Websites keep up on current teen drug trends, host information about preventative drug testing and prescription safes and are valuable tools for parents. ■

Blair Crawford is a writer with No My Kid. For more information visit www.notmykid.org.

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