



Empowering individuals to lead healthier lives

Prescription Drug Abuse in Adolescents: A Growing Concern *Alcohol. Marijuana. Cocaine. Heroin.*

As a society, many efforts have been made to raise awareness of the dangers of these substances. As a parent of a teenager, these words most likely conjure up feelings of fear, anxiety, and perhaps an overwhelming need to protect. *Adderall, Ritalin, Xanax, Vicodin*. Do these words elicit the same reaction? Nowadays, abuse of prescription medication is just as real a problem as illegal substance among teens. The difficult part about this drug problem is that the substance is very easily accessible. Alcohol and illicit drugs prove a more difficult task to obtain versus opening up the medicine cabinet, or getting a prescription from a friend.

The 2012 Partnership Attitude Tracking Survey data confirm that misuse and abuse of prescription drugs is now a normalized behavior among teens. According to the study, one in four teens (24 percent) reports having misused or abused a prescription drug at least once in their lifetime (up from 18 percent in 2008 to 24 percent in 2012), which translates to about 5 million teens. That is a 33 percent increase over a five-year period.

Abusing prescription or OTC medications can take many forms such as taking more medication than prescribed, taking medication prescribed for another individual, or using the medication in some other form—such as crushing up the pill and snorting it. In all these methods, the main purpose is to experience a desired “high.”

More than a quarter of teens (27 percent) mistakenly believe that misusing and abusing prescription drugs, or over-the-counter medications, is safer than using street drugs. In reality, abusing prescription medication is equally as dangerous and harmful. Depending on what type of medication is being abused—stimulants, depressants, opioids—effects can vary, including the following: slurred speech, shallow breathing, fatigue, disorientation, lack of coordination, paranoia, dangerously high body temperatures, an irregular heartbeat, seizures, and in some cases, death.

According to the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, in 2010, an estimated 66,517 adolescents aged 12 to 17 were admitted into the ER for nonmedical use of pharmaceuticals. Teenage prescription drug abuse is a very real and growing problem; however, there are steps that can be taken to prevent your teen from becoming a statistic.

Talk... Unfortunately, many teenagers are under the impression that prescription drug abuse is more accepted than illegal drug use in their household. Talk about the dangers of abusing prescription medication and your viewpoints on the matter. *Safeguard your home.* 56 percent of teens surveyed with PATS noted that they got their prescription medication from their parents’ medicine cabinet. Remember to dispose of unused or expired prescription medication, and if possible lock up your medications. For more information on prescription drug abuse and what you can do to prevent it, log on to <http://medicineabuseproject.org/>.