



"NOT MY KID" - USE / MISUSE OF PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS AMONG ADOLESCENTS.

1 in 6 teens (grades 9-12) report using at least one prescription drug for non-medical reasons during the past year. 2/3rds of those said they obtained it from home.¹

WHAT EVERY PARENT OF TEENS SHOULD KNOW

Prescription drug abuse has emerged as one of the leading public health and safety concerns across North America. This is particularly concerning where teenagers are involved given their prevailing attitude towards these drugs, the drugs' availability and a general lack of education from their parents about the risks.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE PROBLEM

- Prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drug abuse is a significant and growing problem amongst teenagers who are using them to sensation seek, party, get high, alter their body image or self-medicate to the point of overdose, addiction or death.
- The most commonly abused prescription drugs are opioids (pain relievers such as codeine, Percocet, Percodan, Demerol, or Tylenol #3) with 1 in 8 teens (grades 7 -12) having reported their non-medical use.¹
- 1 in 10 teens (grades 7 to 12) report misuse of over-the-counter cough/cold medication that contains dextromethorphan (DXM).¹
- Prescription and OTC drugs can be deadly, especially when mixed with alcohol.
- Prescription and OTC drugs are readily available as they are either freely scavenged/stolen from relatives' and friends' medicine cabinets or otherwise obtained at the retail level for a fraction of the cost of hard street drugs when they are not stolen.
- Teens access to prescription drugs includes friends, "pharm" parties in which prescription drugs are shared,

classmates, legal and illegal on-line pharmacies and drug dealers.

- Teenage abuse of prescription and OTC drug use is based, in part, on misconceptions that they are safer and less addictive than street drugs and carry less risk.
- Drug education programs tend to focus on illegal drugs.
- The majority of parents do not communicate the risks of prescription drug use to their children.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO ABOUT THIS PROBLEM

- Educate yourself, your teen, other parents and relatives.
- Talk and communicate clear expectations.
- Manage your teen's accessibility to prescription drugs and OTC medicines.
- Always be a positive role model.
- Monitor pill consumption and activity.
- Dispose of unused medications safely.

THE NEED FOR EDUCATION

Knowledge is power! Teens that learn a lot about the risks are up to 50% less likely to use/ abuse these drugs. NEVER assume that your child wouldn't develop a prescription or OTC drug problem.

- **Things you should tell your teen:**
 - Prescription drugs are dangerous.
 - Used improperly, prescription and OTC medicines can be as dangerous as any street drug. Risks include: overdose, addiction and death.
 - Mixing prescription drugs with alcohol can be even more

dangerous. Prescription drug abuse has resulted in several high profile deaths including singer Whitney Houston, movie actor Heath Ledger (Dark Knight) and 28 year old NHL player Derek Boogaard.

- Prescription drugs are only safe in the hands of the person they were prescribed for.
- Prescription drugs should only be taken under a doctor's supervision. A doctor will tell you exactly how they should be taken, according to your height, weight, gender and other drugs that you may be on, as well as things to avoid - such as drinking alcohol, smoking, or combining with other medications. They are also aware of potentially dangerous side effects and can monitor patients closely for these.
- Many prescription drugs are highly addictive and can result in strong withdrawal symptoms. The current opioid epidemic is evidence of this
- Highly addictive drugs include Vicodin, Demerol, Percocet, Darvocet, Ritalin and amphetamines.
- Prescription & some OTC drugs can impair your ability to operate a motor vehicle.
- A study by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (www.ccsa.ca) found that 33% of drivers tested positive for at least one

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¹ CAMH Drug Use Among Ontario Students (Highlights) Study 1977-2013

TEENAGE PRESCRIPTION & OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUG ABUSE

drug. Depressants (sedatives/tranquilizers) and stimulants were amongst the most common drugs taken. Operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of a drug can result in Impaired Driving charges.

- Prescription fraud is illegal.
- Anyone who alters an existing prescription, steals prescription forms, forges a prescription, or impersonates medical staff to obtain a prescription or otherwise commits personation (fraudulently poses as another person – living or dead – with intent to gain advantage for himself) commits a criminal offence. The most common reason for committing prescription fraud is drug addiction.

TALK & COMMUNICATE CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Talking to your teen does make a difference. A recent American survey found that teens that learn anti-drug messages at home are about half as likely to use drugs and two-thirds of “kids” say that the fear of losing their parents’ respect and pride was one of the main reasons they didn’t use drugs.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Ask your teen what they’ve learned about drugs in school and continue with the topic including prescription drugs (note: don’t rely on the school for your child’s drug education as most drug education is focused on illicit drugs).

- Dispel the myth that drugs available through a doctor or drug store are less harmful than street drugs.
- Explain your expectations about avoiding drug use.
- Listen to what your teen is saying.
- Maintain open lines of communication.

MANAGE YOUR TEEN’S ACCESSIBILITY TO PRESCRIPTION DRUG & OTC MEDICINES

- Take an inventory of all prescription and over-the-counter medicine in your household.
- Safely dispose of all expired medicines (see Dispose of Safely section).
- Hide and secure medicines including those in use.
- Tell relatives, especially grand-parents, to lock their medication or keep them in a safe place.

ALWAYS BE A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL

28% of parents have taken a prescription drug without having a prescription for it themselves, according to a recent American study. This sets a dangerous example for your kids and effectively reduces your moral authority. Always be a positive role model.

MONITOR PILL CONSUMPTION & ACTIVITY

The need for monitoring should include your prescription drugs and OTC medicine supply and your child’s activities and behaviour.

- Estimate your expected refill date when you open a new container or bottle and write it on the prescription’s label.
- Check this date with the actual date that you run out of the medicine.
- Count the number of pills, if you become suspicious.
- Keep track of prescription refills for all members of your household.
- If your teen has been prescribed a drug, be sure to control the medication and monitor dosages and refills.
- Take note of any unexpected packages delivered to your teen. Check the internet history should you become suspicious.

DISPOSE OF SAFELY

The safe disposal of discarded prescription drugs must take into account that teens are known to retrieve these from the garbage where precautions are not taken. Pills are best discarded when returned through your pharmacy’s safe disposal program (available at most major pharmacies). In the event that this option is not practical, it is recommended that the pills be mixed with wet garbage such as coffee grounds, wet compost or kitty litter. Labels should also be removed/obscured/rendered unreadable before the containers are thrown out.

WHEN TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

The following may be signs that your teen is abusing prescription or OTC drugs:

- Drugs are missing.
- Your teen’s:
 - grades drop
 - loss of interest in hobbies/activities
 - appearance, behaviour (becomes more aggressive) and friend’s change

- patterns of eating or sleeping are disrupted
- visits pro-drug sites on the internet.
- Lack of money.
- You find cough, cold or prescription medicines in your child’s things when he/she is not sick.
- There are signs of possible drug use such as slurred speech, nausea, vomiting, dilated pupils, sweating and difficulty walking.
- You hear about a friend of your teenager getting caught abusing prescription drugs.

IS SEARCHING EVER GOOD?

As the owner of your home (and in the absence of a rental agreement), you are entitled to enter and search any room in your house which includes the belongings stored within. Searching can help keep your children safe, if you suspect your child is drinking or using drugs. Searching is a drastic decision that you should be able to defend as it can provoke strong and lasting reaction. Valid reasons for searching include a safety concern that is born of a noticed change in behaviour. Searching should include web-site visits, postings on social media and things, such as mouth wash, that are used to mask odours.

DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM

If you suspect that your teen may be abusing prescription or other drugs, TAKE ACTION!

- Talk to your teen when he/she is sober and you are calm.
- Remind your teen that you do not approve of drug abuse. Set clear and firm rules and consequences.
- Consider talking to others who often come in contact with your teen, such as teachers or parents of your teen’s friends.
- Seek medical advice for the purpose of obtaining an expert evaluation.
- Be supportive.

If you hear about a teenage friend getting caught abusing prescription drugs, calmly speak to your teen about it.