



The Fine Line Between Drugs and Medication

By Michele Friedman

If you think drugs are only found in dangerous alleyways and inner-cities, you couldn't be more mistaken. In truth, they're as close as your medicine cabinet.

"But that's not a drug- it's medicine," you may say.

Well, maybe it is a medication intended to treat an ailment. But when you or your family members don't take it properly, that good-for-you remedy turns into a potent, and even lethal drug.

Still skeptical? According to the National Parent Teacher Association, opioid painkillers like Percocet cause more drug overdose deaths than cocaine and heroine combined. And the danger doesn't stop with prescription drugs. Federal health officials say misuse of over-the-counter painkillers send 160,000 Americans to the emergency room each year.

The problem is that many Americans believe the myth that abusing legal drugs is safe. For this reason, prescription drug abuse has increased 80 percent in the past 6 years. To add to misconceptions about safety, many of these drugs are easily obtained. With access to over-

the-counter medications at supermarkets and convenience stores, and prescription drugs through the internet, and even the family medicine cabinet, deadly pills are within reach.

That's why it's more important than ever to talk to your kids about the proper way to use medicine. You should also set a good example by reading and following label instructions and by limiting use. Parents of adolescents should also hide medication in a safe place. Even if you trust your son or daughter, their friends may still try to swipe your medicine when they visit.

It is also important that you dispose of your prescriptions when they no longer need to be taken. Adolescents and young adults are likely to take medications like these since you are likely to remain unaware that the drugs are missing. To properly discard your medication, follow these steps:

1. Cross your name off of the label with permanent marker
2. Modify the medication to prevent misuse
 - For pills and capsules- add a small amount of water to dissolve them.
 - For liquid medications-

add enough table salt, flour, charcoal, or even mustard to make the medicine smell and look disgusting.

- For blister packs- wrap the blister packages containing pills in multiple layers of duct or other opaque tape.
- Place the medicine bottle inside a non-transparent bag or container and throw it in the trash.

Lastly, resist telling your son or daughter to take medicine for minor aches and pains. This can lead them to comfortable relationships with these potent drugs. Instead, try to find the cause for the pain and take steps to prevent it in the future. For example, most headaches can be avoided by getting enough sleep, eating on a regular basis, and remaining hydrated.

Each and every one of us can make an effort to prevent medication abuse. For more information, contact the NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc. at (732)254-3344.

See page 5 for additional ideas on how to properly dispose of medication.

CASA* 2008 TEEN SURVEY REVEALS:

- **PROBLEM PARENTS ENABLE TEENS TO ABUSE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS, MARIJUANA, ALCOHOL**
- **MORE TEENS SAY PRESCRIPTION DRUGS EASIER TO BUY THAN BEER**

Problem parents—those who fail to monitor their children’s school night activities, safeguard their prescription drugs, address the problem of drugs in their children’s schools, and set good examples—increase the risk that their 12- to 17-year old children will smoke, drink, and use illegal and prescription drugs, according to the National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XIII: Teens and Parents, the 13th annual back-to-school survey conducted by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University.

“This year’s survey reveals that too many mothers and fathers are problem parents who fail to take essential steps to prevent their kids from smoking, drinking or using drugs. By their actions—and inactions—by failing to become part of the solution, these parents become part of the problem of teen alcohol and drug abuse,” said Joseph A. Califano, Jr., CASA’s chairman and president and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. “Indeed, these problem parents enable—some even encourage—their 12- to

17-year olds to use and abuse tobacco, alcohol, and illegal and prescription drugs.”

The CASA survey found that the later teens are out of the house hanging out with friends on school nights (Monday through Thursday), the likelier alcohol and drug use will be going on among them.

Almost half (46 percent) of 12- to 17-year olds report leaving their house to hang out with friends on school nights. Among these teens:

- 50 percent who come home after 10:00 p.m. say that drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana or other drug use occurs;
- 29 percent who come home after 8:00 p.m. and before 10:00 p.m. say that drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana or other drug use occurs
- But only 14 percent of parents say their teens usually leave the house to hang out with friends on school nights.

“Parents who are not aware of such conduct by their teens, or are not candid about it, are problem parents whose failure to monitor their children’s school night activities increases the risk

of drug or alcohol use,” said Califano.

For the first time in the CASA survey’s history, more teens said prescription drugs were easier to buy than beer (19 vs. 15 percent).

The proportion of teens who say prescription drugs are easiest to buy jumped 46 percent since 2007 (13 vs.



19 percent). Almost half (46 percent) of teens say painkillers are the most commonly abused prescription drug among teens.

When teens who know prescription drug abusers were asked where those kids get their drugs:

- 31 percent said from friends or classmates;
- 34 percent said from home, parents or the medicine cabinet;
- 16 percent said other;
- Only nine percent said from a drug dealer.

Stopping the Next High *by Alison Birnbaum*

Are we supplying our children with their next high?

Several national studies have just released statistics revealing that more teens abuse prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs than any other illicit drug, except marijuana.



The news is staggering: 2.1 million teens abused prescription drugs in 2006; 3.1 million people ages 12 to 25 have used cough medicine to get high.

This means that millions of us parents have been caught off-guard while a new wave of drug abuse has been occurring right in our own homes. The good news is that we have the power to prevent our children's access to medicines abused as drugs!

What can we do? There are three really easy ways to begin:

1. Safeguard all drugs at home and ask friends and family to do the same. I knew a young woman who was taking her father's OxyContin from his bathroom cabinet. Though the family was aware of her drug abuse history, they were totally unaware of the disappearance of the father's pills.
2. Review all medications – including prescription medications and (OTC) medications – that you are storing: Choose either to toss the meds out, or find a place to lock them so that only adults have access.
3. Properly conceal and dispose of old or unused medicines in the trash -- and control the distribution of every prescription written for your family members. Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) medications such as Adderall and Ritalin are being shared among teens for studying and weight loss. Prescription painkillers are widely abused, and even antidepressants are being shared amongst teens who don't have a prescription for them.
4. Make sure that your child is not selling, sharing, or increasing his or her own dosage. Ask your prescribing doctor to review the proper use and dosage of each medication.
5. Monitor dosage and use. Is your child using the meds for focusing on schoolwork as prescribed? Or has the use spread to a more general enabling of performance? I knew a teenage boy who was misusing his Ritalin to stay up all night and still be able to function the next day. He burned through his prescription, which finally signaled to his parents that he needed help.
6. Set clear rules for teens about all drug use, including not sharing medicine.
7. Define prescription and OTC drug abuse and clarify why it is so important to not share medicine and to always follow the medical provider's advice and dosages.
8. Read up. Be prepared to discuss the dangers of prescription and OTC abuse. Also, check out www.theantidrug.com/drug_info/prescription_drugs.asp



Remember that one of your most powerful tools in preventing drug abuse is expressing your disappointment in your child's behavior. Most teens say that losing their parents' approval is their number one reason to not use drugs.

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When is the right time to bring up the topic of drugs with my teenager?

Parenting expert Phillippe Cunningham, Ph.D., suggests that any moment can be a teachable moment. When you decide to use a moment to teach your teen something about drugs, it doesn't have to be a long, serious talk — just a few words can do. And it's not a talk you have to have only once. Have it regularly.

Some examples of teachable moments might be when you're:

- Having fun. One mother said, "I go for walks with my girls and everything just comes out right."
- Discussing books or movies with your kids.
- Eating dinner together as a family.

- Just hanging out ... reading, cooking a meal, going fishing, listening to music, watching a ball game, singing together, playing chess or having a family picnic.
- When your kids are in school, it's a good time to start using teachable moments to warn them about inhalants. Some kids sniff gasoline, nail polish remover or the fumes from shaving cream cans to get high, and they can die any time they use them — the first or 50th time.

Source: The National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign's Behavior Change Expert Panel

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) of Middlesex County, Inc. is a private, non-profit, community-based health organization providing prevention, education, information and referral services to county residents, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, municipal alliances, and social service agencies since 1980.

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