

Why Rx Drug Abuse is Growing & How Parents Can Help

Happy pills, red birds, zombies and black beauties. These are just some of the nicknames for prescription drugs — opioids, depressants and stimulants — being abused by today's teens.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens, prescription drugs are the most commonly abused substances by ages 14 and older, following marijuana and alcohol. The use of non-prescribed drugs by our youth has become a healthcare crisis.

Prescription drug abuse is defined as taking a medication that was prescribed for someone else or taking a prescribed drug in a way not directed by their doctor. Prescription drugs can be incredibly dangerous with their addictive qualities and harmful effects.

There is often a lack of understanding by teens on the risks and dangers that come with illegal use of prescription drugs. Doctors prescribe with a full understanding of the risks to each patient along with their medical conditions. When taken without a doctor's support and in conjunction with other substances, the results can be deadly.

The most common types of non-prescribed drugs abused are:

- Opioids – pain relief (*Vicodin, OxyConti, Codeine*)
- Depressants – anxiety relief or sleeping aids (*Valium, Xanax*)



- Stimulants – attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) treatments (*Adderall, Ritalin*)

As we know, many students are stressed and anxious from the constant pressures of AP classes, extracurricular activities, homework, college process, overextended schedules, lack of appropriate sleep and more. With the growing pressures, we are seeing more students coping by turning to non-prescribed drugs, such as Ritalin and Adderall. Many students believe non-prescribed drugs will help with the extra energy and focus to study longer, stay up later and be more competitive.

What's most concerning is that the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids found that 1 in 5 teens think it is okay to abuse prescription drugs as long as they are not using them to get high. Equally troubling is that students reported that it is easy to get non-prescribed medications.

As parents we can help our teens with the pressures they are facing and in support of healthy decision making with the following tips.

- 1. Open Communications** – encourage open dialogue about the dangers of non-prescribed drug use.
- 2. Provide Resources** – find help for academics, balance and support. Help them create their definition of success.
- 3. Reinforce Acceptance** – express your pride and love, not based on results, but on good life choices.
- 4. Establish Healthy Patterns** – model and build healthy lifestyle practices into your family with adequate sleep, nutritious eating, balance and a vision for a positive life.

Remember that you are your teen's greatest teacher and influencer. Allow your actions to support your words.

