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Prescription drug abuse on the rise

Many children experiment with drugs. What many parents and caregivers may be surprised to discover are even stereotypically "good" kids may try drugs, and legal drugs are becoming just as popular as illegal ones among kids looking to experiment.

Statistics indicate that children of all ages are using drugs in increasing amounts. According to DrugFree.org, about 15 percent of 7th graders have experimented with marijuana and 50 percent of students have tried it by the end of high school. Alcohol use often begins around age 11. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration says that prescription painkillers use has grown to 5 percent of users who enter treatment. In fact, prescription drug use is quickly becoming more popular among kids than other types of mood altering substances.

A time of growth, experimentation and a little more personal freedom, school-aged years are when many youngsters try drugs and alcohol. With the wealth of drug commercials on television, many kids who do not feel comfortable going the illegal drug route turn to prescription drugs they can easily find in their medicine cabinets. Students often mistakenly think that because a doctor prescribes a medication, it is safer than street drugs. This is not the case.

According to the Teen Drug Abuse Web site, 60 percent of teens said that drugs were sold, used or kept at their school. One in five teens has abused a prescription pain medication, prescription stimulant, or tranquilizer. And at least one in 10 teens reports using cough medicine in order to get high. Marijuana still remains the most popular drug of choice among students, but OTC and prescription drugs are gaining ground.

In lieu of "keg" parties and other booze-heavy social events, some students are now hosting "pharm" parties, where a bevy of pharmaceutical drugs are available. Students carry baggies of assorted pills referred to as "trail mix." And searching through medicine cabinets for staples like Vicodin, Xanax, Ambien and other pain/tranquilizer pills is called "pharming." OxyContin and Vicodin are now more popular among teens than cocaine and ecstasy.

The U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy says that some pills are more commonly abused than others. These include:

- opiates, such as codeine, oxycodone and morphine
- central nervous system (CNS) depressants, such as barbiturates and benzodiazepines
- stimulants such as dextroamphetamine and methylphenidate

While some children turn to drugs simply for the rush or high, others are self-medicating undiagnosed problems, such as ADD or depression. Prescription drug use can be very easy to mask from adults because many authority figures are focused on street drugs like marijuana or cocaine. Here are some pointers for recognizing the abuse of prescription drugs.

- Check to see if pills routinely go missing from the medicine cabinet.
- Pay attention to behavioral changes in students, including lethargy, aggression, sleeping changes, secrecy, etc.
- Talk to other parents about prescription drug use.
- Listen for lingo used among children as described above in relation to social events.

Parents can keep prescription drugs under lock and key to help prevent stealing and abuse of pills. They can also limit the number of OTC medications stored at home.



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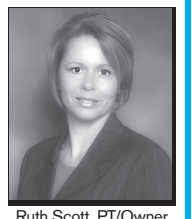
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