

## INFORMATION YOU CAN TRUST FROM THE FALMOUTH PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP



### **PREVENTING TEEN PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE**

(This article was published in the Falmouth Enterprise on March 29, 2013)

This article is based on a fact sheet from *The Partnership at DrugFree.org*.

#### **What is prescription medicine abuse?**

Prescription (Rx) medication abuse is the use of an Rx drug to create an altered state, to get high, or for any reasons other than those intended by the prescribing physician.

#### **How many teens are abusing Rx Drugs?**

According to research, one in six teens say they have taken a prescription medicine – that was not prescribed to them – at least once in their lifetime. This behavior cuts across geographic, racial, ethnic and socioeconomic boundaries.

#### **Why are some teens abusing Rx Drugs?**

Teens are engaging in this dangerous behavior for a variety of reasons. In some cases, they do it to party and get high, but also to manage stress or regulate their lives. Some are abusing prescription stimulants (such as Adderall) used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder to provide additional energy and the ability to focus when they're studying or taking tests. Some teens are using pain relievers and tranquilizers to cope with academic, social or emotional stress.

#### **What are the risks?**

There are immediate and long-term risks to medicine abuse. In the short term, overdosing can be fatal, as can mixing Rx medications with over-the-counter drugs and/or alcohol. In the longer term, prescription opioids (pain relievers) and other prescription medicines have been proven to be addictive. Relying on Rx medicines at a young age to help "manage" life can establish a lifelong pattern of dependency and prevent teens from learning important coping skills.

#### **Where are teens getting prescription medications?**

About two-thirds (65-70 percent) of teens who report abuse of prescription drugs are getting them from friends, family and acquaintances. Some teens share Rx medications among themselves—handing out or selling their own pills or those they've acquired or

stolen from classmates. A very small minority of teens also say they get their prescription drug illicitly from doctors, pharmacists or over the internet.

### **Are parents educating their children about the risks of this behavior?**

Research shows that many parents are not communicating the risks of prescription drug abuse to their children as often as they talk about street drugs. This is partly because some parents are unaware of the behavior (which wasn't as prevalent when they were teenagers), and partly because those who are aware of teen medicine abuse tend to underestimate the risks just as teens do. A recent study noted that 33 percent of parents have taken a prescription medicine without having a prescription for it themselves or to get high. This sets a dangerous example for their kids, teaching them that they don't need to follow guidelines for proper use of Rx medicines.

### **WHAT SHOULD PARENTS DO?**

1. Educate yourself: Learn more at [drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org) and [medicineabuseproject.org](http://medicineabuseproject.org).
2. Talk to your kids about the risks of prescription drug abuse. Children who learn a lot about the risks of drugs at home are up to 50 percent less likely to use drugs than those who do not get that critical message from their parents.
3. Safeguard your medicine. Keep prescription medicine in a secure place, count and monitor the number of pills you have and lock them up — and ask your friends and family members to do the same.
4. If you have medications at home that have expired or you no longer need, especially narcotic painkillers, dispose of them at the kiosk in the lobby of the Falmouth Police Department.
5. Get help! If you think your child has a problem with prescription drug abuse, speak with your child's physician or a school counselor. Also, DrugFree.org has a Parents Toll-Free Helpline at 1-855-378-4373.

### **Recommended Resource**

*MedlinePlus: Prescription Pill Abuse* is an excellent source of information about prescription drug abuse. The site provides access to information from reliable sources that are accurate and up-to-date.

([www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/prescriptiondrugabuse.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/prescriptiondrugabuse.html))

**For more information, visit the partnership's website at: [www.falmouthprevention.org](http://www.falmouthprevention.org).**

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