

Prescription Drug Abuse

According to recent statistics, prescription drugs are quickly becoming a popular drug of abuse with young people. Why? For one thing, they are increasingly available. Some young people need to look no further than their mother's purse or their grandfather's medicine cabinet to "score". Additionally, since the pills are "prescribed" by a doctor, some young people think the drugs aren't as dangerous as street drugs like Ecstasy or cocaine.

Several indicators show that prescription drug abuse is a significant problem in the United States and one that has been increasing recently. Here are a couple of shocking statistics:

- In 2004, 2.4 million persons ages 12 or older initiated non-medical use of prescription pain relievers, surpassing for the first time in the life of the survey, those who initiated abuse of marijuana (2.1 million) (*National Survey on Drug Use and Health*).
- Among 12th graders, in 2005, 9.5% reported past-year non-medical use of Vicodin, and 5.5% reported past-year non-medical use of OxyContin. Data show an increase in the abuse of OxyContin between 2002 and 2005 among 12th graders (NIDA's 2005 *Monitoring the Future* survey [MTF]).

So how do you know if your child or one of your students is abusing prescription drugs? The signs of prescription drug abuse are similar to street drugs. Some symptoms are behavioral changes, mood swings, and changes in sleeping and eating habits. Other signs that a teen you know might be abusing prescription and/or over-the-counter (OTC) drugs include constricted pupils, slurred speech, or flushed skin. Parents and teachers should also be alert to the following: personality changes, irritability, excessive energy, sweating, forgetfulness, or clumsiness.

What to Look for at Home

Watch for signs around the house such as missing pills, unfamiliar pills, or empty cough and cold medicine bottles or packages. If your teen has a prescription, keep control of the bottle. Be alert to your teen running out of pills quickly, losing pills, or requesting refills.



Teens are abusing a variety of prescription drugs to get high, including:

Painkillers: such as those drugs prescribed after surgery.

Depressants: such as sleeping pills.

Stimulants: such as those drugs prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Talking About Teen Pregnancy

Many parents want to know what the best way is to prevent teen pregnancy. One effective method of helping prevent teen pregnancy is to simply talk to your children. It is important to start talking with your children early and often about sex, and be specific. Kids have lots of questions about sex, and they often say that the source they'd most like to go to for answers is their parents.

Start the conversation, and make sure that it is honest, open and respectful. If you can't think of how to start the discussion, consider using situations shown on television or in movies as conversation starters. Ask them what they think and what they know so you can correct misconceptions. Ask what, if anything, worries them.

Many inexpensive books and videos are available to help with any detailed information you might need. The internet is also filled with resources on talking to children about sex. You can visit <http://www.talkingwithkids.org/> to start. Community agencies like Health and Human Services also will be able to provide you with literature to answer your questions and your children's questions.

Here are the kinds of questions kids say they want to discuss:

- How do I know if I'm in love? Will sex bring me closer to my girlfriend/boyfriend?
- How will I know when I'm ready to have sex? Should I wait until marriage?
- Will having sex make me popular?
- How do I tell my boyfriend or girlfriend that I don't want to have sex without losing or hurting their feelings?
- How do I manage pressure from my friends, who are having sex?
- Can you get pregnant the first time?

Research clearly shows that talking with your children about sex does *not* encourage them to become sexually active.

When is It Just Too Much? Over-involvement in Athletics

Obviously, student involvement in athletics is great for many reasons. Sports can help students burn off extra energy and aggression, provide a good social outlet for children, and even help students stay healthy and fit. Certain young people crave athleticism and can't wait to get to the next game or practice. For some young people, however, over-involvement in sports can become a burden that leaves them feeling simply burnt out. It's up to parents, caregivers, coaches and caring

teachers to protect a child athlete and know when it simply has become too much.

Here are some key considerations: *Does the child like the sport, or do they dread going to practice? Do they make up excuses to miss practice? Are they overly fatigued from too many sports during the school day? Do they have enough energy to make it through class? Does the coach put unrealistic expectations on the child athlete? And finally, does it seem like the parent wants the child to be involved more than the child does?*

Remember, sports are supposed to be fun. While staying physically healthy is an important goal, a child's mental health level is just as significant. If your child seems to be involved in too many sports, or, if a teacher thinks perhaps a child is over-involved, talk to the child. Slow down on some of the activities. Take a break.



**HELPING
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Schools Need to Say 'No' To Bullies



Children and youth who are bullied need clear messages of support from adults. Although we want children to be strong and assertive so that they can stand up to kids who bully other students, adults must

realize that many children aren't ready to do this.

Teachers, administrators, coaches, janitors and cafeteria workers can play critical roles in helping students who are bullied and creating a healthy and safe climate in your school and in the surrounding communities. Here are some quick points to help empower bullied students:

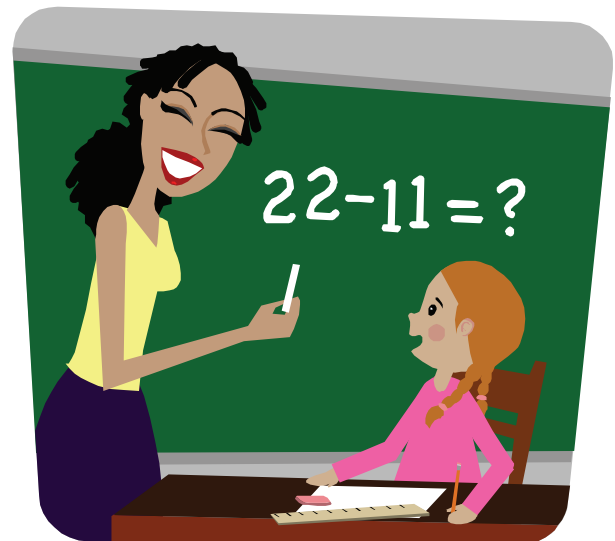
- Don't do further damage by lending too much support in public. Kids are concerned about what their peer group sees. It may be more helpful to lend your supportive words and gestures in private.
- Create a community of caring. Promote anti-bullying messages. Begin a peer counseling group or support group so bullied students can band together and promote peace rather than fear.
- Praise bullied students who stand up for themselves. Let bullied students know that you appreciate their bravery and their helpfulness by providing you with information and how it will positively impact many others in the school.
- Ask bullied students what they need to feel safe. Those who are bullied may feel powerless, scared, and helpless. Follow through and grant requests, when possible.
- Get additional facts about the incident(s) from other adults or students, so bullied students don't feel as though they will be easily identified as the sole reporter(s) of the abuse.
- Protect bullied students in conversations with the students who bully. Don't reveal their identity, if possible. Rather, explain that you've learned about the bullying from a number of sources, including other adults.

Assisting Students With Chronic Illness

According to recent statistics, chronic illnesses affect at least 10% to 15% of American children. Chronic conditions include asthma, allergies, diabetes, epilepsy (also known as seizure disorders), and other health problems.

In order to ensure that these students are not impeded in their education, here are some ideas for how schools can assist students with chronic illnesses:

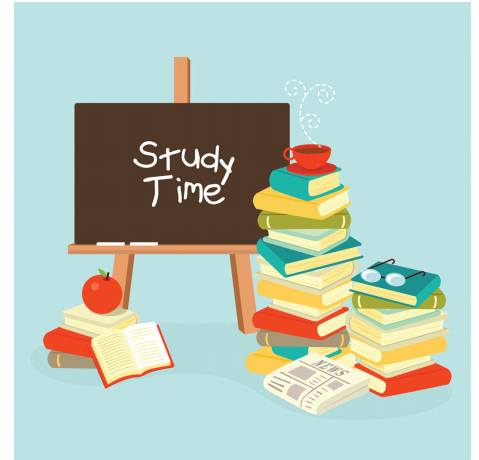
1. Identify students with chronic conditions, and review their health records as submitted by families and health care providers.
2. Arrange a meeting with parents or caregivers to discuss health accommodations and educational aids and services.
3. Clarify the roles and obligations of specific school staff, and provide education and communication systems necessary to ensure that students' health and educational needs are met in a safe and coordinated manner.
4. Implement strategies that reduce disruption in the student's school activities, including physical education, recess, offsite events, extracurricular activities and field trips.
5. Communicate with families regularly and as authorized with the student's health care providers.
6. Ensure that the student receives prescribed medications in a safe, reliable, and effective manner and has access to needed medication at all times during the school day and at school-related activities.
7. Be prepared to handle health needs and emergencies and to ensure that there is a staff member available who is properly trained to administer medications or other immediate care during the school day and at all school-related activities, regardless of time or location.
8. Provide appropriate health education to students and staff.



Making the Most Out of Homework

As a parent, it's important for you to be involved in your child's education, and one way to do that is to help your child with homework. What's the best way to help your child with her homework? You can encourage good study habits and model a positive attitude toward learning and problem solving for your child, even if you're not a whiz at history or science.

- Plan ahead and set a schedule. Help your child choose a regular time for doing homework every night. Plan according to the family's schedule, and make sure your child has a good study spot, free from distractions like TV or games, and make sure they have plenty of light to see.
- Get involved. Keep a tally of what projects your child or children are working on in class; schedule work time for reports and projects well in advance of the due date. Develop a calendar or family bulletin board to keep track of big projects and day-to-day work.
- Lend a hand. Help your child study for a test by quizzing him on the subject. If he is having trouble with a homework problem, go over the material with him and help him brainstorm ways to solve it. For larger projects, help him break the assignment down into manageable pieces or "chunks." If she's still having trouble, take her to library or contact her teacher for more information. Make sure, however, that you're not doing the homework for your child.
- Know your child's learning style. Not all children learn the same way. For example, some learn more through reading and using language, while others learn more from looking at pictures. Some children have a mix of learning styles, so let teachers know what your child's style is.



Improving Parent/Teacher Synergy

Parents and teachers have the same goal: educating children and equipping them with the skills that they will need for the future. With that same goal in mind, it is crucial that parents, too, become involved in the educational process. Here are some quick ways that parents and teachers can work together to form better lines of communication.

- Get connected, and stay connected. The internet has made it even simpler to establish relationships between families, parents, teachers and the community. Take advantage of the internet, and use it to stay connected. Teachers and parents can e-mail one another with questions and comments. Parents can develop discussion groups to talk about upcoming school events and projects.
- Put in some "face time." It is important for parents to attend functions like back-to-school nights and PTA meetings to really get a grasp on how their children are doing. Additionally, it shows children that parents really care about their education. Finally, it can provide an opportunity for you to talk with other parents and teachers.
- Volunteer. Teachers always can use an extra set of helping hands, whether it's for a bake sale or a field trip. Use your talents as parents for the good of the school.

For more information, contact: