



## **KNOW! To Bust the Myths to Prevent Teen Prescription Drug Abuse**

When it comes to talking to our children about the dangers of drugs, we tend to focus the conversation on illegal or “street” drugs. While those drugs are extremely dangerous and absolutely should be part of the conversation, we cannot forget to include the high risks involved with the misuse or abuse of prescription drugs. In fact, according to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), prescription drug abuse is the fastest-growing drug problem in the U.S. and is profoundly impacting the lives of teens.

Parents can make a huge difference. In addition to following the three simple steps shared in the previous Know! Tip, **[KNOW!, SECURE, DISPOSE To Prevent Teen Prescription Drug Abuse](#)**, parents are encouraged to talk, and then talk some more with their children on this subject. Experts say children whose parents talk early and often about the dangers of drugs are up to 50 percent less likely to use drugs in the first place. Unfortunately, only 22 percent of teens report having specific conversations on the topic of prescription drug abuse with their parents. With that in mind, many parents can take a simple, but monumental step toward prevention by starting these important conversations.

Do not feel like these talks have to be one-on-one, formal sit-downs. Talk in the car on the way home from school or seize the teachable moment when an ad for prescription drugs is aired during TV time. **The perfect moment to talk is now.** And when you do, be sure to share the facts that many teens don't know:

**Fact 1:** Prescription drugs can harm us when they're misused.

**Fact 2:** Prescription drugs can be addictive and have varying, harmful side effects. Use them only when you need them and as directed by a doctor.

**Fact 3:** Sharing your prescription, even with good intentions, is both dangerous and illegal. Prescription drugs are only safe when used at the correct dosage, by the person they have been prescribed for. Your medicines might interact harmfully with someone else's medication, prove to be too much of a dose for that person, or otherwise harm that person.

When talking with your child on this topic, it is helpful to understand WHY young people abuse prescription drugs. The most common reasons reported by teens include:

- To get high
- To self-medicate (pain, anxiety, insomnia)
- To improve academic or sports performance
- To lose weight
- To be daring or out of curiosity

The most misused and abused prescription drugs fall under three categories: **opioids** (relieve pain), **depressants** (ease anxiety and treat insomnia), and **stimulants** (increase attention and alertness).

It is typical for the same drug to be abused for different reasons. For example, boys are more likely to abuse stimulants to get high, while girls are more likely to abuse stimulants to lose weight or stay alert.

Remember, when used as intended, by the person they were prescribed for, prescription medications are usually safe and effective. However, when misused or abused, prescription medicines can be dangerous and even deadly. If you suspect or know your child is abusing prescription drugs, contact your family physician for guidance, direction, and next steps, or visit [findtreatment.gov](http://findtreatment.gov) for a treatment facility near you.

In addition to securing medications in our homes and properly disposing of unused, unwanted and expired medicines, we can significantly decrease the odds of our children experimenting with these dangerous drugs simply by talking with them regularly and educating them on the misconceptions and high risks of prescription drug abuse.

## **Sources**

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\): Rise in Prescription Drug Misuse and Abuse Impacting Teens. July 2020.](#)

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\): Talking to Your Kids About Prescription Drug Abuse.](#)

[U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency: Prescription for Disaster: How Teens Abuse Medicine, Third Edition.](#)