

Refuse, Remove, Reasons: Accessibility of Prescription Drugs

On the Video...

According to a recent report from the CDC, for the first time the abuse of painkillers and other medication is sending as many people to the emergency room as the use of illegal drugs. The abuse of prescription drugs is being called our nation's fastest-growing drug problem. In fact, many kids say they can get any prescription drug they might want. Joseph, age 17, says he could get "Vicodin, morphine, anything like that."

Patti, age 17, says she could even get methadone.

According to The Partnership At Drugfree.org, 61 percent of teens say prescription drugs are easier to get than any other drug. One reason is easy accessibility.

"This is the age of medication," explains Dr. Steven Jaffe, an adolescent psychiatrist. "I think there is a tremendous amount of all sorts of medicines out there that are readily available in the bathrooms, in the cabinets at home as well as on the black market."

In fact, kids say the medicine cabinet is the first place they look. "That's mostly how it starts," says 16-year-old T.J. That's why, experts say, prescription medicine needs to be locked up.

"We have gun cabinets that are locked up to keep guns away from our teenagers," says Dr. Herb Kleber, professor of psychiatry at Columbia University. "We should also develop locked medicine cabinets in order to help secure these agents so that it isn't easy for teenagers to get to them."

Carol Thomas lost her son, Ross, when he overdosed on prescription drugs. Ross was 16-years-old.

"Ross didn't get anything from [our] medicine cabinet, but I know parents have it and there's nothing wrong with that," says Thomas. "If you need medication, you need medication. But I think that we're silly to walk around and dangle a carrot in front of a kid's face," she says.

What We Need to Know...

Because the U.S. Food and Drug Administration puts its seal of approval on prescription drugs, many teens mistakenly believe that using these drugs – even if they are not prescribed to them – is safe. Most teens that abuse over-the-counter (OTC) medications are unaware of the potential dangers. Since these drugs are legal and have been given to them by parents when they're ill, kids think they're safer than illegal drugs. In fact, as many as one-third of teens think it's okay to use OTC medications to get high at least once in awhile, and more than half of all teens don't feel it's particularly risky to do.

Commonly abused over the counter and prescription drugs include cough medicine, diet pills, Oxycontin, Ritalin, and Vicodin. Unfortunately, parents are often unaware of both the prevalence of teen OTC drug use and the potential danger associated with abusing these drugs. The best way to reverse this alarming trend is for parents to educate themselves about the dangers of OTC drug use, lock up their medicines at home and share their knowledge with their children and other parents.

Conversation Starters...

- Why do you think friends are willing to share prescription drugs?
- Some experts say "this is the age of medication." What do you think that means? Do you agree?
- What would you do if you noticed friends sharing prescription drugs? Would you speak up? Why or why not?