

Prescription Drug Misuse in Adolescents

On August 16, 2017, federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released alarming figures on teen drug overdoses. Drug overdose deaths for adolescents ages 15-19 doubled from 1999 to 2015. Dr. Christopher Ruhm of the University of Virginia explained that the research points to opioid analgesics, heroin and fentanyl as being the main culprits. CDC also reports that the majority of the overdoses were unintentional. Researchers like Dr. Ruhm believe the figures will be much higher in 2016 and 2017.

According to NIDA, prescription drugs are the third mostly commonly abused drugs among adolescents 14 and older, after alcohol and marijuana. 18% of 12th graders reported that they misused prescription drugs in their life time. Another study by the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that 11.4% of people age 12 to 25 used prescription drugs non-medically in the past year.

Prescription drugs are misused in a variety of ways. Taking someone else's medication is considered misuse. Taking a prescription medication in a way other than prescribed or to get high is misuse. Mixing prescription drugs with other substances like alcohol is also misuse and can be very dangerous.

Three types of commonly misused prescription drugs:

Stimulants – often used to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Opioids –used to relieve pain

Depressants – used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders

When prescription drugs are misused, there can be harmful effects on the body and the brain. The effects vary based on the type of drug being misused.

Effects on the body and brain:

Stimulants – can cause an increase in body temperature and heart rate. Can also make the user feel paranoid. Stimulants cause dopamine and norepinephrine to buildup in the brain.

Opioids – can cause drowsiness, confusion, nausea, respiratory depression and may induce euphoria. Opioid medications bind to opioid receptors, which affect pleasure and pain levels. Opioid misuse can permanently damage the opioid receptors making it very difficult to treat pain.

Depressants – can cause slurred speech, shallow breathing, drowsiness, disorientation, lack of coordination and seizures. Depressants cause an increase in neurotransmitter, gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), which increases the inhibition of brain activity and makes the user feel calm.

Prescription drugs can have long lasting effects on the brain and can lead to addiction. When prescription drugs are taken at high doses and without the supervision of a physician and pharmacist, dependence may occur and the brain's reward system may be altered. The impact can be particularly



harmful on the developing brain. The pre-frontal cortex, which helps us strategize and control impulses, is still developing in adolescence. The developing brain is vulnerable to addiction, as the neural pathways are not completely hardwired until after adolescence. The brain adapts to higher doses of a drug which causes the user to need larger and larger amounts of a drug to get the same initial effects, also known as tolerance. A user may also begin using harder drugs like heroin or fentanyl to get high for a lower cost. If the drug use is ceased, withdrawal systems are likely to occur.

Youth who are misusing drugs may withdraw from family, friends, school and activities they once enjoyed. Their health may also decline as a result of the misuse. Pay attention to changes in behavior and physical symptoms of prescription drug misuse. If you believe your son or daughter is misusing prescription drugs, contact your physician.

What you can do:

Prevention, early intervention, and education are key to protecting adolescents from accidental overdoses and prescription misuse.

- Monitor Internet Use: the internet is making it easier for youth to access drugs and to get more information on how to get high. Monitor the websites youth are visiting and social media activity to prevent substance misuse.
- Review your medicine cabinet regularly and lock up medications. Participate in drug take-back programs if you have expired or unused medications.
- Educate: talk to your teen about the dangers of prescription drugs.
- Ask teens what they are experiencing at school and at friends' homes.
- Ask a pharmacist or physician if you have any questions about medications being prescribed.
- Set a positive example

Resources:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/more-than-one-third-americans-prescribed-opioids-in-2015/>

<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/prescription-drugs>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/americas-heroin-epidemic/teen-drug-overdoses-doubled-1999-2015-cdc-reveals-n793006>

https://www.dea.gov/pr/multimedia-library/publications/prescription_for_disaster_english.pdf

<https://www.samhsa.gov/homelessness-programs-resources/hpr-resources/teen-prescription-drug-misuse-abuse>

Transitioning to a New School

Parents generally do their best to construct their child's life in a way that removes and/or limits instability, provides predictable routines, and minimizes emotionally difficult changes. However, change does occur and sometimes it is impactful. One of these changes that happens in almost every child's life is moving to a new school. Whether your family is experiencing a job change that requires relocating to a new school district or your child is making the leap from pre-school to elementary school or elementary to middle school, it's almost certain at some point your child will change schools. The first days and weeks of a new school can be exciting, but they can also be filled with uncertainty and anxiety.

Tips for parents in helping their kid/s successfully adapt to a new school.

- **Take a Team Approach.**

If you find yourself choosing between a few schools, talk with your child about what each school has to offer. Let our child have some say in what school he/she would like to attend.

- **Be Positive.**

Talk to your child about their expectations, hopes, and fears for the upcoming school year but remain positive in response. Reassure your child that other children are having the same feelings and that he/she will have a great year. Remind him/her that they'll learn new things and make friends.

- **Encourage School Involvement.**

While you don't want your child to become over-committed, it's important to encourage participation in one or two activities that particularly interest him/her. Your child is more likely to strive academically if he/she feels connected through a school activity, club, or sport.

- **Get Enough Sleep.**

If your child has enjoyed a vacation of late nights and lazy mornings, getting him/her up for school over the next few weeks can be difficult. Help make this transition easier by having a sleep routine in place. Having all electronic devices off for the night, an hour before bed, will help your child wind down so they can fall asleep and rest easier.



- **School Supplies.**

Make sure you or your child finds out what school supplies and materials are required. Most schools should provide a handy list for the lower grades, but if not, take it upon yourself to ask and then purchase the items as soon as possible.

- **Prepare the Night Before.**

To avoid the morning rush, organize what you can the night before. Lay out clothes, make a lunch and assemble any supplies your child may need. Be sure to get everyone up extra early so you'll have plenty of time to calmly get ready and get out the door on time.

- **Get a Healthy Start.**

Encourage your child to eat a good breakfast and pack a healthy snack to help him/her get through the day.

- **Accompany Your Child.**

Even if your elementary school child will be riding the bus regularly or walking to school, you may want to take him yourself on the first day, particularly if he seems nervous.

- **Introduce Yourself.**

Young children are often shy with a new teacher. If at all possible, have your child meet their teacher before they attend their first day, otherwise, it might be helpful if you go into the classroom and introduce your child to the teacher. Let the teacher know about any special interests or challenges that your child has.

If you notice your child's showing signs of poor transitioning, it's important to talk to them about it, and to meet with their teachers and administrators so you can work to target the sources of your child's discomfort. School guidance counselors and school psychologists can also help with difficult transitions. They can sometimes designate a faculty member as a contact person with whom you can communicate. The school may even be able to pair your child with a "buddy" like a built in friend who is comfortable in the school already.

Tips for Schools/teachers in helping their kid/s successfully adapt to a new school.

- **Having a New Student Transition Team.**

Transitional periods are also opportunities for growth if children have learned coping skills and are given an opportunity to understand and adapt to their new environment.

- **Peer Helper/ Buddy System.**

Create a student monitoring, peer helper or buddy program consisting of children chosen from various groups who are taught to be role models for younger children. The training may consist of one or two days before school starts or at other times. The children participate in role plays, exercises, games, and discussions that increase team and empathy building. Their roles will vary, but they can include greeting younger children or new students, conducting school tours, answering questions, introducing new students to peers, providing social support throughout the year, and/or mediating peer problems.

- **Welcome Sign/Board.**

Personally greet new students with the school's indoor/outdoor LED message board or having a bulletin board welcoming new students.

Remember to monitor new students and identify those who are struggling. Refer them into school support systems such as the school counselor/social worker or to groups that promote school adjustment.

www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/adjusting-to-new-school/

www.educationcorner.com/adjusting-to-a-new-school.html

www.today.com/.../new-kid-survival-guide-how-help-child-thrive-new-school-

www.education.com/magazine/article/10-ways-child-adjust-school/

www.educationcorner.com/adjusting-to-a-new-school.html

Let's Talk About Suicide....

There has been growing interest in the influence of social media and the internet on suicide-related behavior. Pro suicide websites, chat rooms and YouTube uploads have the potential to be more influential on already vulnerable youth. With today's digitally savvy kids, parents and educators need to be even more mindful of online behavior as it relates to mental health and the overall wellbeing of our youth. In recent months, "The Blue Whale Challenge" has made its appearance in headlines, on the web and on social media sites. For many the question lingers, "What is the Blue Whale Challenge and is it real or a hoax?"



The Blue Whale Challenge has been reported to have started abroad but is now being more widely talked about in the United States. It is reportedly an online game in which players agree to follow a set of instructions over the course of 50 days. The instructions allegedly come from an anonymous instructor who requires the player to submit photographic evidence that they have completed each task, keeping their communication private. As the 50 days progress, each set of instructions gets more serious than the next, with the final instruction being to complete suicide. The game has been reaching young people via social media. Suicide prevention advocates stress that parents should watch for warning signs that are specific to the Blue Whale "game". Drawings of blue whales or statements such as "I am a blue whale" are examples. Likewise, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention suggests that parents check in with their children and monitor their online and social media activity for signs of the game. Over the past few months, U.S. news stories have pointed to a handful of teens engaging in some facets of the challenge resulting in their suicides, however, nothing has been confirmed outside of possible connections to the game. The best we can do is be aware and stay on top of the online activities of our youth. Experts also suggest that we can improve the social literacy of our youth by guiding them to better understand how to safely manage it. One social media site has taken action to help. When someone searches for words or hashtags related to the Blue Whale Challenge on Instagram, a pop-up box appears saying, "Can we help? Posts with words or tags you're searching for often encourage behavior that can cause harm and even lead to death. If you're going through something difficult, we'd like to help." At the bottom of the pop-up box are links to get support.

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, in addition to monitoring social media use, it is important to talk to kids about how they are feeling and how they handle distress. Talking to youth about how they might handle challenges can open up doors for important conversations about coping skills. Likewise, being aware of mental health changes in youth can help parents and educators in early intervention efforts to connect vulnerable youth to supportive resources. Research tells us that 90% of people who die by suicide experience mental illness. According to the Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1 in 4 high school students report being depressed and 14.6% have considered suicide. Yet, 60% of kids with diagnosable depression are not getting treatment (Child Mind Institute, Children's Mental Health Report). Connecting youth to help is key. Mental health professionals are trained to help a person understand their feelings and can improve mental wellness and resiliency. Just as we take

our kids to medical check-ups to promote their physical health, we also must promote and support the mental and emotional health of youth as well.

If you are concerned about a young person who may be vulnerable, The American Foundation of Suicide Prevention offers the following suggestions:

- Unless there is reason to believe your child already knows of or has played the Blue Whale Challenge, don't bring up the game. By doing so, you increase the chance that your child will investigate it on their own.
- Monitor your children's online and social media activity to ensure they are not engaging with the Blue Whale Challenge or other potentially dangerous activity.
- Check in with your child and ask how things are going. Ask open ended questions without judgement; validate and support their feelings.
- Engage in conversations about coping strategies.
- If you fear your child may be at risk, get professional help right away.

Resources:

CenterPointe Crisis Line (Lincoln)- 402-475-6695

Nebraska Family Helpline: 1-888-866-8660

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline- 1-800-273-Talk (8255)

SCIP- www.scipnebraska.com (for referral information call your school office)

Emergency Mental Health Care/Crisis Assessments- Bryan West Campus Emergency Department, Lincoln, NE (outside of Lincoln area, contact your local hospital).

References: National Alliance on Mental Health; Mental Health America; The American Foundation of Suicide Prevention; Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2015); National News Resources (CNN, Newsweek, USA Today); Child Mind Institute, Children's Mental Health Report (2015).