

## Are You Supplying Drugs to Teens?

A shocking and insulting question, you say? Well, the Office of National Drug Control Policy has released a study that reveals that young people are turning away from the streets and finding a bountiful supply of drugs in the medicine cabinets of their families and friends. In fact, the report states that “next to marijuana, the most common illegal drugs teens are using to get high are prescription drugs” which they believe to be medically safe. Some statistics:

- Nearly one in five teens (19% or 4.5 million) report abusing prescription medications not prescribed to them.
- Girls are more likely than boys to intentionally abuse prescription drugs.
- When teens abuse prescription drugs, they often characterize their use as “safe” or “responsible” because they come from the pharmacy.
- 62% or 14.6 million teens who abuse prescription drugs say they get them from schoolmates, relatives or from their family or friends’ medicine cabinets.
- The majority of teens (56% or 13.4 million) agree that prescription drugs are easier to get than street drugs.
- 14-year-olds are four times more likely than 13-year-olds to be offered prescription drugs by a friend.
- Among 12 to 17-year-olds, girls are more likely than boys to have abused prescription drugs in the past year (9.9% of girls vs. 8.2% of boys).
- Past year abuse of OxyContin among 8<sup>th</sup> graders doubled – increasing 100% over the last four years.
- Nearly one in 10 high school seniors reported using illegally acquired Vicodin in the past year.
- Every day, 2,500 teens abuse a prescription drug for the first time.

But there are definite safeguards and precautions that can significantly stem the tide of teenage prescription drug abuse. These include:

**Controlling access to drugs in the home and monitoring quantities:** Storing drugs in the medicine cabinet is like leaving a loaded gun in a drawer. It invites tragedy.

**Monitor your own behavior:** Are you guilty of “saving” prescription pain killers in case you might need them again “some day”. This behavior sends a terrible message that self-medication is OK.



**Dispose of prescription drugs responsibly:** Never flush them (pollutes the water supply) or toss in the garbage (too easy to retrieve). Investigate when the next “drug drop off day” is scheduled in your area.

**Talk about the problem:** Just as earlier generations of parents focused on illicit street drugs, we now must expand the discussion to include prescription drugs often viewed as safe, acceptable or harmless.

If you believe that a young person in your home may be “into” prescription drug abuse, remember that knowledgeable, professional EAP counselors are just a phone call away 24/7 to address your concerns *immediately* and *confidentially*.