

# LIFE TALK NEWS 22

## SHOULD YOU BE WORRIED ABOUT PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE?



Read on to see why prescription drugs need to be treated with caution...

### TEENAGERS AND PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

In an article written for Life Talk, Jennifer Lewis says: "Adolescence, as we all know, is a time for experimentation and perhaps a little risk taking too. Taking risks is important for your teen's development, as they must learn to explore the world without their parents, and discover that they are capable of managing on their own. But what if the risk taking becomes dangerous, and would you know if it had become so? At present, one area of particular concern for health professionals is the rise in the number of [teenagers abusing prescription drugs](#). Here we look at the facts behind the headlines, help you understand the risks and how to reduce them.

#### Facts and figures

The answer to the title question is that we should all be worried about prescription drug abuse. It isn't a problem that is confined to young people. If anything it is far more widespread than 'street drug' abuse, amongst people of all ages. But, the research shows that every single day in the US, roughly 2,000 children will use prescription drugs for the first time. The figures cover children as young as 12 and up to the age of 17. Around 50% of high school seniors consider opioid painkillers, such as [Vicodin](#) or [OxyContin](#), 'easy' to obtain. Over the counter (OTC) and prescription drugs are the most commonly abused drugs after alcohol, tobacco and marijuana. Other drugs regularly abused are tranquilising drugs such as Xanax and Valium, and stimulants, such as Concerta and [Adderall](#). Teenagers reported taking prescription drugs for varying reasons. Boys were more likely to use them to 'get high', whereas girls reported that they used drugs to make them more alert at school, or in order to lose weight.

#### OTC drugs

Over the counter drugs are also of concern. Cough and cold mixtures are one of the most frequently abused OTC medications. They contain dextromethorphan, or DXM, which can induce a high if taken in sufficient quantities. Because this is above the recommended dosage on the packaging it can lead to harm. Often it is when prescription or OTC drugs are mixed with alcohol that difficulties arise. Alcohol mixed with opioids can lead to breathing problems and death.

#### But they're safer than street drugs?

Not at all. Many people believe this, because prescription drugs are regulated and prescribed by a doctor. It is important to teach your teen that this is not the case. Opioid drugs act on the brain in the same way as heroin - it works by blocking pain receptors in the brain, but also brings a sense of euphoria, making it highly addictive; stimulant drugs act in the same way as cocaine. High doses of DXM can have a similar effect on the brain as ketamine, and can lead to loss of memory, and disconnected thoughts. DXM abuse can affect control over movement, cause nausea, vomiting, increased heart rate and raised blood pressure. Abusing prescription drugs and DXM is not safe.

#### Warning Signs

Fortunately, as parents, there is plenty you can do to protect your child from drug abuse within the home. First and foremost, you must talk to your teenager about the dangers of prescription drug abuse, as outlined above. To them it might seem like a softer option than buying drugs on the streets, but in effect it is not much different. Impress upon them the dangers they are being exposed to, and point out that it is illegal to use drugs in this way. They could be putting themselves and you at risk of prosecution. You may feel safer if you keep any medications that are prescribed for you hidden. You should count the number of pills you have if you suspect there may be an issue. Your teenager's friends may take an interest in your medication cupboard if everything is laid out for them. Look out for euphoric moods followed by relaxation and drowsiness. If your teenager seems unable to focus on tasks and suffers mood swings, it may not be 'typical teenage behaviour'. It could be a sign of something more serious. If you notice vomiting, itching or complaints about nausea, these are common side effects of abuse. Any deviant behaviour, such as stealing, skipping classes and loss of drive are of concern, naturally, and can go hand in hand with needing to get more of the drug that is causing addiction. The withdrawal from opioids is unpleasant, so the focus on getting more becomes more and more intense. Overdose is a danger if opioids are taken in combination with other drugs. If in doubt, don't hesitate to call for medical help.

#### Knowledge Is Power

For both you and your teen, knowledge is power. The more they understand the risks of prescription drugs, the more they will be able to make an informed decision about how to act. The more you know, the easier it will be to spot problems before they occur. Talk to other parents, and warn them of the potential risks of leaving medicines lying around. The harder it is to get hold of drugs, the easier it is to avoid temptation or peer-pressure. Remember, there are roughly 139 million prescriptions for opioid drugs written each year. The chances are your child will be exposed to the risks at some point. Be aware. Don't jump to conclusions, and don't over-react if your teen comes clean. If he or she confides in you it will be because they want your love and care."

#### Life Talk chapters worth reading include:

**Life Talk for Parents:** 5. Drugs – why your teen could be at risk; 6. Drugs – the spiral down and signs of use; 21. Steroids – good, bad or ugly?; 44. Communication; – and many others.  
**Life Talk for a Daughter and Life Talk for a Son:** – Making a difficult choice; – When your mates pressure you; – Drugs: weed, MDMA and hard stuff; – When you've made a mistake; – Your happiness: is it up to you?; – You don't have to be perfect; – (and 70 other fun, success and life-related topics).  
**The Tug-of-Life:** The Tug-of-Teens section, as well as a number of other chapters.

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The top left video on our home page is a **'must see'** about the issues our youth are facing – and it shows what you can do to help!  
 We also have video clips that address specific challenges being faced by teens, young adults and parents. We upload a new video every few weeks, so check regularly to see the latest tips.

#### OUR WEBSITE HAS SECTIONS FOR PARENTS, TEENS & EDUCATORS. HAVE A LOOK!

**NEWSLETTERS 1 – 21 COVER:** Alcohol and the teen brain; huffing; clubs; Facebook guide for parents; drugs; cell phones; pocket money; hubbly bubby; chewing tobacco; clubs & fake IDs; communication; discipline & boundaries; depression; Grade 8 hiccups; promiscuity; self-mutilation; eating disorders; self-esteem; bullying; abuse; ADHD; EMO; subject choices; MXIt; divorce; ice-spiking with 'eye drops'; head injuries; cults; chat-rooms; child-trafficking; cyberbullying, choking games; exam stress; tips for hosting parties; and many others. (Download off [www.lifetalk.co.za](http://www.lifetalk.co.za))

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#### HOW WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM JOINING?

- You'll become more proactive in preparing your children for the challenges of adolescence (and adulthood);
- You'll receive current information and advice;
- You'll unleash your power (replacing worry and helplessness with action/results);
- You'll become part of building a society where values, positive attitudes and successful choices are part of our youth's future.

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*Life Talk for a Daughter*, *Life Talk for a Son* and *Life Talk for Parents* include 15 new chapters covering many of the latest issues being faced by teens and young adults. (So even if you have the pre-2012 edition it's worth getting a new copy!)

*The Tug-of-Life* is "a life-changer of note" and no family should be without one! A unique approach to tackling life's challenges, this entertaining book identifies the choices and challenges we all face (children and adults alike). It helps you to take control of (and enrich) your life so that you can achieve the outcomes you desire.

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