

THE MEDICINE ABUSE PROJECT:

How teens, parents and doctors
view the problem of teen misuse
and abuse of prescription drugs and
over-the-counter cough medicines

A RIGHT OF PASSAGE OR AN EPIDEMIC?

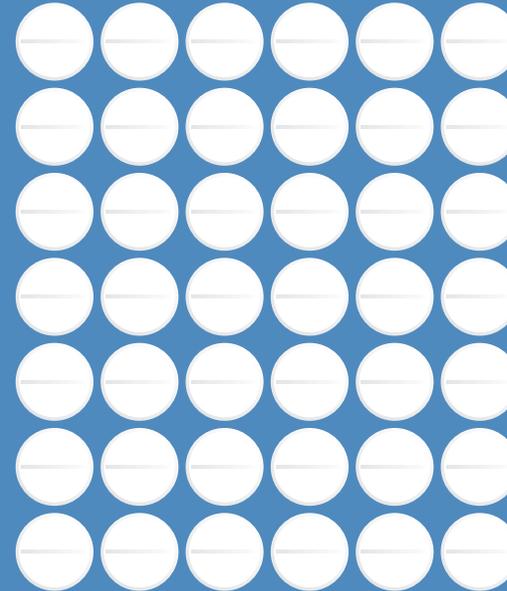
Used as prescribed or directed, medicines improve lives. When misused or abused, the opposite is true and the outcomes of this behavior are devastating, particularly among teens and young adults. American teens are abusing prescription drugs and over-the-counter cough medicines at alarming rates and the consequences of this abuse are only getting worse.

Just how prevalent is the medicine abuse problem among teens? We already know from existing research that **one in six teens has taken a prescription medication to get high, and prescription medicines are the most commonly abused drugs among 12**

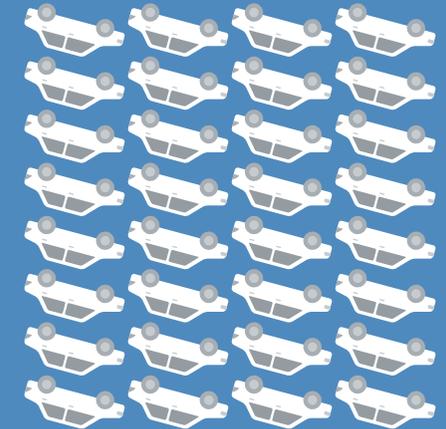
to 13 year olds. And, they are getting these medicines from family and friends.

What is particularly troubling is that teens aren't only taking these medicines to party, but they are also taking them to try to cope with everyday life – to manage stress, lose weight, sleep or because they think it might help them study better. While medicine not used as directed or individually prescribed is dangerous and potentially deadly, this issue is not a high priority for parents.

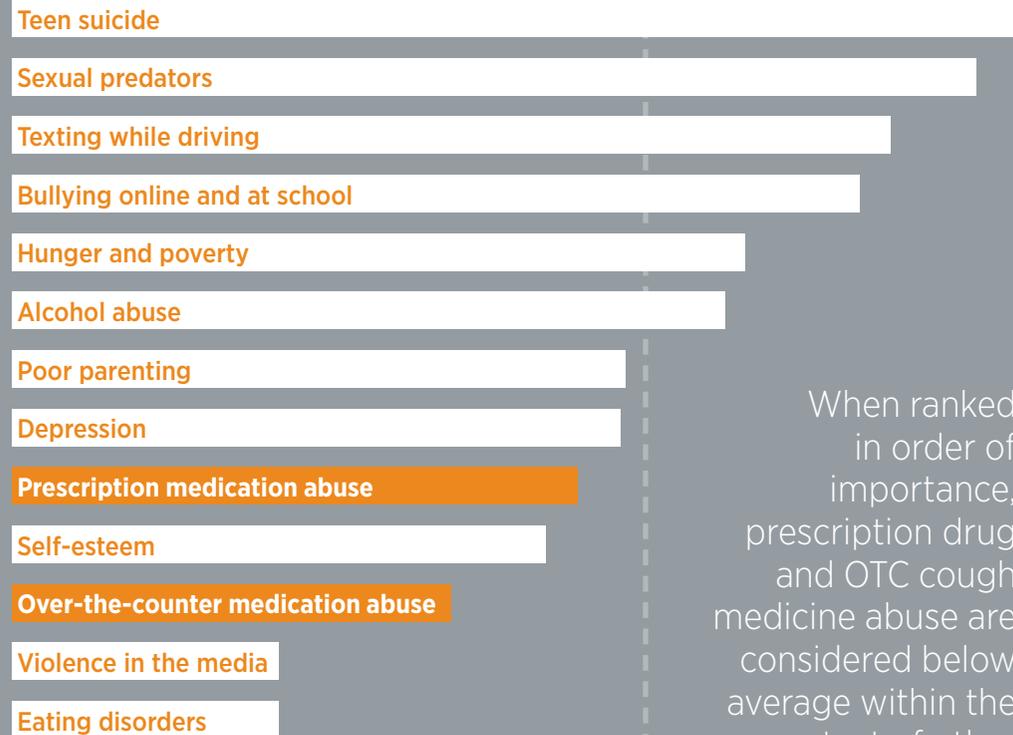
The Medicine Abuse Project aims to end this devastating epidemic by preventing half a million teens from abusing medicine within five years.



More Americans die from
**DRUG
OVERDOSES**
than in
car crashes
and this increasing trend is
driven by Rx painkillers.



Problems Facing Teens Today*



When ranked in order of importance, prescription drug and OTC cough medicine abuse are considered below average within the context of other major issues facing teens today.

* As perceived by parents of teens

GETTING SMART ABOUT TEEN MEDICINE ABUSE

Through research, The Partnership at Drugfree.org found that Americans underestimate the impact that the abuse of prescription drugs and over-the-counter cough medicines has on teens today. Given the dangers, and relatively low levels of concern, an increased effort to educate parents and teens is necessary to raise awareness of the risks, particularly among teens.

Methodology

In an online survey, 1,072 respondents answered questions about their attitudes, beliefs and actions related to medicine abuse. For the purpose of this study, the general population was defined as those U.S. residents

ages 18-74, while teens were defined as U.S. residents ages 12-17. The sample consisted of 208 parents of college students, 274 parents of teens, 440 teens and 254 Hispanics.

A second survey included 239 health care professionals, drawn from a general population internet panel. The internet survey included 156 doctors (52 primary care physicians and the remaining 104 were pediatricians, psychiatrists, emergency room physicians and sports medicine physicians) and 83 dentists/oral surgeons. All were 25 years of age or older, currently living in the United States and authorized to write prescriptions.

THE DISCONNECT

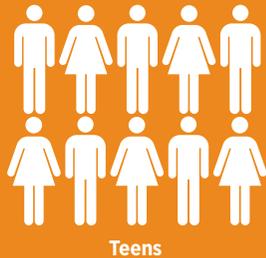
The issue of teen medicine abuse is more widespread than parents think. Still, 22 percent of adults and 19 percent of teens say they know someone who has died due to medicine abuse. So, where is the disconnect? This issue is simply not on their radar. Parents rank medicine abuse 13th among

their greatest concerns for teens, below both alcohol abuse and drug abuse.

While 31 percent of parents believe it is easy to access prescription medicines at home, 36 percent of teens believe the same. Parents may not always be aware of how accessible their

medications are to their kids, and how easy they could be making it for them to find these medicines and potentially abuse them. Since 79 percent of teens know where their parents store their prescription medicines, the easiest place for kids to get drugs is often right in their own home.

Only **6 percent of parents** say they have a child who abused medicine, however **10 percent of teens** admit to misusing/abusing medicines in the past 6 months.

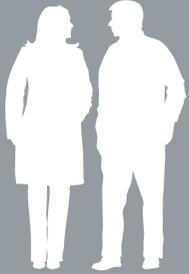


Teen Accessibility of Prescription Medicine

Adults in the general population and parents of college students believe it's relatively easy for teens to obtain prescription medications from friends, school or other people they know. If teens wanted to take prescription drugs, they think the easiest place to find them would be at home.

	General Population	Parents of College Students	Parents of Teens	Teens
Friends	44%	46%	39%	28%
School	37%	37%	31%	24%
Someone Else	34%	41%	30%	27%
Home	31%	30%	25%	37%

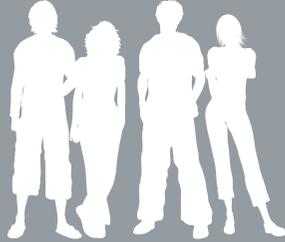
THE GREAT DIVIDE



6 percent of parents say they have a child who abused medicine...

31 percent of parents believe it is easy to access prescription medicines at home...

3 percent of parents admit giving their child/children medication not prescribed for them...



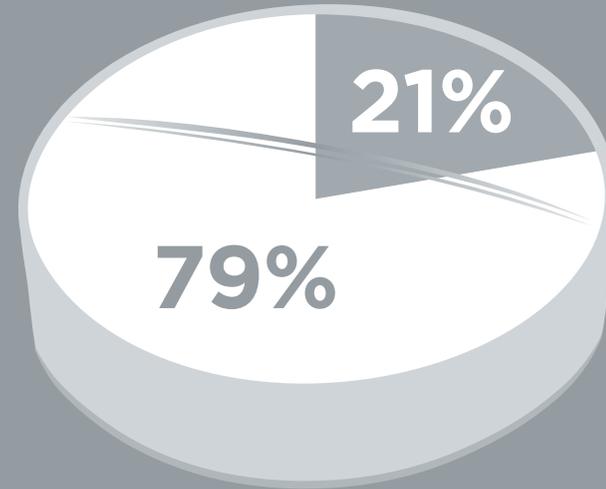
however **10 percent of teens** admit misusing/abusing medicines in the past six months

36 percent of teens believe the same

but **22 percent of teens** say the same

Teen Awareness of Prescription Medication Storage

Most teens (79%) know where their parents keep their prescription medications; 21% do not know.



Parents report that **they do not give their children medicines not meant for them**, but teens are telling a different story.

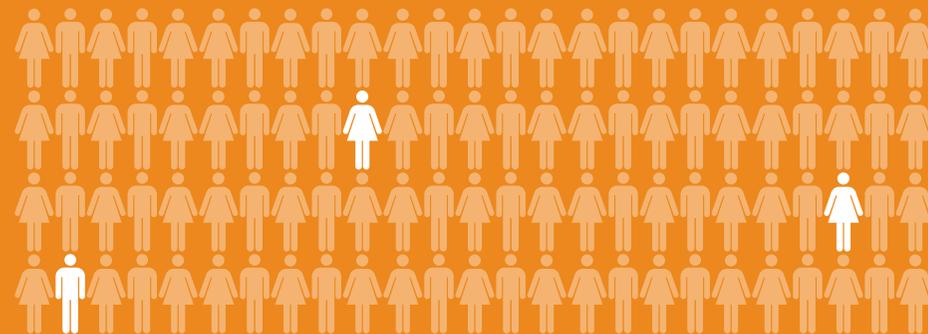
DIFFERING STORIES

The research shows that only 3 percent of parents admit to giving their child/children medication not prescribed for them. Yet, 22 percent (one in five) of teens say they were given a prescription medicine not meant for them by their parents.

Two out of five adults (42 percent) say they have leftover medicine from a past prescription and nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of these adults report keeping their medicine in case they or someone else needs it in the future.

It's no wonder that teens underestimate the danger of taking a medication not prescribed for them.

Only 3 percent of parents admit giving their child medication not prescribed for them.



Yet, 22 percent of teens say they were given a prescription medicine not meant for them by their parents.





My daughter was suffering severe pain from a sprain, so I told her to take one of my Rx pills that I had left over from major surgery. At the time, she was in her late teens, and I knew that the dosage that worked for me would work for her.

Father of a college student

My son had a cough. I had some prescription cough medicine here at home. I gave him a dose.

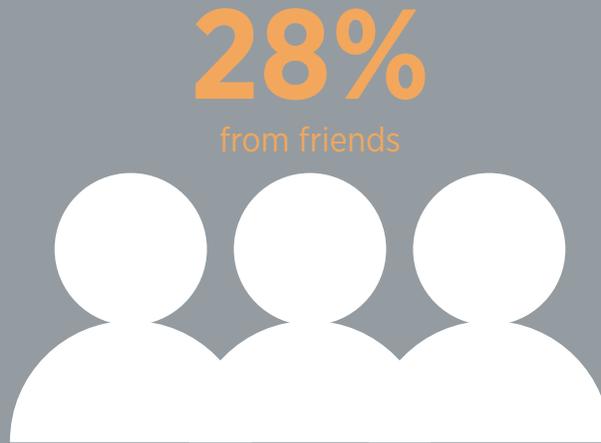
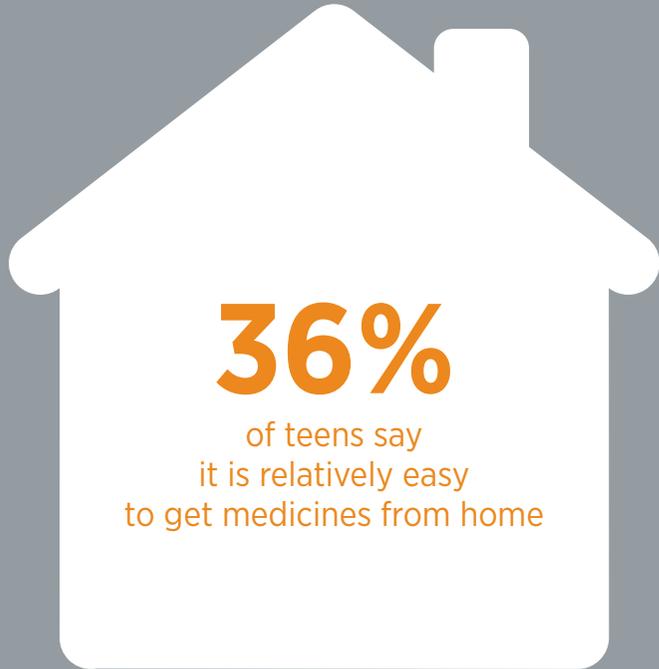
Mother of children 12-17

(I've given my child)...allergy drops that were a prescription for another child about the same age.

Mother of children 12-17 and college students

WHERE DO THEY GET THEM?

Teens think their home is the easiest place to access medication. Adults, on the other hand, think teens would get these meds from friends, school or someone else, before their own homes.



Adults' perception of where teens are getting Rx drugs

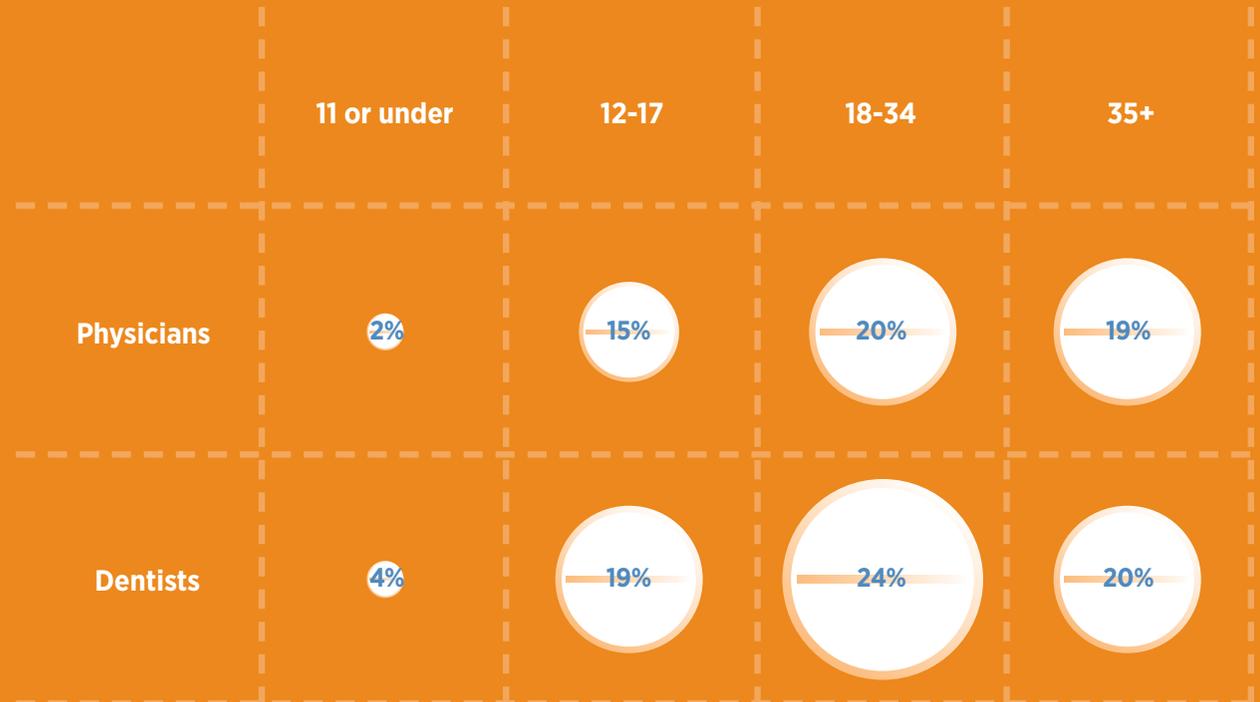
Doctors and dentists believe that **the problem of medicine abuse is as big (or bigger) than alcohol abuse.**

THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL'S PERSPECTIVE

Doctors and dentists believe that prescription medications are just as dangerous as illegal drugs when abused and that these medications are relatively easy to obtain. And, three out of four doctors and dentists believe that the problem of prescription medicine abuse has gotten worse among teens in the past 5 years.

Prescription Medication Abuse by Age

Both doctors and dentists believe teens abuse prescription drugs at almost the same rate as adults



Doctors and dentists see themselves as influential, but not primarily responsible, when it comes to their patients potentially developing addictions to prescription medicine. In their opinion, they play a smaller, secondary role when it comes to educating patients about the potential for misuse and abuse of medication – their role in combating this issue lies in:

- Limiting access to addictive medicine and prescribing smaller quantities
- Screening for and counseling at-risk patients
- The fact that a relatively small percentage of the prescriptions they write are for potentially addictive medications (although it is a higher percentage among dentists)



3 in 10
believe it is difficult
to spot at-risk teens



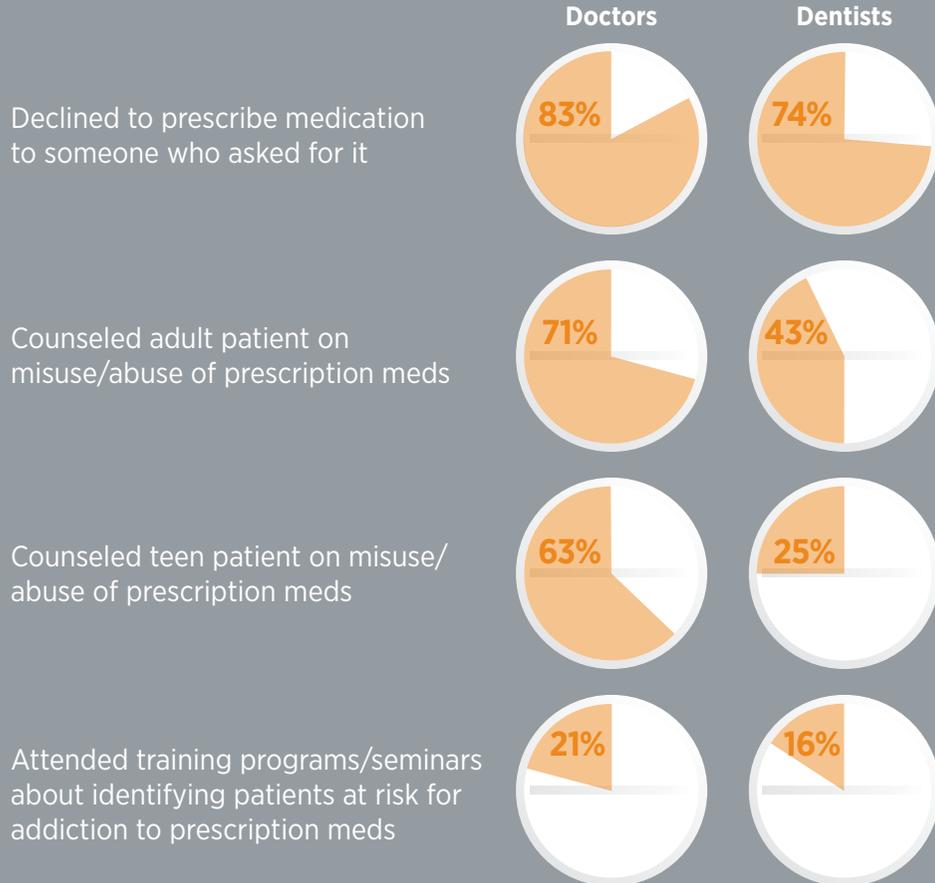
Close to half
find it difficult
to identify at-risk kids

It's Difficult to Identify At-Risk Kids

Doctors and dentists think it is relatively easy to identify at-risk adult and teen patients, but much more difficult to spot kids who may be at risk for addiction.

Actions Taken in the Past 3 Months

(One or more times)



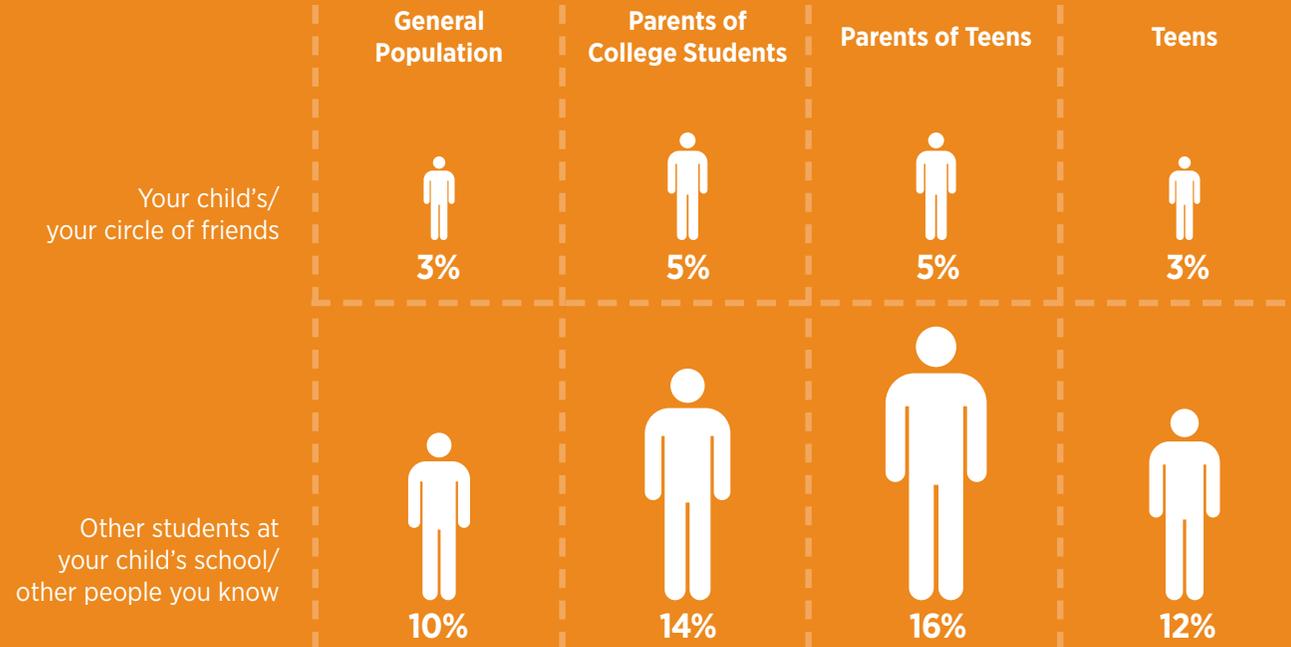
Doctors and dentists agree that it is difficult to spot teens who are at risk for addiction. If doctors or dentists perceive that a patient is at risk for addiction, they are in a unique position to take action. It is fairly common for doctors and dentists to refuse a patient's request for prescription medication – at least three-quarters have done so in the past three months. Almost eight in 10 doctors have referred a patient to a substance abuse treatment program, and nearly two-thirds (63 percent) have counseled a teen patient on the misuse/abuse of prescription medicine.

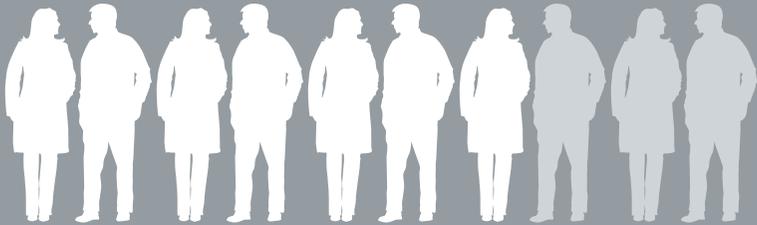
NOT MY PROBLEM

While the issue of medicine abuse is underestimated by parents, it is also generally thought to be a problem experienced by “**other**” people. Among teens, 7 percent say medicine abuse is a problem among their close circle of friends, but 23 percent say it’s a problem among **other** students at school/**other** people they know. Just 5 percent of parents in general think abuse of prescription medication is a problem for their own child or their child’s circle of friends. However, 16 percent of parents of teens ages 12-17 and 14 percent of parents of college students believe it is a problem for **other** students at their child’s school or **other** people they know. The truth: **about one in six teens admit to taking a prescription medication to get high.**

Prescription Medicine Abuse Perceptions

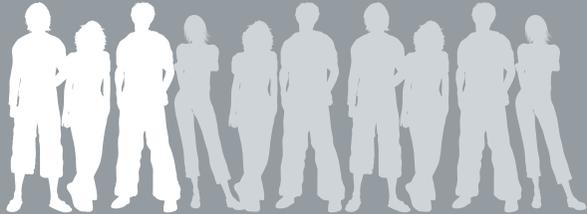
While not considered a large problem overall, prescription medicine abuse is generally thought to be a problem experienced by “other” people.





67% of parents

say they have discussed medicine abuse
with their children



31% of teens

have had someone talk to them
about OTC medicine abuse

34% of teens

have had someone talk to them
about prescription medicine abuse

THE CONVERSATION ISN'T HAPPENING

Parents are considered the most influential force for combating prescription medicine abuse. Of those surveyed, 91 percent of parents believe that it is their responsibility to teach their children about proper medication use; 88 percent of parents also agree that conversations with their children are effective at combating medicine abuse. But, many parents are failing to act as the first line of defense. While 67 percent of parents (75 percent of parents of teens) say they have discussed medicine abuse with their children, conversations about over-the-counter and prescription medicine abuse have taken place in the past six months with 31 percent and 34 percent of teens, respectively. Teens often do not understand the severity of the possible consequences associated with abusing medication. Most teens recognize that there is some risk of abuse when taking prescription medication, but only 36 percent feel it poses a “great risk.” Therefore, it is crucial that parents and loved ones talk to the teens in their lives about the dangers of abusing medications. They may seem less dangerous than illicit drugs like heroin and cocaine, but the consequences can be just as devastating. We talk about alcohol, smoking, drinking and driving and sex with our kids — why not medicine abuse?

Parents believe they are mainly responsible for teaching their children about proper medicine use, but the conversations are not taking place.

TIME TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE

Efforts to address alcohol and illegal drug abuse are more prominent than those addressing abuse of prescription medicine and OTC cough medications. Teens are particularly aware of messages about alcohol abuse and much less likely to recall seeing anything about medicine abuse in the past three months. Also, adults and parents are hearing about prescription drug abuse from different sources than teens. While 65 percent of the general population, including adults and parents, report hearing about prescription drug abuse in the news/newspapers, 48 percent of teens report hearing about it through friends/family and 40 percent identified their source as TV ads.

Additionally, fewer discussions are happening in general about the abuse of prescription medicine and OTC cough medications, compared to illegal drug and alcohol abuse. Parents are leading the discussions on illegal drug and alcohol abuse. In the past six months, 62 percent of teens reported their friends/family spoke with them about illegal drug abuse, and 61 percent reported their friends/family spoke with them about alcohol abuse. However, only 34 percent and 31 percent of teens reported their friends/family spoke with them about the abuse of prescription drugs and over-the-counter medicine respectively.

You can join The Medicine Abuse Project by taking these simple steps to help combat medicine abuse:

- Take the Pledge to learn more and help end teen medicine abuse.
- Talk with the teen in your life about the dangers of abusing medicines.
- Safeguard your medications and safely dispose of unused medicine.

Awareness of Substance Abuse Coverage

Teens are particularly aware of messages about alcohol abuse, and much less likely to recall seeing anything about prescription or OTC abuse in the past 3 months.



72%



67%



46%



41%

The Medicine Abuse Project aims to prevent half a million teens from abusing medicine within five years.

Parents, educators, coaches, health care providers, government and law enforcement officials and other partners are joining together to save lives by preventing teen medicine abuse. We all have a role to play, and you can join us.

Go to **MedicineAbuseProject.org** to take the Pledge to:

- Learn about teen medicine abuse
- Safeguard your medications
- Talk to the teens in your life about this important health issue