



Abuse of Over-the-Counter Drugs in Schools

By: Ashley Bleoaja

Prescription drug misuse by young teens and even children has become a national health problem. According to MedScape, the rates for new users of prescription drugs are now almost equal to those for new users of marijuana, and prescription drugs are now the second most common drugs (after marijuana) used by teenagers to get high. The Partnership for a Drug-Free America states that the abuse of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications is an "entrenched behavior" among America's youth. The Office of National Drug Control Policy reports that most adolescents who misuse these products are getting them easily and for free. Data from the last decade shows rates of middle school substance abuse and addiction in kids as young as 11 or 12 years old have swelled across the United States. In 2015, more than 8% of 8th graders reported using illicit drugs. Children who abuse over-the-counter drugs like cough syrups and pills take the substances in high doses to get high. Around 48% of ER visits related to cough medicine abuse involve people aged 12–20. Similarly, 49% of American parents say anybody in the house can access home medicine cabinets where over-the-counter drugs are often stored. In addition, convenience stores will often sell basic medicines without an age limit. (The Recovery Village)

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) reports that prescription and over-the-counter drugs, after marijuana and alcohol, are the most abused substances in America by those ages 14 and older. The most commonly abused over-the-counter drugs are likely pain relievers like ibuprofen and acetaminophen, diet pills, laxatives, energy drinks or pills, and cough medications containing dextromethorphan, or DXM. (The Recovery Village) Drug misuse is especially harmful for adolescents due to the brain damage caused by drugs during early development. According to the Addiction Center, the teenage years are vital to healthy cognitive function as an adult, so it is important to maintain a strict level of healthy behavior during these years. Drug abuse can impact the brain's ability to function in the short-term as well as prevent proper growth and development for later in life. The negative effects of drug usage on the brain are as following: interfering with neurotransmitters and damaging connections within the brain, creating memory problems, causing missed opportunities during a period of heightened learning potential, ingraining expectations of unhealthy habits into brain circuitry, and inhibiting development of perceptual abilities.

Apart from biological and neurological side effects the abuse of drugs can also lead to homelessness for most adolescents. A common stereotype of the homeless population is that they are all alcoholics or drug abusers. The truth is that a high percentage of homeless people do struggle with substance abuse, but

addictions should be viewed as illnesses and require a great deal of treatment, counseling, and support to overcome. Substance abuse is both a cause and a result of homelessness, often arising after people lose their housing. (National Coalition for the Homeless) Substance abuse is often a cause of homelessness. Addictive disorders disrupt relationships with family and friends and often cause people to lose their jobs. For people who are already struggling to pay their bills, the onset or exacerbation of an addiction may cause them to lose their housing. Over two-thirds of homeless people currently report that drug abuse was a major reason for their condition. However, substance abuse can also be a result of homelessness, rather than a cause.

While it may be hard to talk about substance use, opening up to a parent, guardian, or other caring adult can help a teen connect with the right support and treatment. Teens who aren't comfortable talking about these issues with a parent or guardian, can ask a school guidance counselor to put them in touch with support groups and resources that have worked for other young people. In some cases, teen rehab programs are the best way to treat a drug or alcohol problem., or other caring adult can help a teen connect with the right support and treatment. Teens who aren't comfortable talking about these issues with a parent or guardian, can ask a school guidance counselor to put them in touch with support groups and resources that have worked for other young people. In some cases, teen rehab programs are the best way to treat a drug or alcohol problem. (Start Your Recovery) Even for teens who have suffered from drug abuse, there are still ways to sobriety and recovery.

Resources:

Start Your Recovery, <https://startyourrecovery.org/who/teens>

Addiction Center, Why the Teenage Brain is Susceptible to Addiction,

<https://www.addictioncenter.com/teenage-drug-abuse/health-effects-teen-substance-abuse/>

The Recovery Village, Over-the-Counter Drug Abuse, <https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/otc-abuse/>

MedScape, Teen Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drug Abuse,

<https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/713306>