



# Parents Make A Difference!

## Teens and Prescription Drug Use

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Prescription drug abuse among teens is on the rise. According to a MetLife study in 2012, one in four teens has misused or abused a prescription drug. That's a 33% increase since 2008. That study also reported that teens are more likely to abuse prescription drugs than illegal drugs like ecstasy, cocaine, crack and methamphetamines.

Teens are abusing prescription drugs for many reasons:

- To feel good emotionally or physically (treating pain, weight loss, getting high, etc.)
- To fit in with a group
- To help with school work or get better grades

Teens also report that prescription drugs are easier to get and usually cheaper than illegal drugs.

In the 2013 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 5,410 southwest Wisconsin middle and high school students, 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders were asked about their thoughts and use of prescription drugs when they don't have a prescription. More than one out of every six 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders in southwest Wisconsin is taking prescription drugs without a doctor's order (CHART 1).

Although the number is lower than the national average, a similar survey found that in 2009, less than one out of every 10 southwest Wisconsin students were taking prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription. A specific question on the 2013 high school survey found that almost 300 southwest Wisconsin high school students reported taking a prescription drug without a doctor's order in the 30 days prior to the survey.

Prescription drugs are "prescribed" for a reason. When people use prescription medications for anything other than what they were ordered for, they are at risk for serious health consequences.

Prescription drug abuse has many dangers including developing a dependence or addiction to the medication. Other dangers of prescription drug abuse are slower brain activity, irregular heartbeats, dangerously high body temperatures, heart failure and seizures. Even though 94% of the teens in southwest Wisconsin believe that there is a risk in taking a prescription without a doctor's order (CHART 2), 16% of them have still done so. Youth who abuse prescription medication are also more likely to report experimenting with or using other drugs.

**Students who report taking a prescription drug without a doctor's order.**

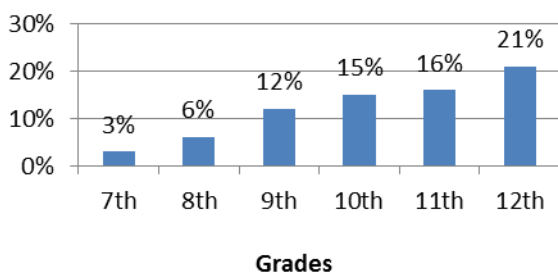


Chart 1

**Students who think there is risk in taking a prescription without a doctor's order.**

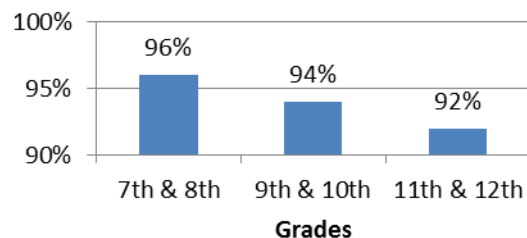


Chart 2

In general, the majority of students believe their parents and friends think it is wrong to take a prescription drug without a doctor's order (CHART 3). Unfortunately, 4% of southwest Wisconsin middle school students and 13% of high school students report that they are taking prescription drugs without a doctor's order even though they report their parents think that it would be wrong to do so.

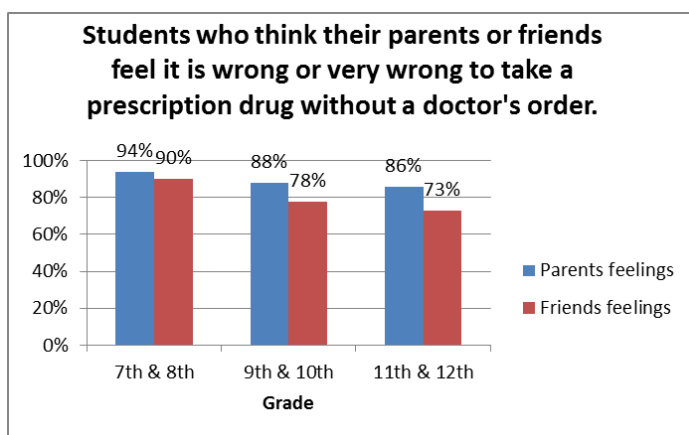


Chart 3

### Signs of Prescription Drug Abuse

- Fatigue, red or glazed eyes, repeated health complaints
- Sudden mood changes
- Withdrawing from family, secretiveness
- Hanging out with new group of friends or withdrawing from friends
- Decreased or obsessive interest in school work
- Less interested in hobbies or school activities that had been fun
- Missing prescription medicines from your cabinet – check often!
- Additional filled prescriptions on your pharmacy record that you did not fill
- Increases in borrowing money

## Parents Make a Difference!

Parents need to communicate the dangers of prescription drug misuse and abuse to their teens. Across the country, students report having more talks with their parents about smoking, alcohol and illegal drugs than they do about prescription drug abuse.

As a parent, teach your teen to RESPECT the power of medicine; RECOGNIZE that all medicines have risks along with the benefits and that the risks can increase when medicines are abused; and take RESPONSIBILITY for learning how to take prescriptions safely. Let your son or daughter know how important it is to ask for help at the first sign of a problem – their problem or a friend's abuse problem.

### How can a parent help?

- Talk with your teen about prescription medicines – do not assume that illegal drugs are the only threat.
- Avoid stockpiling prescription medications and keep them in a safe place.
- Monitor your pills and those of a teen's prescription.
- Promptly and safely dispose of any unused prescription medicines.
- Encourage friends and relatives to monitor their own medications.
- Talk to the parents of your teen's friends – encourage them to secure their prescriptions too.
- Get educated and be sure you can recognize signs of prescription drug abuse.

### Sources:

Drug Facts – Prescription Drugs, <http://teens.drugabuse.gov>

Teen Drug Use: Good News & Bad News Revealed in New Report, The Partnership for A Drug Free America

<http://notinmyhouse.drugfree.org/>

<http://medicineabuseproject.org/>

