

A Prescription for Parents on Preventing Prescription & Over-the-Counter Abuse Among Teens

#1 Educate yourself and your teen about the risks.

Prescription drugs can be just as dangerous and as addictive as “street drugs,” and can be lethal. Talk to your teen about the dangers of these drugs.

#2 Keep track of quantities.

Take note of how many pills are in a bottle or pill packet and ask other households your teen visits to do the same, such as grandparents or other friends. Don't forget about refills. If you find you have to refill medication for a chronic condition more often than recommended, there could be a real problem—as someone may be knowingly stealing your medication.

#3 Talk to friends, relatives and school administration.

Make sure your friends and relatives know about the risks, too, and encourage them to regularly monitor their own medicine cabinets. If you don't know the parents of your child's circle of friends, then make an effort to get to know them, and get on the same page about rules and expectations. Follow up with your teen's school administration to find out what they are doing to address issues of Rx and OTC drug abuse on campus.

#4 Follow directions carefully.

Make sure you and your teen use Rx drugs only as prescribed by a medical doctor and take only the recommended dosages as indicated for both Rx and OTC drugs. If you are directed to finish the prescription, then do so as advised. If you have any questions about how to take a prescription drug, call your family physician or pharmacist.

#5 Discard old or unused medications.

Unused prescription drugs should be disposed of in the trash. It is best to add an undesirable substance (like used coffee grounds or kitty litter) and put the mixture in an impermeable, non-descript container like an empty can or bag. Unless the directions say otherwise, do NOT flush medications down the drain or toilet because the chemicals can taint the water supply. Also, remove any personal, identifiable information from prescription bottles or pill packages before you throw them away.

#6 Monitor your teen's time online.

Check browser histories and set a time limit for how long your teen can be online. For more information on how to monitor your child's online activities, visit TheAntiDrug.com's online tutorial.

#7 Be observant.

If you find your teen is quickly going through cough syrup, or you find empty bottles and pill packages among your child's personal effects, talk with her, listen carefully, and determine if there is a problem. If there is a problem, call your family physician immediately.

#8 Find other ways to relieve stress and have fun.

Many teens point to personal and family stress, as well as boredom, as reasons they abuse Rx and OTC drugs. Help your teen find other ways to relieve pressures, for example through positive activities that interest your child, positive friendships, or by simply listening and offering guidance. Also, help your teen find constructive ways to pass time and set a good example yourself.

To learn more about Rx & OTC health risks, visit TheAntiDrug.com.