

Mental Health and Crisis Management Services Presents...

“Dangers of Misuse/Abuse of Over-the-Counter (OTC) or Prescription Drugs ”

Did you know?

- Teen abuse of prescription and OTC medications is higher or on par with teen abuse of a variety of illicit drugs – i.e., cocaine / crack (9 percent), Ecstasy (9 percent), methamphetamine (8 percent), LSD (6 percent), ketamine (5 percent), heroin (4 percent) and GHB (4 percent).
- There has been a dramatic increase in the number of poisonings and even deaths associated with the abuse of OTC and prescription drugs. Many teens believe the myth that these drugs are a safe way to get high. However, when they are abused, prescription drugs can be just as dangerous as street drugs.
- Teens who abuse prescription or OTC drugs may be abusing other substances as well. Sometimes they abuse prescription and OTC drugs together with alcohol or other drugs, which can lead to dangerous consequences, including death.

Why are teens and children abusing OTC ?

- Many OTC drugs contain an ingredient called dextromethorphan (or DXM). It is in cough suppressants that can be found in stores in caplet or liquid form.
- When taken in very large doses, DXM can produce a high. It also can pose a real danger to the user, including:
 - Impaired judgment and mental functioning
 - Loss of coordination
 - Dizziness
 - Nausea
 - Hot flashes
 - Hallucinations
 - Brain Damage
 - Seizure
 - Coma
 - Death

Signs of abuse.

- Does your child take large amounts of cold or cough remedies?
- Does he/she take a medication even when not ill?
- Does your child continually ask others for medication?
- Constricted pupils, slurred speech, falling grades, personality changes, excessive energy, sleepiness or avoiding sleep, loss of appetite, mood swings, irritability, and/or changes in normal habits or appearance also can signal a possible drug abuse problem.

Strategies for Educators or Counseling Professionals

- Explain to students that although these drugs are legal they can be as dangerous as street drugs if improperly used.
- Many teens and children do not understand that medicine does take time to work. Often, they become frustrated and double up on the medicine which can be very dangerous.
- No student should have medication (OTC or prescription) on school grounds or on their person.
- Teach responsible use of medications. Explain about appropriate dosages and the potential for overdose.
- Focus on teaching safety and avoid giving examples that glorify or provide unnecessary details about getting high from these medications.

What should I do if I have questions or concerns about a student?

- If you suspect that a student has consumed an unknown amount of OTC or prescription drugs and needs emergency care, please call 911.
- Refer the student to the TRUST counselor and/or another counseling professional.
- Student’s parents should be made aware of any concerns and resources should be provided. When informing parents regarding suspected use, focus on describing observable behaviors or signs.
- Administration should be alerted.
- Depending on the level of use, education, medical attention, individual, group, or family counseling services may be appropriate.

Information adapted from <http://family.samhsa.gov/get/otcdrugs.aspx>.

Mental Health and Crisis Management Services

M-DCPS Crisis Line: 305-995-CARE

<http://mhcms.dadeschools.net/>