

Teen prescription drug abuse.

By

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Freshmen. Wide eyed and self conscious. The first “high school” party of the new school year. A bowl is passed around. Inside is a rainbow of colors. Blue, green, red and yellow. The pills look more like candy than the serious medicine they are. The bowl passes around and the partygoers pick a pill and down it with beer. A senior standing in the corner asks his friend what he put in the bowl. “I don’t know, I got them out of my grandpa’s house. He has all kinds of drugs just lying around.” They look back at the freshmen. “They’re new, they won’t know the difference.”

A young girl is walking to class. She stumbles and can’t seem to regain her balance. She tries to walk but then collapses to the ground. The school officials don’t know what’s wrong and an ambulance is summoned. Her friend quietly tells one of the nearby teachers that her friend just took a “Zany.” The girl’s body is violently reacting to the prescription drug Xanax. The ambulance speeds off to the hospital.

Like wildfire, prescription drug abuse is sweeping into our school campuses. Prescription drugs are the fastest growing substance of abuse among teens. Easy to get from the family medicine cabinet, medications such as Xanax, OxyContin, Tylenol with Codeine, Vicodin, Tranquilizers and Soma are becoming the drugs of choice. Prescription drugs are seen as safer and cleaner. Street drugs are viewed as dirty and “ghetto.”

Champions recovery clinic reports few if any cases in 2008, but in 2009 kids addicted to prescription drugs became a significant part of their caseload. Prior to 2009, the drugs of choice were primarily marijuana and alcohol abuse. Now, with kids starting as early as age 9, prescription drug abuse is quickly spreading in both junior high schools as well as in high school becoming a major drug of abuse. These teens report easily getting the drugs from parents and friends. Costing as little as \$2 a pill for Xanax, OxyContin can go for up to \$60 per pill.

The Probation Department is seeing a similar spike in prescription drug use among juveniles they see. In the last 3 months of school last year, the number of prescription drug cases jumped from almost none to 50 cases out of just one High School. Moreover, the probation officers estimate they may see only one out of every ten kids who are abusing these drugs. They are also witnessing older kids selling to the younger ones, who most often use texting to place orders.

Hanford Police School Resource Officers are seeing prescription drug abuse on campus becoming more and more common. Easy to get, teens can take two or three pills out of a parent's prescription bottle with little risk of being caught. Visiting a friend, the abuser simply has to open the family medicine cabinet to find dozens of pill bottles all for the taking. The pills are small and easy to conceal. The user doesn't need a lighter, pipe or other drug paraphernalia. No tell tale odors. Normal drug tests used by the police will not detect these drugs in the kids system. Easy to get, little chance of getting caught and seen as clean and safe, prescription drugs have become the drug of choice on campus among middle class kids.

Clean and safe, these prescription drugs are not. They are powerful medicines given in adult doses under the supervision of a doctor. Bad reactions and possible death are the reality of prescription drug abuse. But this epidemic is one that can be stopped. Parents and teachers need to be aware of this problem and look for any unusual behavioral changes in their kids. Most importantly, all prescription medications should be kept under lock and key. You may trust your kids, but they can be tempted, and other kids who visit may not be so trustworthy.

For further information to help protect your children from becoming involved in the Prescription drug abuse epidemic, visit the Kings Partnership for Prevention Website at www.kpfp.org. There you will find a variety of resources on-line and locally, for Parents, Educators and Teens. Visit www.TheAntiDrug.com/Resources/teen-rx.aspx, where you can find a downloadable edition of "Prescription for Parents on Preventing Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drug Abuse among Teens. Kings Partnership for Prevention is a community coalition with members from throughout the community representing a wide variety of interests. Their Mission is to proactively engage our communities by supporting, participating in and creating opportunities for healthy life choices. We invite you to join us at our next regularly scheduled meeting, October 1st, at the Kings County YMCA at 5:30 PM. For more information contact the Coordinator, Nell Lobdell at 904-4446.