



PREVALERT: Pharming

Pharming sows problems for teens

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The non-medical use of prescription drugs is a common way for “clean teens” to get high. “Pharming” is a term used by children and adolescents to describe the raiding of medicine cabinets and ingesting their findings for the purpose of achieving a high. Pharming, done either individually or with other teens at parties, has become an alternative to illicit drug use since prescription drugs are inexpensive, easily accessible, and wave fewer red flags to parents. They are mistakenly perceived as “safe” because they are prescribed, and are, in most cases legal.

In 2004, Indiana’s 12th grade students reported higher rates of monthly use of non-prescribed tranquilizers and narcotics than the national average. Yet, lower rates of use were reported among grades 10th through 12th. According to the National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA), the most widely used prescription drugs among youth are opioids (OxyContin®, Vicodin®, Darvon®, Dilaudid®); central nervous system depressants (Valium® and Xanax®); and stimulants (Adderall®, Ritalin®, and Dexedrine®). Prescription drug abuse varies by user preference and availability.

Using non-prescribed medication can cause heart, liver or kidney damage/failure, central nervous system impairment, and mood disorders among a myriad of other complications.

Signs of Use

- Disruption in patterns of behavior
- Difficulty sleeping or staying awake
- Change in eating habits
- Disengagement from family
- New circle of friends
- Nervousness or paranoia
- Poor performance at school or at home

What You Can Do

- Dispose of unused medication
- Encourage realistic expectations
- Talk with your child about the dangers
- Engage your child in activities that are healthful and fun
- Approve of chaperoned parties only
- Monitor internet purchases and activities
- Monitor financial expenditures

Knowing how to prevent prescription drug abuse is half the battle. Parenting your teen is the other half. It’s okay to talk openly with your teenager about the truth—that using non-prescribed medication can be just as dangerous as using illicit drugs. Even if the use is occasional, the negative effects can last a lifetime.

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