Signs for parents that their teen might be abusing prescription or OTC drugs: a NetWellness column

By Plain Dealer guest columnist
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The fact of the matter is that teens are abusing prescription and over-the-counter drugs in alarming numbers. This is the second of two columns about that abuse, and what parents need to know.

How will I know if my teen is abusing prescription or OTC drugs?

There are many possible signs that your teen is abusing prescription or OTC drugs.

Just remember, some behavior-related signs could represent "normal" teen behavior. Here's some things to look for:

- Your teen's grades drop
- Your teen shows a loss of interest in activities and hobbies
- Your teen changes friends, appearance, or behavior
- Your teen's patterns of eating or sleeping are disrupted
• Your teen visits pro-drug sites on the internet

• You find cough, cold, or prescription medicines in your child's things, but he or she is not sick

• Medicines disappear from the house or medicine cabinet with no explanation

• Your teen shows signs of possible drug use, such as slurred speech, nausea, vomiting, dilated pupils, sweating, and difficulty walking normally

The CAGE and CRAFFT questions are two more tools to help understand whether someone might be addicted to drugs. These tools are often used by professionals to spot substance abuse. The CAGE questions were created for adults, while the CRAFFT questions were designed for adolescents.

If you suspect your teen is abusing Rx/OTC drugs

If you suspect your teen may be abusing prescription, OTC, or other illicit drugs, they probably are. Take action and talk to him or her about your concerns:

• Do so when your teen is sober and you are calm, if possible. If you need to, give yourself a cooling-off period.

• Let your teen know that you do not approve of drug use or possession. Remember to disapprove of the actions, but love your child.

• Do not make the conversation a lecture.

• Express your love and concern for his or her safety.

• Know the facts and listen to any questions your teen may have as well as any comments they make.

During the talk, ask your teen whether or not he or she is taking drugs. If you do not feel he or she will tell the truth, you might want to take further steps to find out whether drugs are being used. Further steps might include talking with other individuals who often come in contact with your teen such as teachers or parents of your teen's friends.

You may also wish to get help in starting the conversation from another family member, a school guidance counselor, or a family doctor.

For more tips on talking to your child about drug abuse, visit the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. You can also read the Action Guide for Parents.

Seeking help from an expert or treatment center
If you know your child is using drugs, remember that you are not alone. Know, too, that help is out there.

One important first step is getting expert evaluation. Your family doctor, local hospital, or school nurse may be able to refer you to local sources of expert evaluation and treatment. Such sources may include substance abuse centers and treatment facilities. In addition, some mental health treatment facilities evaluate and treat substance abuse problems.

You can also locate sources of help through the Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator from SAMHSA, which lists over 12,000 treatment centers.

Search the locator for treatment centers in your state online, or by calling their toll-free telephone number at: 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357) to find local treatment centers.

Sources of help exist for family members as well. One such source is Al-anon, which offers support groups providing help and hope for the family members and friends of alcohol users. These support groups can be very helpful for the family members and friends of drug users too. Find Al-anon meetings in your area online.

If you know that your child is using prescription, OTC, or other illicit drugs — or suspect that he or she may be — take action. While this is surely a trying and scary period of time, know that many other parents have gone through similar experiences, taken action, and seen good results.

Resources

OTC Drugs

• Legal but Lethal: The Danger of Abusing Over-the-Counter Drugs

Prescription Drugs

• How Do Kids Get Prescription Drugs?

• A Prescription for Danger - Use of Painkillers on the Rise

Talking to Your Teen about Drug Abuse

• The Partnership for a Drug-Free America Action Guide for Parents

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