



# Prescription Drug Misuse Among Teens: What Parents Should Know

Prescription drug misuse has emerged as one of the top teen substance use trends in 2025, according to the Partnership to End Addiction. Many young people believe prescription medications are safer than other substances because they are prescribed by medical professionals. However, medications can be dangerous when taken incorrectly, taken by someone for whom they were not intended, or purchased from an unauthorized or illegal source.

This newsletter provides an overview of the issue, explains how teens may access these medications, and offers tips on how to start conversations with young people in your life.

## How Prevalent is Prescription Drug Misuse Among Teens?

According to the annual national survey, Monitoring the Future, about 0.8% of adolescents aged 12–17 misused prescription stimulants in the past year, representing roughly 203,000 young people in the U.S. Stimulant medications, such as Adderall and other ADHD treatments, are among the most misused prescription drugs by teens. Some young people view them as “study drugs” that improve focus or academic performance, without fully understanding the potential risks.

Even though the percentages may seem small, the consequences can be serious. Misusing prescription medications can lead to:

- Heart problems and high blood pressure
- Sleep disturbances and anxiety
- Dependence or addiction
- Dangerous interactions with alcohol or other drugs
- Death if laced with a substance such as fentanyl

## Where Are Young People Accessing Prescription Medications?

Prescription medications are often available in homes and among peer groups, making it easier for misuse to occur without parents immediately noticing.

Common sources of these medications include:

1. **Family medicine cabinets:** Unused or leftover medications kept at home are one of the most common sources.
2. **Friends or classmates:** Students sometimes share or sell medications prescribed for ADHD or other conditions.
3. **Online sources:** Social media and online marketplaces can make it easier to obtain medications, delivered to your door without a prescription. The social media app, Snapchat, which is widely popular with young people has received the most scrutiny as being a site where dealers are present, but they are on other sites as well.

## The DEA Campaign – One Pill Can Kill

Unsuspecting young people often believe they are purchasing a prescription drug when they purchase it from a dealer, either online or in person. They may be unaware that these are often fake pills that may be laced with fentanyl, and they may unknowingly fall victim to fentanyl poisoning. The fake prescription pills are made to look exactly like the real thing. There is no way to tell them apart. They are also being produced in rainbow colors, which seem more like candy and appeal to young people.

The DEA has developed the “One Pill Can Kill” campaign with resources for parents. Please visit their website, <https://www.dea.gov/onepill>.



## What Parents & Caregivers Can Do

Never has it been this dangerous to experiment with a drug. There are several practical steps adults can take to reduce the risk of misuse.

### Talk About it!

Talking with teens about substance use can feel uncomfortable, but open communication is one of the most effective prevention tools.

### Start early and keep conversations ongoing

- Discuss medication safety before issues arise. Short, regular conversations are often more effective than one “big talk.”

### Emphasize safety, not punishment

- Focus on health and safety rather than consequences alone.
- Teens are more likely to listen when they feel respected and understood.

### Correct Common Myths

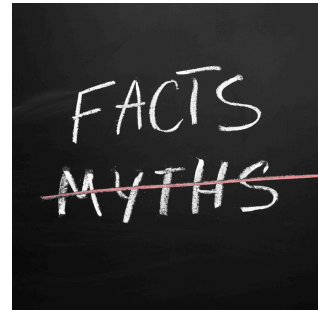
Explain that:

- Prescription medications are only safe when used as prescribed
- Taking someone else’s medication is both illegal and dangerous
- Stimulants can cause serious health risks if misused

### Ask open-ended questions

These questions help teens share their experiences without feeling judged.

- “Have you ever heard students talk about using study drugs?”
- “What do kids at school think about medications like Adderall?”
- “Do you know anyone who has been offered prescription pills?”



## Monitor medications at home

Keep track of prescription quantities and store medications securely.

### Dispose of unused medications

Use community drug take-back programs or pharmacy disposal options. Find a location to drop off prescription medications [here](#).

## Watch for warning signs

Possible signs of misuse may include:

- Increased secrecy
- Declining academic performance
- Unusual bursts of energy or agitation

## Seek Help if Needed

If you suspect misuse, talk with a healthcare provider, school counselor, or substance use professional.



## Additional resources:

<https://candorhealthed.org/parent-information/family-resources/substance-use-prevention-resources/>  
<https://www.dea.gov/onepill>  
<https://candorhealthed.org/substance-use-prevention-portal/>  
<https://drugfree.org/>

### Funded in whole or in part by:

Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Substance Use Prevention and Recovery, through a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration



Chicago High Intensity  
Drug Trafficking Areas

