



# What Parents Need to Know About Prescription Drug Abuse



Office of District Attorney Jonathan W. Blodgett



Jonathan W. Blodgett,  
Essex District Attorney

## A Message From the District Attorney

**Prescription drug abuse is a growing problem.**

According to a 2013 study by the Drug Enforcement Administration, prescription drug abuse continues to be the nation's fastest growing drug problem. Americans are abusing prescription drugs at a higher prevalence rate than any illicit drug except marijuana.\*

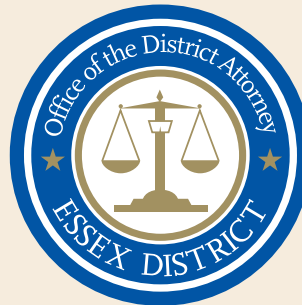
As District Attorney, I am often approached by citizens who share with me heartbreaking stories of lives lost or destroyed as a result of drug abuse. The stories frequently begin with a teen who began using a prescription drug illegally because he didn't know it was dangerous. Unfortunately, the stories often end with tragic results. Either the teen became addicted to the prescription and switched to using other illegal drugs such as cocaine or heroin, or lost his life after an overdose. These sad stories usually end with, "I wish I had known more...."

For this reason, my office has prepared this brochure. Taking prescription medication in a manner not prescribed by a doctor (non-medical use) is illegal, dangerous, and sometimes deadly. Please review this information and share it with those around you. You could save someone's life.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan W. Blodgett". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Jonathan W. Blodgett, Essex District Attorney

*\*2013 National Drug Threat Assessment Summary, US Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration*





Many teens believe that prescription drugs are safe because they are prescribed by a doctor. Teens often start using prescription drugs to fit in with their friends or to get high.

**Without careful monitoring, teens might become addicted to valid prescriptions.**



### **It's the Law!**

Using a prescription drug in a way that is not prescribed is illegal.

If your teenager has prescription drugs that are not his, he could be arrested for illegal possession of drugs.

If your teenager gives her prescription drugs to someone else, she could be charged with illegal distribution of a controlled substance.

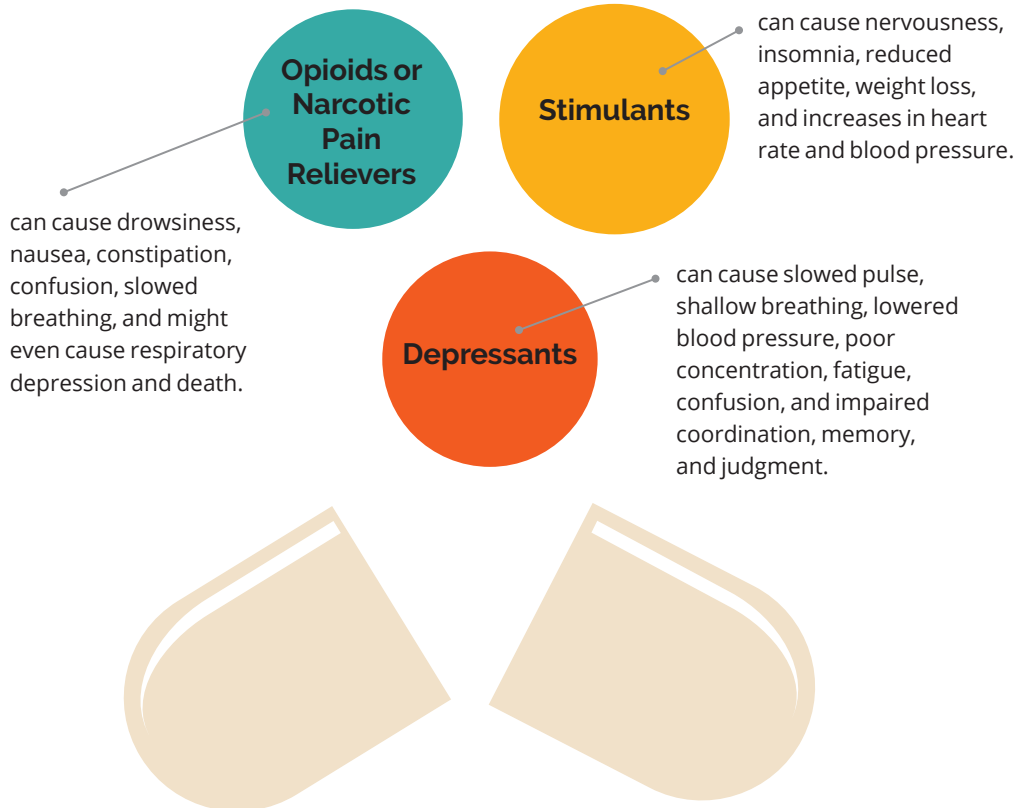
Illegal distribution of a drug on or near school property could result in stiff penalties and, in some cases, a mandatory jail sentence.

## Where Do Teens Get Prescription Drugs?

Teens can easily obtain prescription drugs in their own homes and in friends' homes. In addition, teens often report they are given the drugs by friends who have a prescription medication.



## Symptoms of Prescription Drugs Include:



## Signs That a Teen Might Be Using Drugs Include:

- ❑ Changes in school performance
- ❑ Change in friends
- ❑ Loss of interest in sports, music, or other favorite activities
- ❑ Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- ❑ Lack of personal grooming
- ❑ Hostile, uncooperative behavior
- ❑ Frequently late for curfew
- ❑ Red-rimmed eyes and a runny nose, but no allergies or cold
- ❑ Money, prescription drugs, or cough medicine are disappearing

## Fact:

Teens who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are

**50% less**




less likely to use drugs.

# Parents Are the Most Powerful Influence in Their Teenager's Life. What Can Parents Do to Prevent Drug Abuse?

## TAKE ACTION.

According to the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, teens who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are 50 percent less likely to use drugs.

Make sure teens understand that:

-  **Narcotic drugs**, when used improperly, have physical and psychological effects similar to heroin.
-  **Prescription medications** should be used only under a doctor's supervision. It is not safe to use someone else's prescription drugs. Taking another person's prescription drugs may be just as dangerous as using illicit drugs or alcohol.
-  **Narcotic pain relievers and other prescription drugs** can be highly addictive and potentially deadly, and must be taken only under a doctor's care.

With more than half of teens reporting that prescription drugs are easy to obtain, parents should follow these guidelines:

- Safeguard all prescription medications in your home.
- When a family member receives a prescription, ask the doctor or pharmacist if the medication has the potential for abuse.
- If your teen must take a prescription during school hours, arrange for him to receive it from the school nurse.
- Dispose of unused medications safely and quickly.

Communication with teens can be challenging. It is important to remain clear and consistent.

**BE AVAILABLE AND REMAIN OPEN.**  
**IF YOU SENSE THAT SOMETHING IS WRONG, TAKE ACTION.**

# Types of Prescription Drugs

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the following categories of prescription medications are some of the most commonly abused:



**Narcotic Pain Medications** (opioids) are prescribed to manage chronic or severe pain. Brand and generic names include: Fentanyl (Duragesic), Demerol (Meperidine), Dilaudid (Hydromorphone), OxyContin and Percocet (Oxycodone), and Vicodin (Hydrocodone).



**Stimulants** are prescribed to treat conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Brand and generic names include: Adderall (Amphetamine and Dextroamphetamine), Dexedrine (Dextroamphetamine), and Ritalin and Concerta (Methylphenadite).



**Depressants** are prescribed to treat conditions such as anxiety, acute stress reaction, panic attacks, stress, and sleep disorders. Brand and generic names include: Ativan (Lorazepam), Nembutal (Pentobarbital Sodium), Valium (Diazepam), Xanax (Alprazolam), and Klonopin (Clonazepam).

*While these are currently the most commonly abused prescription drugs, it is important to remain informed of the latest drug trends because they are always changing.*

## Prescription Drug Use May Lead to Illegal Drug Use

According to the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids and the Medicine Abuse Project,



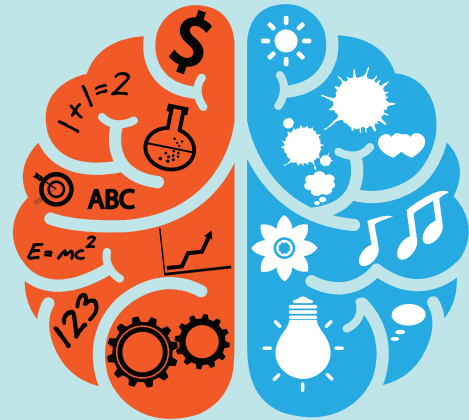
"Teen abuse of prescription pain medicine (also known as opioids) usually starts in two ways.

**1** Some teens start abusing it at a party with friends...

**2** Others start taking it legitimately when prescribed by a doctor after an injury or dental procedure — but in some cases, legitimate use turns to dependence, abuse, addiction, and then heroin use."

nearly half of the young people who inject heroin started by abusing prescription drugs.

## Why Do Some Teens Become Addicted?



Some research indicates that brain development is still in progress during adolescence; introducing drugs during this period of development may cause brain changes that have profound and long-lasting consequences.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, "No single factor can predict whether a person will become addicted to drugs. Risk for addiction is influenced by a combination of factors that include individual biology, social environment, and age or stage of development."

Teens who use drugs or alcohol before age 14 are more likely to become addicted or to suffer from mental and physical health issues.

## Help is Available!

If you are concerned about yourself, a friend, or family member, who might be misusing prescriptions, alcohol, or other drugs, please call for information or treatment options:

### Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline

1-800-327-5050 [www.helpline-online.com](http://www.helpline-online.com)

For more information, check the following websites:

#### Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services

[www.mass.gov/parentpower](http://www.mass.gov/parentpower)

[www.mass.gov/opioids](http://www.mass.gov/opioids)

#### Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse

[www.mass.gov/maclearinghouse](http://www.mass.gov/maclearinghouse)

#### The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids

[www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

#### National Institute on Drug Abuse

[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

[www.teens.drugabuse.gov](http://www.teens.drugabuse.gov)



#### Office of District Attorney Jonathan W. Blodgett

Ten Federal Street

Salem, MA 01970

(978) 745-6610

[www.mass.gov/essexda](http://www.mass.gov/essexda)