



Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula®  
**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES**  
 Clint Eastwood Youth Program



## Pharm'n

The most dramatic increase in recreational use of prescription drugs is among 12- to 25-year-olds. Teens as young as eighth grade are using prescription medications for non-medical reasons — and the list of what they are using is long: OxyContin®, Vicodin®, tranquilizers, (Valium®, Xanax®), sedatives/barbiturates, (Amytal®, Nembutal®), amphetamines, (Ritalin®, Benzedrine®), cold medications, anti-anxiety drugs, and more.

While teens may not have the money for street drugs, or be willing to take the risks involved in purchasing and using them, they know they can easily find a cheap high in their home (or a friend's) medicine cabinet — usually without being caught. Unfortunately, parents are often unaware of this recreational drug use and the potential dangers. Drug education programs usually focus on illegal drugs. Parents also talk about drugs like marijuana, ecstasy, and cocaine, but don't typically don't think to talk with their children about cough syrup, cold pills, and other familiar medications.

### Warning signs of teen drug use

- Changes in interests, activities
- Altered sleeping patterns
- Changes in friends, appearance, hygiene, or behavior
- Negative changes in school performance, such as missing school or declining grades
- Increased secrecy about activities or possessions
- Missing medications from the medicine cabinet, especially cough and cold preparations
- Empty cough syrup bottles or cold medicine blister packs among personal effects or in the car
- Changes in conversations with friends, increased secrecy, or talking in "coded" language
- Visits to pro-drug internet sites that have information about how to obtain and use common drugs to get high

### How to talk to your teen about drugs

- Wait for a time when neither of you will be rushed. A drive or other activities where you are not face to face are often easier times to talk about charged issues
- The easiest way to open this conversation is . . . (OK, I know you're waiting for the magic conversation starter, it's not going happen). There is no magic answer because our children and parenting styles differ. You know your child best and know what they are likely to react to, and what has a chance of getting their attention. Try whatever normally works best with your child around sensitive topics (sex, curfew, grades, love interests). How did you ask your child what he or she knows about sex?
- Sometimes it's good to use a situation you read about or saw on television as a jumping-off point.
- Remember, the purpose of talking is to get and to give information. Be open, be non-judgmental, and LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN —this is not the time to get upset!
- If you fear your child is using, ask, explain why you are concerned. ("Penelope, over the last several weeks I've noticed a major change in your behavior, can you tell me what is going on for you? Are you using any drugs/alcohol? Or medications like cold medicine or the Vicodin the doctor prescribed?")
- Expect denial or anger from your teen.

- Express concern and caring.
- Let your child know that you can be counted on for support, that you will seek treatment if needed but will always be there.
- Conversations about drug/alcohol use need to happen over and over again, and in many ways.

### **Pharm parties: Fact or fiction?**

“Pharm parties” (“pharm” is short for “pharmaceuticals”), are an opportunity for teens to contribute to and partake of “bowls and baggies of random pills.” A 2006 article quoted the research director of communications for the Hazelden Foundation: “Five million kids take prescription drugs every day for behavior disorders. . . . It’s not unusual for kids to share pills with their friends.” Pharm parties are “simply everyone pooling whatever pills they have together and having a good time on a Saturday night.”

### **Don’t make it easy for your teens to have access to medications or unlimited funds.**

- Know where your children are and who they’re with.
- Check in with them when they come home.
- Monitor home supplies of alcohol and drugs (both over-the-counter and prescription medications).
- Talk to your kids (not at them). Keep the lines of communication open.

### **The perils of prescription drug use**

Prescription drugs are everywhere — in the medicine cabinet at home and at friends’ houses — and on the internet.

Many teens do not believe there are risks involved with prescription and over-the-counter drug use because these medications are readily available, easily accessible, and have been given to them by their parents for illnesses, pain, etc. This visibility and previous use may make these drugs appear “safe” or harmless.

Unfortunately, many teens do not understand that it can be just as risky to fool around with legal drugs as with the illegal ones. Though usually safe when taken as directed under a doctor’s supervision, prescription meds can be harmful — even deadly — when used recreationally or in excess.

### **Abusing legal drugs can lead to many of the same severe consequences as using illegal drugs. Some of the most common problems include:**

- physical injury
- impaired judgment
- emotional problems
- addiction
- traffic accidents/loss of driver’s license
- problems in school, possibly leading to loss of college scholarships/admission

If you are concerned that someone you care about is using drugs or alcohol, call us. We’re here to help.

**This information is brought to you by Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula’s Clint Eastwood Youth Program, providing a structured program to treat drug and alcohol abuse as well as mental health problems.**

**For more information or to schedule a free screening, please call 373-0924 or 800-528-8080**

