



# Taking ACTION to prevent & address PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE



EDUCATE *before*  
**YOU MEDICATE**

The NCPIC  
Coalition-working  
together to promote  
safe medicine use

National Council on Patient Information and Education  
[www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org)



## A Resource Kit for America's College Campuses

### Letter to Parents

*The following letter is intended to help inform parents about the dangers of prescription drug abuse, the steps being taken to address the problem on campus, signs and symptoms they can watch for and what to do if they know or suspect that their child is abusing prescription medications. Place on university or organization letterhead.*

Dear Parents:

For many students—notably first-year/freshman—college is the first time that they have ventured away from home. They often find themselves up against tough decisions—one of which is standing up to pressure to do drugs and consume alcohol. [INSERT school name] is committed to providing a safe environment for personal growth and learning, which is why we are sending you this letter.

While alcohol abuse and binge drinking still top the list of substance abuse problems among college students, the misuse and abuse of prescription drugs—the very ones found in medicine cabinets across the country—is a growing and serious problem on college campuses. In fact, college-aged youth have among the highest rates of prescription drug abuse.

- College students misuse **stimulants** (Adderall, Concerta, Ritalin) to “get in the zone” or pull all night study sessions—a habit that is most likely to begin in college. Full-time college students are twice as likely to use a prescription stimulant for non-medical reasons compared to those who aren't in college or are only part-time.
- College-age students are also misusing **pain relievers** (OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin), **tranquilizers** and **sedatives** (Valium, Xanax) recreationally to get high or to help them cope with the academic stress and social pressures of college life.
- These students are also more likely to engage in other risky behaviors like binge drinking and experimenting with marijuana, cocaine and other prescription drugs.
- Mixing prescription medications with alcohol or other drugs or crushing or snorting pills to maximize their effects—which some college students do—can lead to permanent organ damage, a stroke, heart attack, overdose and even death.

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Regardless of the reasons, taking these medications without a prescription or medical oversight of the risks or using them in a manner or at a dose not advised by a health care provider to amplify their effects puts students' health and safety at risk.

Unfortunately, when confronted with the issue of substance abuse, many parents are quick to say "not my child." But once away from home, students are subject to the temptations and demands of college life without parental supervision and support. Even the best and brightest can feel the pressure to fit in socially and excel academically. Studies consistently show that teens and college-age kids think prescription medications are a safer alternative to illicit street drugs like cocaine or heroin. Many may not even know that they are doing anything wrong when they pop a friend's Percocet to relieve a headache or take Adderall to cram for exams all night. But doing so is not only dangerous, it is also illegal to take someone else's controlled prescription medicine.

[INSERT SCHOOL NAME] is adapting a new resource kit from the National Council on Patient Information and Education ([www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org)) to raise awareness of the dangers of misusing and abusing prescription medications and provide tips for seeking advice and guidance about treatment options if needed. Some of the planned activities include:

### [LIST ACTIVITIES]

While [INSERT SCHOOL NAME] is working to promote awareness about the risks and address the abuse of prescription medications on campus, parents are on the front lines to educate and protect children from the dangers of substance abuse. There are some simple things you can do to help protect your child.

## #1 Stay Engaged with Your Child

Find ways to talk regularly with your child about his/her emotional wellbeing and adjustment to college life. This can go a long way to help buoy their confidence to "do the best they can" when juggling academic and social demands. Suggest healthy ways to handle stress.

## #2 Take Precautions

If you or someone else in the family takes one of these types of prescription medications for legitimate medical reasons:

- Keep your medications in a safe place, preferably locked up and out of sight.
- Pick a few times each year to properly dispose of any unneeded or expired medications; don't save them for a rainy day. For instructions on how to best get rid of these medications, talk with your pharmacist or follow any specific disposal information on the patient information sheet that accompanies your medication. You might also visit **Smart Rx Disposal** at [www.smarxtdisposal.net](http://www.smarxtdisposal.net) and the FDA website at [www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm101653.htm](http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm101653.htm).
- If you notice that pills or bottles are missing, take the necessary steps to talk with your child and provide supportive counsel.

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### #3 Know What to Look For

- Read the enclosed information on the ["Warning Signs and Symptoms for Prescription Drug Abuse"](#)

### #4 Take Action

- If you suspect your child—or a friend of your child—is abusing prescription medicines, there is help. Visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's online treatment center locator at [www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov) or call the telephone hotline at 800-662-HELP (4357). Refer to [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org) for a list of other resources that can help.

For more information, read the ["Taking Action to Prevent and Address Prescription Drug Abuse"](#) resource kit for college campuses at [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org) or [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov).

Sincerely,

[TO BE SIGNED BY STUDENT GOVT LEADER, DIRECTOR OF STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES, OR OTHER]

## WARNING SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Because college students are frequently exposed to opportunities to experiment with, misuse and abuse so many different types of prescriptions drugs—from stimulants and pain relievers to anti-depressants and tranquilizers—it can be difficult to know what signs to watch for. Each medication has different effects, and mixing these drugs with alcohol and other drugs is very dangerous and can lead to permanent organ damage and even death.

Know the signs that might signal prescription drug abuse.

### Physical Signs and Symptoms

Depending on the drug misused or abused you may notice the following.

**Stimulants** are prescribed to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or narcolepsy; these medications, which include **Adderall**, **Concerta** and **Ritalin** speed up brain activity causing increased alertness, attention, and energy that comes with elevated blood pressure, increased heart rate and breathing.

Hyperactivity

Shaking

Sweating

Dilated pupils

Fast or irregular heart beat

Elevated body temperature

Seizures

Paranoia/nervousness

Repetitive behaviors

Loss of appetite or sudden and unexplained weight loss

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**Sedatives/depressants** are prescribed to treat anxiety, panic attacks and sleep disorders; these medications (**Valium, Xanax, Ambien** are examples) slow down or “depress” the functions of the brain and central nervous system.

Loss of coordination  
Respiratory depression  
Slowed reflexes

Slurred speech  
Coma

**Opioid analgesics** like **Vicodin, OxyContin** and **Percocet** are prescribed to treat moderate-to-severe pain; these medications can block pain messages from reaching the brain; they can also give someone a feeling of euphoria.

Sleep deprivation or “nodding”  
Pinpoint/constricted pupils, watery or droopy eyes  
Nausea, vomiting, constipation  
Slow slurred speech

Slow gait  
Dry skin, itching, skin infections  
Constant flu-like symptoms  
Track marks (bruised skin around injection site)

### Behavioral Signs

Behavior changes may also include:

- Sudden mood changes, including irritability, negative attitude, personality change
- Extreme changes in groups of friends or hangout locations
- Forgetfulness or clumsiness
- Lying or being deceitful, skipping classes, avoiding eye contact
- Losing interest in personal appearance, extracurricular activities or sports
- “Munchies” or sudden changes in appetite
- Unusually poor performance in school, on the field, in debate club or other activities
- Borrowing money or having extra cash
- Acting especially angry or abusive, or engaging in reckless behavior

For more information, see Partnership for a Drug Free America's website on signs of drug abuse at <http://www.theantidrug.com/drug-information/otc-prescription-drug-abuse/signs-prescription-drug-abuse.aspx>.