

Prescription Drug Misuse

CONVERSATION STARTER

Prescription drug misuse is one of the fastest-growing drug problems in the United States.¹ College campuses are not immune from these challenges. This educational poster promotes conversations around prescription misuse by addressing misperceptions about buying or taking a friend's prescribed medication.

Show the educational poster to the chapter. This can be displayed in a PowerPoint presentation or by showing the physical copy of the poster.

INTRODUCTION

Let's begin our conversation with findings from the 2018 College Prescription Drug Study²:

- 51% of college students who misuse prescription pain medications (e.g. Vicodin®, Lorcet®, Norco®) get them from their friends.
- 57% of college students who misuse prescription sedatives (e.g. Xanax®, Klonopin®, Valium®) get them from their friends.
- 79% of college students who misuse prescription stimulants (e.g. Ritalin®, Adderall®, Dexedrine®) get them from their friends.
- Participants also reported experiencing depression, memory loss and regret as a result of abusing prescription medicine.

Do these statistics surprise you?

One of the negative consequences that often arises from abusing prescription medications is the strain it places on the friend or family member you are pressuring to provide or sell you their prescribed medicine. Consider the potentially significant health consequences for a diabetic if they would end up short on their insulin supply due to providing some of their insulin to a friend. Likewise, a person prescribed Adderall® due to a diagnosed ADHD condition may perform poorly on a test or be unable to complete a major project as a result of being short on their prescribed Adderall medicine due to selling or giving some of it away to a friend.

Regarding stimulant medications, 79% of college students who report misusing stimulants use them to study or improve grades². However, numerous research studies have found students perform worse academically when engaged in non-prescribed use of stimulants compared to those students who do not use stimulants^{3,4}.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following discussion questions are adapted from the [GenerationRx educational materials](#) for college students. Generation Rx's mission is to educate people of all ages about the potential dangers of misusing prescription medications.

Review these discussion questions with the chapter.

What problems may arise from misusing prescription medications?

- *Share the following if not mentioned:*
 - **Health-related consequences** – The most tragic consequences of prescription drug misuse affect our health, including drug overdose, which is the leading cause of accidental death in the United States. Emergency department visits and drug addiction treatment admissions related to medication misuse have also escalated in recent years.
 - **Legal consequences** – Federal law prohibits the possession of the types of medications which are most often misused without a prescription.
 - **Social consequences** – The misuse of medications can affect your family and friends, your job, your education, your finances and much more.

If a friend were to ask you to share or sell your prescription medicine, how could you effectively say no?

- *Share the following if not mentioned:*
 - **Give a reason** – “No way, that’s illegal! I do not need to chance getting a drug-related offense on my record.”
 - **Share your health needs** – “I really need this medicine. I only have enough to get me through the next week.”
 - **Mention positive alternatives** – “No...these pills can cause some serious side effects. If you need help studying, how about we go the library tonight and study together?”

How do you think it makes your friend feel when you ask for their medication? By asking a friend (or even a stranger) for their prescription medication, we put them in an incredibly vulnerable and uncomfortable position. For example, if you ask someone for their prescription medicine, they often perceive that request as you are:

- Using your friendship to obtain drugs. Your friend may begin to question whether your friendship is solely based on you gaining access to their medication.
- Disrespecting their health needs. Your friend has a legitimate need for their medication – if they cannot take their medication as instructed, their health is jeopardized.

- Putting them at risk for getting in trouble. Even if your friend simply gives (versus sells) you the medication, providing “controlled substances” to others without a prescription is illegal.

How can someone safely store or dispose of their medication to ensure others do not access it?

- *Share the following if not mentioned:*
 - **Storage** – When prescribed a medication, store it in a secure location such as a lock-box, medication safe or other lockable space. Avoid storage places where children and others have easy access, such as drawers, nightstands or counters/cabinets.
 - **Disposal** – Once finished with a prescription medication, you have three options for safely disposing of any extra:
 - Place the medication in a drug drop box. To find a drop box in your area, visit: <https://www.rxdrugdropbox.org/>.
 - Take advantage of community drug take-back programs that allow the public to bring unused medications to a central location for proper disposal. Call your local law enforcement agency or ask your pharmacist to see if a take-back program is available in your community.
 - Dispose of the medication at home.

If you suspect someone has overdosed on drugs, how can you take action?

- *Share the following if not mentioned:*
 - **First, call 911 immediately.**
 - Second, move the individual to the recovery position (place the individual on their left side with their arms under their head, bending their right leg to prevent them from rolling onto their stomach). This position is designed to prevent suffocation if the individual vomits.
 - Third, in the event of an opioid overdose, if available and a person with proper training is present, administer naloxone.
 - Lastly, stay with the individual until help arrives.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can we as a chapter support safe medication practices within our chapter and community?
- What are the current accountability mechanisms in place if a member chooses to sell or illegally use prescription medication? Are those mechanisms adequate to influence behavior?
- What ongoing education should we be providing members on this topic?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [GenerationRx “Safe Medication Practices for Life” workshop](#)
 - Located on the VP Risk Management page of the Resource Center
- [College Prescription Drug Study](#)
- [FDA Guidance on Disposal of Unused Medicines](#)
- [Organizing a Medication Disposal Day for Your Community](#)

SOURCES

¹Arria, A. Wagley, G. Addressing college drinking and drug use. 2019.

²<https://cssl.osu.edu/posts/632320bc-704d-4eef-8bcb-87c83019f2e9/documents/cpds-key-findings-2018.pdf>

³Arria et al. “Do college students improve their grades by using prescription stimulants nonmedically?” *Addictive Behaviors*, vol. 65, 2017, pp. 245-249.

⁴<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/study-drug-dangers>