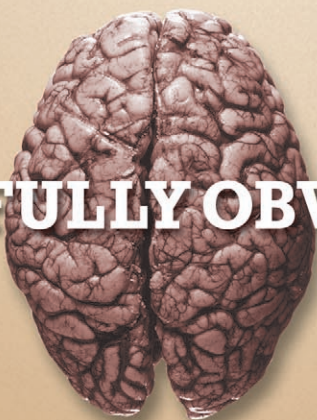


# THE EFFECTS OF ABUSING PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

*are*

**PAINFULLY OBVIOUS**



**Leader's Guide**

A Community Service of Purdue Pharma L.P.

It's not news that kids experiment with drugs. But recently, kids have found that some of the easiest drugs to get access to are right in their home –

**Equating the results of prescription drug abuse with those of “hard drug” abuse (like heroin or crack) is a key to getting kids to understand the real dangers of prescription drug abuse.**

prescription medications.

Some of the drugs more commonly abused are tranquilizers, steroids, stimulants, and painkillers. Brand names include Xanax®, Ritalin®, Valium®, Vicodin®, Lorcet®, Percocet®, OxyContin®, and Soma®.

Clearly, prescription medications are invaluable for people with certain medical conditions that need these medications to manage their conditions. However, they can be deadly when abused. Prescription medications should only be taken by the person for whom they are prescribed.

Kids tend to believe that prescription medications are safer than illegal “street” drugs because they are prescribed by a doctor, approved by the FDA, “clean” (i.e., not mixed with other substances), and “non-addictive” (they think).

**Illustrating how they will lose their dignity and self-respect when abusing prescription drugs connects with a teen's need for acceptance and triggers their fear of alienation from their peers.**

In addition to “popping pills,” kids are abusing these drugs by crushing pills

**Once teens understand the consequences of prescription drug abuse, the reasons not to abuse these drugs become “painfully obvious.”**

and snorting or injecting them to get a quicker, more intense high. The result can be as addictive and dangerous as taking any “illicit” drug.

Importantly, there are also emotional and social consequences to prescription drug

abuse. These seem to be even more relevant to kids than the physical dangers, which they rationalize “will not happen to me.”

## KIDS' BELIEFS ABOUT DRUGS

- Kids believe heroin and crack are some of the “worst” drugs because they are highly addictive, and can kill you or hook you on the first use. Kids also perceive these drugs to be “antisocial”—done alone or with a small group.
- Some drugs, like marijuana, are considered less dangerous and more social because they are perceived to be less addictive and are used with others to “have fun.”
- Most kids have not had a lot of experience with prescription drug abuse. For this reason, kids are generally not sure where abuse of prescription drugs fits on the “danger” scale.
- Kids tend to believe these medications are relatively safe, since they are “legal,” doctor-prescribed, and FDA-approved. However, there is a general feeling that it is somewhat “desperate” to “stoop” to taking someone else’s prescription to get high.
- Kids who have had some experience with prescription drug abuse know that it can have the same horrible results as illicit drug abuse.

## EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

- Kids believe getting addicted to prescription drugs can lead to a loss of dignity and self-respect.
- The severe physical side effects of prescription drug abuse, such as diarrhea, vomiting, dizziness/ passing out, seizures, heavy sweating, and severe shaking, can all lead to public humiliation. This taps a critical emotion in kids that can help prevent abuse—the fear of embarrassment in front of their peers and alienation from them.
- Kids believe addicts lose control of their lives and are driven only by their need to get more drugs. They stop caring about things that were important to them before they got addicted (friends, family, appearance, interests, grades), and lose their individuality.
- Kids believe that addiction can lead them to betray the trust of people close to them, as they will steal, lie, or cheat their friends and family in order to support their habit. They know that once they lose someone’s trust, it is very hard to get it back.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE ACTIVITIES

The companion Discussion Guide provides ideas for activities to help you discuss this issue with kids, and hopefully lead them to understand how prescription drug abuse can affect their lives on an emotional level as well as a physical level. Some ideas include:

- Discuss what doctors consider before prescribing a drug (e.g., patient’s medical condition, height, weight, age, allergies, other medications or food they may consume, other medical conditions they may have, and ability to understand how to take/use so no harm occurs). Have a healthcare professional come talk to the class.
- Compare the “painfully obvious” consequences of prescription drug abuse to other things that are obviously stupid to do (e.g., use tuna fish for deodorant, etc.). Have kids create their own “painfully obvious” posters.
- Have students talk about how becoming addicted to something could affect them; use celebrities as examples of the consequences of drug abuse.
- Discuss how the brain is affected by abusing prescription drugs. Assign an extra-credit report on the brain and how its functions are affected by chemicals.
- Discuss how prescription drug abuse will affect the development of their identity. Talk about self-respect – how it feels to have it, or to lose it.
- Have students tell about times when they betrayed the trust of someone close to them and how it made them feel. How did their relationship with this person suffer?
- You can use the toy brains enclosed in your Youth Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Kit to reward kids for their participation, or give them out to all participants as reminders of the “painfully obvious” message.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

For more information, visit [www.painfullyobvious.com](http://www.painfullyobvious.com) or the following websites:

Partnership for a Drug Free America:  
[www.drugfreeamerica.com](http://www.drugfreeamerica.com)

Office of National Drug Control Policy:  
[www.freevibe.com](http://www.freevibe.com)  
[www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com)

National Institute on Drug Abuse:  
[www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention:  
[www.samhsa.gov/csap/index.htm](http://www.samhsa.gov/csap/index.htm)