After marijuana, the drugs most commonly abused by teens are prescription medications. Teens use these drugs to get high, to “self-medicate” for anxiety or pain or sleep problems, or even to try to improve school performance. Prescription drugs are in easy reach, available in teens’ own homes.

Common Misconceptions about Prescription Drugs

Many adults as well as teens share these dangerous and false beliefs:

- Prescription medications, even when not prescribed for you by a doctor, are much safer than “street drugs”.
- Prescription pain relievers are not addictive.
- Stimulants can improve academic performance, even if you do not have ADHD.

Health Concerns Associated With Teen Prescription Drug Misuse:

- Dependence and addiction (especially to opioids, anti-anxiety drugs and sleep medications)
- Overdose, sometimes fatal (especially to opioids, anti-anxiety drugs and sleep medications)
- Seizures, irregular heartbeat and cardiovascular complications (especially with stimulants)
- Increased risk of suicide

Prescription Drugs Most Commonly Misused by Teens

- Pain relievers (such as Vicodin, OxyContin)
- Sedatives and tranquilizers (such as Valium, Xanax)
- Stimulants (such as Ritalin, Adderall)
- OTC Cold Medications (such as Sudafed, Benadryl)

Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse Among Teens

- Talk with teens about the dangers of prescription drug use, equating them with the dangers of “street drugs.”
- Store medications securely in a locked cabinet. Ask grandparents and others to secure their medications as well.
- Dispose of expired or unused medications safely. A list of Rhode Island prescription drug take-back locations may be found at http://riprc.org/files/2013/09/drugdisposalsites.pdf.

For more information:

- The Medicine Abuse Project/The Partnership at Drugfree.org at medicineabuseproject.org
- Education Before You Medicate, National Council on Patient Information and Education at www.talkaboutrx.org/rx_program.jsp
- SAMHSA’s National Helpline at 800-662-HELP or 800-662-4357.