

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

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Preventing Misuse and Diversion of Medication

Medications can be an important part of treatment for psychiatric and other health disorders. When doctors prescribe medication, they carefully review an individual's personal and family medical history. The medicines that are safe for one person may not be safe for another. There are potential side effects that can pose risks for people who take medications that are not prescribed for them.

Examples of non-prescribed use of medication include misuse and diversion. "Misuse" is using medication in a way other than as prescribed. Examples include taking more medication than prescribed or taking medication to get high. "Diversion" is a term used when medications are directed illegally to a marketplace or to another person without a prescription.

Prescription medications are among the top classes of drugs abused by high school and college students. About 1 in 10 adolescents report trading, selling, or giving away medication that had been prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), pain, sleep, or anxiety. These medications often come from friends and family.

Although misuse and diversion of medications are common, using medications for non-prescribed reasons can cause serious health and legal problems.

Using medication in ways that are not prescribed may:

- Impair judgment and contribute to risky behavior
- Be a sign that a person may have other emotional or behavioral problems (problems which could be helped with appropriate treatment)
- Be a sign that a person has an addiction or is developing an addiction
- Lead to intoxication, overdose or even death

Children and adolescents need their parents' help in order to use medications safely. This is especially important when youth have had problems with alcohol or drugs or take multiple medications.

Suggestions for using medication safely include:

- Take the medication exactly as prescribed
- Store medications safely

- Keep medication in the original child-resistant container
- Make sure medications are stored securely, especially during parties and in college dormitories
- Consider placing all medication in a locked box
- Dispose of medications properly
 - Do not save medication after it is no longer prescribed; instead discard unused medication using proper disposal procedures
 - For a guide to the proper disposal of medications, visit the [FDA's website](#)

Parents and their children should talk openly about using medications safely, diversion and pressures to divert. Parents can:

- Ask their children about whether they have experienced or heard about diversion or misuse of medication
- Remind their children that they should not share their medications because it can be illegal and can put their acquaintances at risk for harm
- Encourage their children not to give in to peer pressure to use medications belonging to other people. This can be dangerous.

If you suspect your child is misusing or diverting medication, immediately talk with your child and your child's doctor. Your child's doctor can also help figure out next steps if someone else in the family is misusing or diverting medication. Explore and identify local resources to help the person deal with the problem and consider an evaluation by a trained mental health professional. Help your child understand that diversion of medications is a significant issue that may have serious health and legal consequences. Taking medications safely as prescribed is an important part of managing and maintaining health.

For additional information, visit the AACAP Substance Abuse Resource Center and ***Facts for Families***:

[#3 Teens: Alcohol and Other Drugs](#)

[#41 Substance Abuse Treatment for Children and Adolescents: Questions to Ask](#)

[#21 Psychiatric Medication for Children and Adolescents Part I – How are Medications Used](#)

[#29 Psychiatric Medication for Children and Adolescents Part II – Types of Medications](#)

[#51 Psychiatric Medications for Children and Adolescents Part III: Questions to Ask](#)

Additional Resources:

[Monitoring the Future](#)

[NIDA: Common Misconceptions](#)

[FDA: Disposal of Unused Medicines](#)

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