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Parent Alert: Prescription Drug Abuse

Oregon has the highest rate of prescription drug abuse among 15- to 19-year-olds nationwide - approximately 4% of 8th Graders and 7% of 11th Graders according to the Oregon Healthy Teens Survey. This is especially troubling because youth are more likely than young adults to become dependent on prescription drugs. Moreover, teens who report abusing prescription drugs are twice as likely to use alcohol; 5 times as likely to use marijuana; 12 times as likely to use heroin; 15 times as likely to use ecstasy and 21 times as likely to use cocaine. See www.casacolumbia.org

There are three main types of prescription drugs that are particularly popular among teens: central nervous system depressants like Xanax and Valium (used for their calming effect), opioids such as OxyContin, Percocet and Vicodin (used for the "buzz" effect), and stimulants such as Ritalin, Strattera and Adderall (used as performance enhancing drugs to stay alert longer to do homework).

Back to School Issue

The ABC's of Bullying

Dear Parents,

While most of our children are looking forward to meeting up with friends when the new school year starts, some are dreading the return to school due to the fear of being bullied. The following quote from an adult who was bullied as a child highlights the profound and lasting impact bullying can have: "The threats, the snickers behind my back - I got this sick feeling in my stomach whenever I heard them, and I carried that feeling around with me like a weight. I woke up scared about the coming day and went to sleep dreading tomorrow."

Unfortunately, this person's feelings are all too common. According to a recent study, among children under 17, one in five reports being physically bullied and three in ten report being teased or emotionally bullied. With text messaging and Facebook usage on the rise, one in ten report having been the victim of Internet harassment - and that number is likely to go up. These numbers are particularly alarming because a large number of bullying incidents are unreported.

The good news is that bullying - defined as physical or verbal aggressive behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power - can be prevented. Parents play a huge role, both in helping their kids learn to treat others with respect and in being resilient when they are the target of a bully. We hope the information in this issue of PARENTLink will help you and your child cope successfully with these challenges.

Sincerely,
Oregon Partnership
Emily Moser, Director of Parenting Programs
Diane Murray-Fleck, Parents Teaching Prevention Program Coordinator
Rosemary Schwimmer, Parenting for Prevention Program Coordinator

Bullying Prevention: Parents can forge solutions and help their child be resilient to bullying

Bullying takes many forms - from teasing and name-calling to threats, hitting, and leaving peers out of activities and groups, just to name a few. But regardless of the form bullying takes, the behavior is harmful and poses a serious situation. It is important that you take steps to protect your child from bullying.

If your teen is abusing prescription drugs, there is a high probability that those drugs came from your own medicine cabinet or from a friend. Here are some parenting strategies :

- Lock up your medications. Prescription drug lock-boxes are available on line.
- Dispose of unwanted or unused drugs. Look for "drug take back" collection days in your local community.
- Talk to your teens and address the perception that prescription drugs are "safer" than illicit drugs.
- Watch for signs that your teen may be abusing prescription medications: declining grades, mood swings, increasing aggressive behavior, lack of money (since spending money is being used to buy drugs).

Getting help for teen prescription drug abuse is very important. Contact your pediatrician for advice.

Special Event Prescription Drug Abuse Education

The U.S. Attorney's Office and Oregon Partnership are hosting an Rx Summit for educators designed to address the issues surrounding teen prescription drug abuse, including curriculum, policy, parent involvement and participation in local take-back events. For more information, please go to www.oregonrxsummit.org.

How you can best respond when your child is being bullied:

Listen and ask questions. Ask your child to describe the bullying, where and when it happened, and who may have witnessed it - both youth and adults. Ask them to share their feelings with you. Let your child know that telling you what happened is not tattling.

Empathize. Thank your child for talking with you about it. Let them know that by doing so they started the process to address the situation. Reassure them that bullying is wrong and not their fault, and that they are not alone. Share a personal story with your child – we all have been the victim of a bully at one time or another – so that they can better understand that it happens to everyone.

Stay calm. A parent's protective instincts rightly kick into high gear when they learn their child has been bullied. As difficult as it is, take some time to settle your emotions in whatever way works for you - whether it's simply taking a few minutes alone to collect yourself, or talking with your spouse or partner. Doing so will help you devise the best response to the situation, instead of forging ahead with a knee-jerk reaction that may backfire and lead to further bullying of your child.

Ask for your child's input on solutions and communicate a plan. Ask your child for their ideas about how to handle the situation and let them know your thoughts about how it can be addressed. Your child will likely be fearful that any action on your part will only make the situation worse, so including them in the plan and reassuring them that they will be protected is extremely important.

Contact your child's teacher or principal and offer to be part of the solution. Report everything you know about the bullying - the who, what, when and where. Offer your help to stop it. Find out the school or school district's policy and process when it comes to bullying situations, and do your best to work within the established system. Stay connected. Talk with your child and school officials regularly to find out if the bullying has stopped. If it hasn't, do not hesitate to reconnect with school officials. Unfortunately, it may take more than one conversation before the problem is resolved. Do not be afraid to advocate for your child.

How you can help your child be resilient in the face of bullying:

Promote your child's talents and strengths. Support them in their interests and help them discover activities they enjoy. Doing so will build their self-confidence and circle of friends who share their interests.

Accentuate the positive. Get to know your child's friends and encourage them to make friends with peers who are positive influences. Encourage your child to make friends with kids outside of school. For kids who have been bullied, friendships outside of school provide another environment where they have positive relationships.

Just Two Talks

Researchers from Virginia Tech and the University of Washington have demonstrated that a brief, voluntary conversation with an adult led up to a 20 percent decrease in marijuana use for teenagers who frequently use the drug, and that decreased use was still present after a year. Virginia Tech News, June, 2011

Underage Drinking

Teens who drank under adult supervision in the eighth grade reported experiencing more harmful consequences of alcohol use, such as not being able to stop drinking, getting into fights, or having blackouts. By ninth grade, teens in this study who drank occasionally with an adult present were more likely to drink without adult supervision. Findings suggest the importance of a zero-tolerance policy for young teen drinking. Social Development Research Group, June 2011

Dinner, Anyone?

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) has consistently found that the more often children eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs. According to CASA, compared to children who have frequent family dinners (five or more per week), children who have infrequent family dinners (less than three per week) are:

- Twice as likely to have used tobacco

Help your child develop an action plan. As a parent, you obviously can't be everywhere your child goes. Talk with your son or daughter about steps to follow if they are bullied. Some examples include walking away from the situation, immediately seeking out "safe" friends and going to the main office if the bullying happens at school. Talk with your child about the safe adults they can go to if they are bullied, and role-play with them so they feel comfortable talking with an adult.

Ensure a safe haven, and keep talking. Make your home a secure and protective place, and keep the lines of communication open with your child. When it comes to communication, your instinct might be to ask direct questions - "Are you OK?" or "Are you being picked on?" - if you are concerned that they're being bullied. Instead, try making statements based on your observations. Saying, "You're sad today" or "You haven't been playing with the neighborhood kids like you usually do" opens the door for your child to respond and share.

Encourage bullying prevention. Perhaps your child has not been bullied but has witnessed it. Talk with your son or daughter about the fact that bullying is an aggressive, intentional behavior that affects many people and that telling you, a teacher and/or principal is important even if they are not the one being bullied. And, similar to talking with a child who has been bullied, emphasize that reporting it is not the same as tattling. Encourage your child to share with you how they feel having witnessed the behavior. It may be that your child feels a sense of powerlessness, even guilt. Talking through these feelings will help them process what they have experienced.

Many of these concepts were adapted from the federal government's Stop Bullying Now! campaign. To learn more, visit the government website at www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/ers.

What if your child is the bully?

As a parent, the thought of your child being the target of a bully probably makes your stomach turn. But, what if things were reversed? What if your child bullied another youngster? This realization would almost certainly spawn a range of feelings, too - from shock and frustration to disappointment and embarrassment, not to mention concern for your child and worry over your child's peer or peers who bore the brunt of the behavior. But how do you best respond?

Here are a few tips:

Gather your emotions. Take a deep breath and acknowledge how you feel. The prospect of a bullying child isn't easy to come to terms with. If needed, talk with a partner, spouse or friend. Your inclination may be to downplay the situation. After all, we all love our kids and want to believe the best about them. But take the situation seriously, and put together a plan to address it. Giving yourself some time to work through your feelings first increases the chances you'll respond firmly, out of love and concern, rather than from anger.

- Almost twice as likely to have used alcohol
- One and a half times more likely to have used marijuana

Family dinners are the perfect time to connect with your child and is a simple and effective way to keep your kids substance free.

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Get the facts. Ask your youngster details about the situation - the what, who, where and when. They may come right out and talk about it. But, being a kid, they may deny the behavior. If the incident happened at school, and you have not been contacted by your child's teacher or school officials, take the initiative and contact them, as tough as this step is. Doing so will help you get the full picture of what happened, report what you know, communicate your concerns, and understand the school's policies and procedures.

Educate yourself. Learn as much as you can about bullying. According to www.stopbullying.gov, although definitions vary, most agree that bullying involves an imbalance of power (people who bully use their power to control or harm); intent to cause harm; and repetition. Bullying can take many forms: verbal, social (such as spreading rumors or leaving people out on purpose); physical: and cyberbullying via the Internet, mobile phones or other digital technology.

Be clear bullying is not acceptable. Kids thrive with boundaries. Define what bullying is using language your child can relate to, clearly communicate your family's rules against bullying, and help your youngster understand the various ways they can settle disagreements and manage their feelings without bullying. Be consistent with consequences if rules are broken. As your child grows, they'll begin using a cell phone and the Internet. Establish rules about respectful behavior when they communicate in person and electronically.

Ask why and take stock. Talk with your child about what is behind their actions. Is it part of a pattern or sign of a more serious behavioral problem? Have you noticed aggressive behavior at home? The answers can help determine how you address the situation going forward.

Stay tuned in. Know your child's friends. Are they positive influences? How do your child and his or her friends spend their time together? Continually monitor their activities, build networks and communicate regularly with other parents.

Catch your child doing positive things. Praise your child when they have positive interactions with friends and peers, when they make new friends and when they solve problems in a positive way.

Maintain a respectful home. Ensure your home is a place where people and their space are respected. Use your powerful influence as a parent to set a positive example, showing empathy, celebrating differences, and meting out discipline with firmness, consistency and love. The importance of maintaining a respectful home was underscored by a recent study by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that found those involved in bullying - as bullies and/or victims - were more likely to have certain risk factors, including suffering abuse from a family member or witnessing violence at home, compared to people who were neither bullies nor victims.

Just remember that if you face a situation in which your child has bullied a peer, you can navigate it effectively by meeting it head-on, learning all you can, reiterating rules and boundaries, and staying connected to your child and his or her world.

Prevention Education

Oregon Partnership's Education Department is currently scheduling speaking engagements for the 2011-2012 school year including parent presentations, school staff workshops, teacher trainings and classroom discussions. Please contact Rosemary Schwimmer at rschwimmer@orpartnership.org for details about presentation topics, scheduling and fees.

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