

Safe to Tell – Keeping Our Children Safe from Drugs – Part One

At Crimestoppers, we see the ugly side of drugs from the criminal acts performed due to dependency, as well as the vicious greed of those dealers who will murder someone to protect their turf. As parents, we struggle with the fear of losing our children to these risky behaviors and worry how we can prevent them from becoming lost in the world of drug abuse. In this week's article, we hope to draw your attention to some of the trends occurring with our youth and drug and alcohol abuse.

Since the beginning of 2008, 3 local high school students have lost their lives to a drug overdose. During 2007, while there were 44 homicides, there were 143 deaths caused by drug overdoses, according to Patrick Warner, assistant special agent in charge of the USDJ Drug Enforcement Agency. Nationally, and in our area, he says, "the trend is moving towards abuse of pharmaceuticals in youth, with pharmaceuticals becoming the new gateway drug, replacing marijuana."

Tips from our Crimestoppers Safe School Hotline show an increase in the abuse of pharmaceuticals by students, though tips on marijuana remain the primary call we receive from students. Prescription drug abuse generally includes antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, adderall, and pain killers like oxycontin.

Reports by law enforcement also have found there is an alarming return of heroin as a drug of choice by students. Reports on heroin, crack and crystal meth are made much more frequently by adults using the Crimestoppers hotline, as compared to our youth Safe School Hotline. But the overall volume of narcotics tips from both groups has increased significantly in 2007.

There are four predictors of alcohol abuse and dependency, which can sometimes lead to drug abuse, according to Freedom from Chemical Dependency, a leading national prevention organization. These risk factors include family history of addiction; high physical tolerance for alcohol/drugs; positive desire and cravings; how the drugs/alcohol makes you feel and the age at which the onset of drinking occurs. The earlier a child starts drinking, the greater risk for addiction.

The abuse of pharmaceuticals can start as early as 11 or 12 years of age, with the child usually having previously abused other drugs, such as marijuana or alcohol. The ease with which children can obtain these narcotics is alarming. Many times, they take these drugs straight from their parents' medicine cabinets. It is also believed that children may think it is safer to try prescription drugs because they are provided to a person by the medical industry and are not "street/illegal drugs."

The best way that we as parents can fight this problem is by educating ourselves on the current trends involving teens, alcohol and drugs and learn the ways to prevent identify and help children who may try these risky behaviors. In next week's Crimestoppers segment, we will address ways to recognize and prevent possible alcohol and drug abuse in our children and identify places to go for help. To learn more about talking to your child about drugs and alcohol, visit www.fcd.org or JustThinkTwice.com.

