

Talk to Your Kids about Huffing

Inhalant use among our adolescents is on the rise. Approximately 2.6 million teenagers have tried inhalants. Surprisingly the inhalants used are everyday legal substances that we have in our household, schools, or grocery stores. Among our 8th to 12th graders, inhalant use is the 4th most commonly abused substances after alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana. Approximately 1 in 5 kids have reported huffing or sniffing according to the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse. Research has also shown that 22% have died on their first try according to Partnership for a Drug Free America. It should also be noted that 5% of parents do not believe that their child has ever tried inhalants. It is alarming to note that children as young as 6 yr of age have tried inhalants.

We might ask, what posses a child to engage in this behavior? There is a theory that children start huffing in grade school because of peer pressure or low self esteem and believe that the chemicals they inhale won't hurt them. Children also find inhalants easy to acquire. Products that they use include, but are not limited to, air fresheners, cooking spray, markers, glue, paint thinner, gasoline, chloroform, nitrous oxide, polish remover, aerosols, degreasers, correction fluids and felt tip makers. Aerosols that contain propellants and solvents used are deodorants, hair spray, fabric protector sprays, butane lighters, whip cream aerosols or a can of computer duster. There are more than 1,000 different products that can be used for inhalant abuse, so you see this is just part of what can be used. Most of these items are found easily in and around the house.

Ways the adolescents achieve sniffing or huffing include, soaking a rag in the chemical then stuffing the rag into the mouth while continuing to inhale the fumes. Or they may sniff or snort right from a container containing the chemical. Another way would be "bagging" which refers to inhaling from a plastic bag after putting the inhalant into it. When a teenager engages in this activity, the biggest clue would be the odor.

Signs & Symptoms to tell if your child is an abuser:

- slurred speech,
- drunk acting, dizzy
- unusual breath odor
- chemical smell on the clothing
- paint stains on the face
- red eyes
- runny nose
- irritability
- depression
- nausea vomiting, weight loss, nervousness, restlessness, anger
- sores or rashes around the nose or mouth
- dazed appearance

By inhaling the chemicals there are irreversible physical and mental changes to the brain that occur. Inhalant use affects the heart by starving the body for O₂ and that then forces the heart to work harder and faster, making the heart beat irregular. A person will then lose their sense of smell, or possibly experience nausea, nosebleeds, have an unsteady gait or even develop kidney, lung, liver or heart damage. The biggest risk to inhalant use is the possibility of death!

Behaviors to watch for are:

- Having pen or marker near nose
- Smelling their clothing
- Paint or stain markers on the face, fingers or clothing
- Hiding rags, cloths, of empty containers of abused products

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As an adult you may want to be aware of slang terms that the kids might use in talking or may communicate on the internet. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, some slang terms are:

Amys

Boppers

Climax

Gluey

Hardware

Hand cleaner

Locker room

Moon gas

Poor man's pot

Poppers

Snappers.

You as a parent can start speaking with your child about good and bad choices. Find out from your child who their buddies are and what kind of activities they engage in. Be a part of their circle. They are very impressionable starting at a young age. Talk to them early so someone else doesn't influence them first.

As always, if you have any questions or comments, eMail me at gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov