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July 3, 2015

As Seen On TV: Talking To Teens About The Realities of Drug Use

When you watch television with your teens, even the often painful but incredibly popular shows, you'll see many opportunities to start conversations



Drug use and abuse are staple subjects of many TV shows. Whether drugs are treated as one of many plot lines on popular network and cable shows, drug use is not always portrayed accurately. As a result, people, especially the teens and young adults who watch these shows, may be misled about certain aspects of drug use and abuse. One way to counteract any false views is to join your children — if you allow them to watch — for these programs that portray drug use and begin conversations concerning the story lines and reality. Keep these facts about drugs that are commonly portrayed on TV in mind when you watch shows with your teens.

Marijuana

Marijuana's status as an illegal drug is confusing because of its legal use in Colorado and Washington, and its status as a medicinal drug in 21 other states. However, when young people use it frequently, marijuana can cause thinking, learning and memory impairment, as well as problem-solving difficulties and issues with staying on task. Heavy pot use can also increase young users' chances of dropping out of school, having poor mental and physical health, and experiencing limited career success.

Methamphetamine

Chronic methamphetamine (meth) use can cause anxiety, confusion, problems sleeping, violent behavior, paranoia, hallucinations and delusions. Users can also experience increased heart rate and irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure and extreme weight loss. They are also at risk of contracting HIV, and hepatitis B and C through needle use.

Cocaine

Cocaine use constricts blood vessels, and increases the body's heart rate and blood pressure. As a result, users raise their risk for heart attack and stroke, which can be fatal. Cocaine users are also likely to suffer from headaches, stomach pain, nausea, loss of smell, problems swallowing, bowel gangrene and paranoia.

Club Drugs

Young people who attend concerts, nightclubs and raves sometimes use MDMA, GHB, Ketamine, Rohypnol and other club drugs. Their use can cause coma, seizures, breathing problems and fatal overdoses. MDMA is most commonly known as "Ecstasy" or "Molly." It is a man-made drug that produces energizing effects similar to amphetamines, as well as psychedelic effects. MDMA is known as a "club drug" because of its popularity in the nightclub scene such as "raves" (all-night dance parties), music festivals or concerts.

Bath Salts

Bath salts is the name given to a family of drugs that have one or more man-made chemicals related to cathinone, which is an amphetamine-like stimulant. Bath salts are usually white or brown crystal-like powders, and are sold in small plastic or foil packages labeled "Not for Human Consumption." Sometimes labeled as "plant food" — or more recently as "jewelry cleaner" or "phone screen cleaner" — they are sold online and in drug product stores. These descriptions are a way for the drug makers to avoid detection by the police. Use of bath salts sometimes causes severe intoxication (a person seems very drunk or "out of it") and dangerous health effects. There are also reports of people becoming psychotic (losing touch with reality) and violent.

Heroin

Heroin is highly addictive — close to 25 percent of people who use it become addicted to it. People who use heroin put themselves at risk of contracting HIV, hepatitis C, pneumonia, infection of the heart lining, and liver and kidney disease. Heroin can also be contaminated by toxic compounds that can damage the lungs and brain.

Sources: Teens.drugabuse.gov