

Last year, millions of parents learned they were their teen's drug dealer.

A new kind of drug abuse is killing our kids. What every parent needs to know.

44 PERCENT OF TEENS have at least one friend who abuses prescription drugs. But this epidemic isn't unfolding on our streets. Our kids are accessing these drugs – absolutely free – right in our own homes. How big is the problem? Unintentional drug overdoses in the U.S. now outnumber traffic fatalities, and prescription drug abuse is the sad reason why.

FREE DRUGS FROM PARENTS? Nearly four billion prescriptions are filled in America every year. Some experts estimate 1/3 of these prescriptions are never used. (How many pills were unused from your last Rx?) But for many of us, it seems wrong to throw away extra pills and not-quite-empty bottles. And that's too much for millions of curious teenagers to resist.

HOW KIDS ABUSE Rx DRUGS: It's no secret that many prescription drugs have unintended alternate uses. Many teens know which painkillers can get you high, especially when mixed with alcohol. Many students cram for exams by misusing drugs that treat ADHD or sleeplessness. Sedatives, anti-depressants, amphetamines, barbiturates, OTC cough medicines with dextromethorphan...you may not know how to misuse them, but others do.

IS YOUR KID MISUSING? By their senior year of high school, one in five teenagers will have abused prescription painkillers. Nine percent will have abused sedatives and tranquilizers; another ten percent will misuse prescriptions for treating ADHD. More teens misuse painkillers every year than use cocaine. Many



kids think prescription drugs are 'safer' than illegal drugs. And it's so much easier to avoid suspicion with prescription drugs.

IS YOUR HOME SAFE? The short brutal answer? No. Pharmacists keep drugs locked away, but the rest of us certainly don't. One industry group estimates that our nation's medicine cabinets contain more than 200,000,000 pounds of leftover prescriptions.

THIS IS THE NEW DRUG EPIDEMIC. In the mid-1970s, an international heroin epidemic pushed overdose deaths to 1.5 per 100,000 US population. The cocaine epidemic of 1989-1993 doubled drug

deaths to almost 3 in 100,000. Today's prescription drug epidemic is three times deadlier than that: over 10 deaths per 100,000 population in 2009.

THE MEDICINE ABUSE PROJECT aims to raise awareness among kids, parents, law enforcement and government officials, health care professionals, and educators. Our goal: cut teen medicine abuse in half in five years, but two things have to happen: First, safeguard your meds. Second, talk to your kids.

SAFEGUARD YOUR MEDS NOW. Our first step, as parents, is to change our behaviors. Please remove any current prescriptions from the 'public' spaces in your home. Clear out your medicine cabinets and closets of unfinished prescriptions, especially in bathrooms that visitors use. It's hard to change the patterns of a lifetime, but we must start throwing away prescriptions when we're finished with them. Every pharmacist tells us that, and it's time to heed their words.

TALK WITH YOUR KIDS. When you safeguard your house, tell your kids what you're doing and why. Ask what they're seeing at school, and how it affects their friends and classmates. Next time you pick up a prescription for someone in the family, raise the subject again. When you give your kids cold medicine or a painkiller, that's another perfect teaching moment. Make sure you say the most important thing a parent can say to their child: "I don't want you to do drugs." And be sure to point out that misusing legal drugs can be just as deadly as using illegal drugs. Because it is.