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## Inhalant Awareness

Inhalants are everywhere – in our homes, schools, offices, workplaces, and you probably purchased some the last time you were grocery shopping. They are chemical substances that produce vapors, which were never meant to be used to get “high”, but when inhaled result in mind altering effects. Inhalants are generally inexpensive, easy to conceal as usually no special storage is required, use is hard to detect, and you don’t have to go to a “dealer” to obtain them.

It is estimated that about one in every 9 of 12th graders and one in every six of 8th graders has tried an inhalant in their lifetime. They are more likely to be abused by younger adolescents, as the older the adolescent is, the less likely he or she is to abuse an inhalant. They are considered one of the “gateway drugs”, often a young person’s first form of substance abuse before graduating to other drugs such as alcohol or tobacco. Most parents are in the dark about the popularity and dangers of inhalant abuse as their use is much easier to conceal/hide than alcohol or marijuana. There are more than 1,000 products that when inhaled are dangerous.

Nearly all inhalants produce similar effects to anesthetics, which slow down the body’s functions. However, depending upon the level of dosage, the user can experience slight stimulation, feel less inhibited, or lose consciousness. The user can die the first or 100th time of use, as Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome is a real possibility when you replace the oxygen in your body with another gas or vapor. Some common inhalants are whiteout, permanent markers, gasoline, spray paint, butane, cooking spray, and polish remover. A weekly allowance can easily accommodate this sort of easy “high”.

These chemicals are used by huffing, snorting, bagging, and use of balloons with nicknames such as poor man’s pot, hippie crack, rush, and huffing.

Parents, teachers, and members of the community need to educate themselves about inhalants and know the warning signs of abuse. Some dangers of these are:

Chronic cough	Hand tremors
Sudden decrease in appetite/nausea	Red, runny nose and nose bleeds
Sores or rash around the nose and mouth	Weight loss
General apathy	Poor memory, confusion
Drunk, dazed, or dizzy	Anxiety, irritability, or excitability
Drowsiness or slurred speech	Unconsciousness
Bad breath	Hearing Loss
Constantly smelling clothes	

If you find someone who appears to have been using an inhalant,

- Remain calm.
- Make sure room is ventilated.
- Call EMS.
- Administer CPR if person is not breathing.
- Check for products used.

The message of inhalant abuse needs to be communicated clearly to our children, explaining that inhalants are not drugs, but are deadly chemicals and poisons. Giving them facts will possibly prevent curiosity and temptations to experiment. Link inhalants to safety or environmental issues by teaching and reinforcing appropriate skills, such as reading labels, recognizing poisons/toxins, safety precautions, following directions when using these products and decision-making skills.

Remember that parental communication is the most effective prevention a parent can do. Youth that remain drug-free often cite their parents’ influence as the reason they don’t use. Preventing this abuse is preventing irreversible damage to children. *(For additional information, please call (814) 443-3639 or (814) 445-6460.)*

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