

## Prescription for Trouble

### Objectives

Students will

- Review the dangers of taking prescription or over-the-counter drugs (OTC) improperly,
- Estimate the extent of drug abuse in their school,
- Conduct a survey on drug abuse and compile the results, and
- Present survey results along with an overview of the dangers of misusing drugs of any kind.

### Materials

- Computer with Internet access
- Print and online resources about drug abuse

### Procedures

1. Inquire students about the following:
  - Which is worse: abusing prescription or OTC drugs or using illegal drugs? (Both are dangerous.)
  - Are OTC drugs or prescription drugs safer than illegal drugs? (When misused, they may be just as harmful as illegal drugs.)
  - What are some reasons OTC and prescription drugs are abused? (Those taking the drugs may feel that it helps them "escape," fit in better, perform better in school, or feel happier.)
  - Do students think that it is normal to take drugs if they are not being misused?
  - What about prescription and OTC drugs makes their misuse common? (They are readily available from store shelves, from friends' or relatives' medicine cabinets, or from a child's own prescription.)
  - What are some ways misusing drugs can affect a person's life? (Possibilities include becoming addicted; getting involved in criminal activity to continue getting drugs; becoming the victim of a crime while under the influence of drugs; suffering an overdose; or harming his or her body or mind.)
2. Engage in conversation with students: What percentage of students at your school might misuse OTC or prescription drugs? Ask students to make an estimate.
3. Assign the task of creating a survey to distribute to students in your grade or the entire school. The purpose of the survey is to find out what types of drugs students use or are aware of other students using. It is important that the survey be completely anonymous and confidential. Have completed surveys dropped in a locked box or collected by some other secure method to ensure confidentiality. Answers to survey questions should be simple "yes" or "no" responses or check boxes next to choices. This type of uniformity will make the survey easier to tabulate and help protect confidentiality. Here are some questions students might consider including in the survey:

- What is your age?
  - Do you or someone you know take OTC drugs (such as cough syrup, cold medicine, or diet pills) when you do not need them? If so, which drugs are taken?
  - Do you or someone you know misuse prescription drugs (such as Ritalin, Concerta, or Zoloft)? If so, which drugs are taken?
  - Do you or someone you know use illegal drugs (such as cocaine, marijuana, or heroin)? If so, which drugs are taken?
  - Which types of drugs are most dangerous: OTC, prescription, or illegal?
  - Would you like to learn more about drug use?
4. To administer and tabulate the survey, students must keep track of the number of surveys distributed, the number completed, and the responses to the questions. Have them use a variety of methods to analyze the statistics. They can figure percentages, calculate averages, and plot the results in charts or graphs. Have them present their findings to their grade or to the whole school, along with some background about the dangers of misusing any type of drug, whether it's illegal, prescription, or OTC.
5. The following sites contain information that may be useful in developing the presentation
- Discovery School: Deadly Highs  
<http://school.discovery.com/schooladventures/health/deadlyhighs>
  - Freevibe.com: Drug Facts  
[http://www.freevibe.com/Drug\\_Facts](http://www.freevibe.com/Drug_Facts)
  - KidsHealth: What You Need to Know about Drugs  
[http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/grow/drugs\\_alcohol/know\\_drugs.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/grow/drugs_alcohol/know_drugs.html)
  - National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information: A Guide for Teens  
<http://www.health.org/govpubs/phd688>
  - National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens  
<http://teens.drugabuse.gov>
  - Neuroscience for Kids: Explore the Brain and Spinal Cord (click on the link "Drug Effects")  
<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/introb.html>
  - Partnership for a Drug Free America: Prescription Medication Abuse  
[http://www.drugfreeamerica.org/Templates/Prescription\\_Abuse.asp?ws=PDF&vol=1&grp=Parents%2FCaregivers&cat=Prescription+Medication+Abuse&top=Articles](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org/Templates/Prescription_Abuse.asp?ws=PDF&vol=1&grp=Parents%2FCaregivers&cat=Prescription+Medication+Abuse&top=Articles)
  - Scholastic's Head's Up: Real News about Drugs and Your Body  
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/headsup/index.htm>
  - Teen Challenge: Prescription Drug Information  
<http://www.teenchallenge.com/drugs/prescriptiondrugs.cfm>
  - Trouble in the Medicine Chest: Rx Drug Abuse Growing  
<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/govpubs/prevalert/v6/4.aspx>

## Extensions

- Students create a campaign to dispel the myth that prescription or OTC drugs are safe. They can create slogans; design posters, fliers, newsletters, or Web pages; and post their

messages throughout the school. The campaign can also discuss strategies for preventing the misuse of drugs and tell students where to go for help with a drug problem.

- Examine what effects advertising might have on attitudes toward using drugs. Why is the United States only one of two nations that allows drug companies to advertise directly to consumers? What factors make drugs seem like a normal part of life? How might such perceptions be changed?
- Students compare the results of their survey with national statistics. One site with such statistics is the Partnership for a Drug Free America page on Prescription Medication Abuse at [http://www.drugfreeamerica.org/Templates/Prescription\\_Abuse.asp?ws=PDF&vol=1&grp=Parents%2FCaregivers&cat=Prescription+Medication+Abuse&top=Articles](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org/Templates/Prescription_Abuse.asp?ws=PDF&vol=1&grp=Parents%2FCaregivers&cat=Prescription+Medication+Abuse&top=Articles). The information presented in the graphs on this page serves as a good basis for comparison.

## Evaluation

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **Three points:** Students were highly engaged in class discussions, developed thoughtful survey questions, and worked diligently to prepare their presentations.
- **Two points:** Students participated in class discussions and developed an adequate survey and presentation.
- **One point:** Students participated minimally in class discussions and developed an inadequate survey and presentation.

## Vocabulary

### addiction

*Definition:* Physical dependence on a drug

*Context:* An addiction to drugs can begin with the first time someone uses the drug

### overdose

*Definition:* Sickness or bodily damage that results from taking too high a dosage of drugs

*Context:* OTC drugs are legal and readily available, but they can still result in overdose if taken improperly.

### over-the-counter (OTC) drugs

*Definition:* Medicines that can be bought without a prescription

*Context:* Coricidin is an over-the-counter cold drug that has been misused by teens.

### prescription drugs

*Definition:* Medicines that can only be obtained with a doctor's order.

*Context:* Teens may misuse the prescription drug Ritalin, thinking it will make them smarter.

### Ritalin

*Definition:* Prescription medication used to treat Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

*Context:* Misuse of one's own or others' Ritalin can cause tremors, convulsions, and even hallucinations.

## **Standards**

The National Science Education Standards provide guidelines for teaching science as well as a coherent vision of what it means to be scientifically literate for students in grades K-12. To view the standards, visit <http://books.nap.edu>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Science as Inquiry: Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry; Understandings about scientific inquiry
- Life Science: Structure and function in living systems
- Science in Personal and Social Perspectives: Personal health; Risks and benefits

## **Lesson Plan Reference**

Discovery Education website