

Parents: Pack your ‘back to school backpack’

By 3Moms

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When it comes to getting your kids ready for school, you know the drill: running errands to pick up new clothes, food for lunches and, perhaps most importantly, school supplies. Parents are accustomed to preparing their kids for the coming school year, yet rarely take time to get themselves prepared for the possible challenges ahead.

Parents should start by assessing the realities of what it means to be a teen today. Arizona’s teens face pressure, as all teens do, but one of the scariest (and most prevalent) is this: prescription drug use. Intentional misuse of prescription medications is the biggest teen substance abuse challenge we face today.

According to the 2007 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study of 6,511 teens (PATS Teens), the number one reason teens see for using drugs is to deal with the pressures and stress of school. In fact, **73 percent of teens reported that school stress is the primary reason for drug use.**

Aggravating the issue are weak perceptions of risk among both teens and their parents – both believe abusing medicine is NOT as dangerous as using “street” drugs – and ease of access to teens – medicines are readily available in their own or a friend’s medicine cabinet or from their own or a friend’s prescription. Medicine abuse has become “normalized” in teen culture, and Arizona 12th grade students abuse prescription medications at twice the national rate.



Many parents assume their children aren’t the ones using and abusing prescription medication, but the reality is that even if your kids aren’t yet using, the chances are great they will be offered these and other substances – sometimes together. Once parents know the facts, they should take a moment to address them with their teens. Research shows that when parents and caregivers talk to teens about substance abuse, kids are up to 50 percent less likely to use.

While parents are busy packing their kids' backpacks, they should create their own backpack – or toolkit – in order to become better informed and ready to address these issues with their teens.

Here are the “Nine in ‘09” items you should include in your “back to school backpack”:

1. **Partnership “message in a bottle”** – The prescription pill bottle reminds you of the biggest challenge our teens are facing.
2. **Cell phone** – Use your phone to get in touch with the new lingo for text messages, and create a secret phrase your teen can use if they need to call you for help but don't want to say anything in the presence of friends.
3. **Phone numbers** – Along with your phone, make a list of important phone numbers – your teen's friends and their parents, as well as coaches, school nurses, mentors, etc. Create a network of responsible adults.
4. **Watch or clock** – To remind you to spend at least 15 minutes a day talking or playing with your teen, and also to set curfews.
5. **Plastic bag/cat litter** – In order to correctly dispose of prescription drugs, the pills must be smashed and mixed in with something undesirable to eat. Do not flush the drugs down the toilet – it contaminates the water source!
6. **Food** – Eating meals together can provide an opportunity to stay connected and talk with your teens about important topics, or just about the day's events.
7. **Pillow** – A reminder for parents that once kids become teenagers, large-scale sleepovers are no longer appropriate. A group will get into trouble much easier than one or two teens together.
8. **Partnership literature** – This will help you keep your kids safe, or help you determine whether or not your teen is using.
9. **Something fun** – Let's not forget that spending time with your children and teens should be fun. Go to a movie, play a board game, go for a walk – spending time with your teens will help strengthen your bond. Your children will respect you as a parent and role model, but they will appreciate and cherish your friendship as well.

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, Arizona Affiliate's website has a wide variety of other valuable information to help parents when it comes to drug use. On the website at www.PartnerUpAz.org parents will find the tools they need to better prepare themselves for a conversation with their child about drugs.

About The Partnership for a Drug-Free America

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America was formed in 1986 by the communications industry to educate children, parents and communities about the consequences of illicit drug use and the benefits of living drug-free. The Partnership is highly regarded for its proven effective media campaigns and public awareness programs. Independent studies from academia, business and science document the profound impact of The Partnership's programs on attitudes and behavior.

The Arizona Affiliate was established in 2003 to carry out The Partnership's mission to reduce illicit drug use in Arizona while meeting the unique needs of communities. Through its programs, the Arizona Affiliate inspires and empowers Arizonans to join in a united effort to prevent illicit drug use among teens through community-based education. The Partnership is a non profit 501-c-3 organization.

For more information, visit the Affiliate website at www.PartnerUpAz.org.

About 3Moms

3Moms consists of everyday mothers whose lives and families have been impacted by their children's drug use. The concept behind 3Moms is to encourage everyone who hears their message to share it with at least three other mothers or caregivers of children.

The original 3Moms initiative began with just three Valley mothers, but has since expanded to include several others, all of whom have been affected by their children's prescription drug abuse.

Jane Duffey lives in Glendale and has three children. Her son died in 2007 from a combination of the prescription drug Xanax and alcohol.

Cindy Sierzchula lives in Glendale and is the mother of two children. Her daughter died from an OxyContin overdose.

Cindy Keith lives in Peoria and is the mother of six children. Her son died from an overdose of methadone, which can be used as a pain reliever or as part of drug addiction treatment.

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