

Medical Waste in Your Home: What to Do

STEP 1: MONITOR

Parents are in an influential position to immediately help reduce teen access to prescription drugs because these drugs are found in the home. But how aware are you? Think about this, would you know if some of your pills were missing? From this day forward, make sure you can honestly answer, yes.

- Start by taking note of how many pills are in each of your prescription bottles or pill packets.
- Keep track of your refills. This goes for your own medication, as well as for your teens and other members of the household. If you find you need to refill your medication more often than expected, that could indicate a problem.
- If your teen has been prescribed a drug, be sure you control the medication, and monitor dosages and refills.
- Make sure your friends and relatives, especially grandparents, are also aware of the risks. Encourage them to regularly monitor their own medicine cabinets.
- If there are other households your teen has access to, talk to those families as well about the importance of helping safeguard their medications.

STEP 2: SECURE

Teens abuse prescription drugs because they are easily accessible and either free or inexpensive. In fact, 64% of kids age 12 to 17 who have abused pain relievers say they got them from their friends or relatives, typically without their knowledge. Approach securing your prescriptions the same way you would other valuables in your home, like jewelry or cash. There's no shame in helping protect those items. The same holds true for your medications.

- Take prescription medications out of the medicine cabinet and hide them in a place only you know about.
- If possible, keep all medicines, both prescription and over-the-counter, in a safe place, such as a locked cabinet your teen cannot access.
- Tell relatives, especially grandparents, to lock their medications or keep them in a safe place.
- Talk to the parents of your teenager's friends. Encourage them to secure their prescriptions.

STEP 3: DISPOSE

Safely disposing of expired or unused prescription medications is a critical step in helping protect your teens. In addition, here is how to help safeguard your family and home, and decrease the opportunity for your teens or their friends to abuse your medications.

- Take an inventory of all the prescription drugs in your home. Start by discarding expired or unused prescription drugs, when your teens are not home.
- Unbelievable though it may seem, teenagers will retrieve discarded prescription drugs from the trash. To help prevent this from happening, mix the medication with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter. Put the mixture into an empty can or bag and discard.
- Unless the directions on the packaging say otherwise, do not flush medication down the drain or toilet.
- To help prevent unauthorized refills and protect you and your family's privacy, remove any personal, identifiable information from prescription bottles or pill packages before you throw them away.