

## **Inhalant Abuse Awareness**

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What is inhalant abuse? When most people think of someone using drugs or getting high, they tend to think of a stereotypical character that they have seen portrayed on TV and in the movies. Sometimes these stereotypes are accurate but other times they are simply dramatizations. The truth of the matter is that drug use/abuse can happen in every home that has a garage with chemicals, a kitchen or bathroom with cleaning products, or even a home supplied with average household writing implements.

What are these chemicals that are so easily available within the home which go unnoticed? **Solvents** such as paint thinner, gasoline, and other volatile chemicals often found in a garage. **Aerosols** such as spray paint, computer cleaner, oven cleaners, and hair spray. **Gases** including Nitrous oxide found in whipped cream cans; often referred to as whippets.

Essentially any household or industrial chemical can be used to get high and the consequences to a person's health from ingesting these compounds can be extremely adverse. "Sudden sniffing death" can occur the first time an individual uses certain chemicals to get high. A few of the potentially lethal ones are butane, propane, and the various chemicals found in aerosols. Long-term effects of inhalant abuse can be liver and kidney damage, psychiatric issues, central nervous system damage, in addition to various other health related problems.

According to the 2002-2005 National Surveys on Drug Use & Health, the annual average number of new users of inhalant type substances was 600,000 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17. Females accounted for approximately 11,000 more users than males. The majority of these children trying this form of intoxication were predominantly white, 14-15 year old, and of average income. Small cities and suburbs including rural suburbs accounted for approximately 50% of the teenagers using inhalants.

This is an issue that everyone can and should do something about because it is so easily accessed through everyday products found in your home. Talk to your kids about the risks of using drugs – and do so often. Don't forget that your kids will be offered to get high more than just one time. And if you suspect your child is using an inhalant or other "recreational" drug, know that there are licensed alcohol and drug counselors ("LADC") who specialize in adolescent/young adult treatment that can recommend the best course of treatment for your child.

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