



Daniel Fishbein, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

RIDGEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

dfishbein@ridgewood.k12.nj.us
201-670-2700 ext. 10530
(fax) 201-670-2668

January 30, 2017

Dear Parent / Guardian:

The Ridgewood Public Schools are committed to providing a safe environment for personal growth and learning, which is why we are sending you this letter. While alcohol abuse, primarily in the form of binge drinking, tops the list of substance abuse problems seen in students, the misuse and abuse of prescription drugs, those same drugs found in medicine cabinets across our country, is a growing and serious problem. This behavior is not only dangerous; it is also illegal.

In Ridgewood, we have seen a significant increase in prescription drug abuse, especially Xanax. This rise has been brought to our attention through reported incidents of “under the influence” behavior, as well as an increase in students’ self-reporting of their own misuse of prescription drugs.

Most often, these prescription drugs come in the form of:

- Stimulants (Adderall, Concerta, Ritalin) that are used by students to “get in the zone” to stay awake to study or party.
- Pain Relievers (OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin) and Tranquilizers and sedatives (Valium, Xanax) that are used by students recreationally to get high, or to cope with the stress of academics, social pressures or family crises.

We work closely with the Ridgewood Police Department on these issues and strive in our schools to promote awareness about the risks associated with the abuse of prescription medications, but our parents are on the front line to educate and protect their children from the dangers of substance abuse. Unfortunately, when confronted with the issue of substance abuse, many parents are quick to say “not my child.” We need, however, to accept the reality that our children may be engaging in substance abuse.

The reasons vary as to why high school age students experiment and abuse prescription drugs. All students are susceptible to feeling pressure to fit in socially and excel academically. Many may not even know that they are doing something wrong when they pop a “friend’s” Percocet to relieve a headache or take Adderall to cram all night for an exam. Students are also more likely to engage in risky behaviors like binge drinking, marijuana, cocaine, other prescription drugs, and even heroin and methamphetamines. Mixing prescription drugs with alcohol or illicit drugs, or crushing and snorting pills, maximizes their effects. These behaviors can lead to permanent organ damage, stroke, heart attack, overdose or even death.

Regardless of the reasons, studies consistently show that teens think prescription medications are a safer alternative to illicit street drugs like cocaine or heroin. Taking any medications without a prescription or medical oversight, or using them in a manner or at a dosage not advised by a healthcare provider, is a risk to a student’s health.

Below are some simple practices you can do to help your child:

1. **Stay engaged with your child.** Find ways to talk to your child about his/her emotional wellbeing. This dialogue can go a long way to help boost their confidence to “do the best they can” when juggling academic, co-curricular and social demands. Suggest healthy ways to handle stress.
2. **Take precautions.** If you or someone in the family takes one of these type of prescription medications for legitimate medical reasons:
 - Keep medications locked in a safe place.
 - Pick a few times a year to properly dispose of any unneeded or expired medications. Don’t save them for a rainy day.
 - If you notice that pills or bottles are missing, take steps to talk with your child and provide supportive counsel.
 - Look for warning signs and symptoms of drug abuse and take action. Contact your pediatrician or family physician, your school’s Crisis Intervention Counselor at 201-670-2700 (Kevin Feeley, GW and RHS, ext. 20573; Lauren DePinto, BF and RHS, ext. 20574), or 800-662-4357.

Attached is a summary of warning signs and symptoms of prescription drug abuse, along with some resources for further inquiry.

On Monday, February 13, 2017, at 7 p.m. in the Campus Center at Ridgewood High School, Dr. Tim Silvestri will present “The New Social Norms at Ridgewood High School.” In addition to Dr. Silvestri’s presentation, we will be discussing the contents of this letter. We urge you to please join us at this important meeting, which is open to all high school and 8th grade parents.

We will be sending out further information on this important topic over the next few weeks.

Sincerely yours,

Daniel Fishbein, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Thomas Gorman, Ed.D
Principal, Ridgewood High School

Katherine Kashmanian, Ed.D.
Principal, George Washington M.S

Anthony Orsini
Principal, Benjamin Franklin M.S.

C: Ridgewood Board of Education
Chief J. Luthcke, Ridgewood Police Department
Ridgewood Public School Staff Members

Note: The majority of the content of this letter was taken from the Educate Before You Medicate National Council on Patient Information Education.

WARNING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Because students are frequently exposed to opportunities to experiment with, misuse and abuse so many different types of prescription drugs — from stimulants and pain relievers to anti-depressants and tranquilizers – it can be difficult to know what signs to watch for. Each medication has different effects and mixing these drugs with alcohol and other drugs is very dangerous and can lead to permanent organ damage and even death.

PHYSICAL SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Depending on the drug misused or abused, you may notice the following:

Stimulants are prescribed to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or narcolepsy. These medications, which include **Adderall, Concerta and Ritalin**, speed up brain activity causing increased alertness, attention and energy that comes with elevated blood pressure, increased heart rate and breathing.

Hyperactivity	Seizures
Shaking	Paranoia/nervousness
Sweating	Repetitive behaviors
Dilated pupils	Loss of appetite or sudden & unexplained weight loss
Fast or irregular heart beat	
Elevated body temperature	

Sedatives/depressants are prescribed to treat anxiety, panic attacks and sleep disorders. These medications, which include **Valium, Xanax, Ambien**, slow down or “depress” the functions of the brain and central nervous system.

Loss of coordination	Slurred speech
Respiratory depression	Coma
Slowed reflexes	

Opioid analgesics, which include **Vicodin, OxyContin** and **Percocet**, are prescribed to treat moderate-to-severe pain. These medications can block pain messages from reaching the brain; they can also give someone a feeling of euphoria.

Sleep deprivation or “nodding”	Slow gait
Pinpoint/constricted Pupils, watery or droopy Eyes	Dry skin, itching, skin infections
Nausea, vomiting, Constipation	Constant Flu-like symptoms
Slow slurred speech	Track marks (bruised skin around injection site)

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

Behavior changes may also include:

- Sudden mood changes, including irritability, negative attitude, and personality change
- Extreme changes in groups of friends or hangout locations
- Forgetfulness or clumsiness

- Lying or being deceitful, skipping classes, avoiding eye contact
- Losing interest in personal appearance, extracurricular activities or sports
- “Munchies” or sudden changes in appetite
- Unusually poor performance in school, on the field, in debate club or other activities
- Borrowing money or having extra cash
- Acting especially angry or abusive or engaging in reckless behavior.

RESOURCES

For more information, see Partnership for a Drug Free America’s website on signs of drug abuse at: <http://www.theantidrug.com/drug-information/otc-prescription-drug-abuse/signs-prescription-drug-abuse.aspx>.

DISTRICT CRISIS INTERVENTION COUNSELORS

RHS

Kevin Feeley

kfeeley@ridgewood.k12.nj.us

201-670-2700, ext. 20573

Lauren DePinto

ldepinto@ridgewood.k12.nj.us

201-670-2700, ext. 20574

BFMS

Lauren DePinto

ldepinto@ridgewood.k12.nj.us

201-670-2700, ext. 20574

GWMS

Kevin Feeley

kfeeley@ridgewood.k12.nj.us

201-670-2700, ext. 20573