

# Helping Hand



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RESOURCE CENTER  
Videos, books, curricula, software and print materials about alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and violence and safe school issues.

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## Prescription and OTC Drug Abuse

Most people who take prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications use them responsibly. But when abused—that is, taken by someone other than the patient for whom the medication was prescribed, or taken in a manner or dosage other than what was prescribed—prescription and OTC medications can produce serious adverse health effects, including addiction. Since many of these drugs are widely available, some young people choose to abuse these drugs rather than “street” drugs. Although many prescription medications can be abused, the following three classes are most commonly abused:

- Opioids**—usually prescribed to treat pain
- Central Nervous System (CNS) depressants**—used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders
- Stimulants**—prescribed to treat ADHD and narcolepsy



Besides prescription drugs, many teens turn to OTC drugs like cough and allergy medicines to get high.

Patients, health care professionals, and pharmacists all have roles in preventing the abuse of and addiction to prescription medications. For example, patients should follow the directions for use carefully; learn what effects and side effects the medication could have; and inform their doctor/pharmacist whether they are taking other medications (including OTC medications or health supplements), since these could potentially interact with the prescribed medication. The patient should read all information provided by the pharmacist. Physicians and other health care providers should screen for past or current substance abuse in the patient during routine examination, including asking questions about what other medications the patient is taking and why. Providers should note any rapid increases in the amount of a medication needed or frequent requests for refills before the quantity prescribed should have been finished, as these may be indicators of abuse.

## Embracing Diversity and Teaching Tolerance

Classrooms today are increasingly diverse, reflecting the communities where families live. Some adults welcome the fact that we live in an increasingly diverse society. Others may feel more hesitant, especially if they have not had much exposure to people different from themselves. Many children are way ahead of their parents in terms of exposure to cultural differences. Their circle of friends, their schoolmates, and their athletic teams are much more varied than those of even a generation ago.

It is very important for adults to help children prepare to live, learn and work in communities that will become even more diverse. Teaching tolerance will help them to live richer, kinder lives and aid them in succeeding in the team environments of school and work.

In short, every child’s success depends on it. Success in today’s world — and tomorrow’s — depends on being able to understand, appreciate, and work with others.

(Source: Nemours Foundation)

# Helping Children Cope With Divorce



Divorce is a painful process for all those involved. But during this stressful period, the feelings, needs and concerns of the children sometimes take a backseat to their parents' anger and emotional trauma. Parents must realize that they are still the most important people in their children's lives and that the divorce has at least as much impact on their children as themselves.

Children are often frightened, confused and threatened by the divorce. They sometimes believe they are responsible for their parents' problems. They may also believe that they have caused the divorce and that they can bring their parents back together. They will often misinterpret the divorce and the actions surrounding it unless they are told what is happening, how they are involved and not involved, and what is going to happen to them. If not informed in an honest, open manner, children will

create their own answers to unspoken questions about the divorce — answers that can be much more frightening than the actual situation.

But with care and attention, children can be helped through this difficult time.

## **Helping a child through a divorce**

You probably are having difficulty getting along with your divorced or soon-to-be-divorced partner, but when it comes to your children, you must put aside those feelings and focus on their best interests.

- **Don't** lie or cover up what's happening to the family. The first rule is honesty.
- **Don't** fight in front of the child.
- **Don't** use the child to carry angry messages to the spouse.
- **Don't** worry the child with legal or financial problems.
- **Don't** expect emotional support from the child; that's a role for adults — friends, family members, or a therapist.
- **Don't** imply that the child should take on adult roles by saying things like, "Now you're the man of the house."

### **Instead:**

- Assure the child that the adults in his or her life will continue to take care of him or her.
- Prepare the child for the changes that will take place.
- Convince the child that the divorce wasn't his or her fault.
- Talk to the child. Help him or her work out feelings and perceptions about the divorce.
- Help the child to express feelings of fear or anger.
- Assure the child that relationships with other important adults in their lives will remain the same.
- Allow the child to mourn the loss of the family as it was before the divorce.

Some children cope with divorce-induced upset by seeking comfort and counsel from family members. Others may benefit from the professional assistance of a therapist trained to help children of divorce with their feelings.

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## Preventing Test Anxiety

Tests are important, especially to schoolchildren. A test may measure a basic skill. It can affect a year's grade. Or, if it measures the ability to learn, it can affect a child's placement in school. So it's important to do well on tests.

Besides, the ability to do well on tests can help throughout life in such things as getting a driver's license, trying out for sports, or getting a job. Without this ability, a person can be severely handicapped. Your child can develop this ability. And you can help him or her do it. Just try the simple techniques developed through Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) research.

It's good to be concerned about taking a test. It's not good to get "test anxiety." This is excessive worry about doing well on a test and it can mean disaster for a student. But there are ways to reduce test anxiety. Encourage your child to do these things:

- Space studying over days or weeks. Real learning occurs through studying that takes place over a period of time. Understand the information and relate it to what is already known. Review it more than once. By doing this, the student should feel prepared at exam time.
- Don't "cram" the night before—Cramming increases anxiety which interferes with clear thinking. Get a good night's sleep. Rest, exercise, and eating well are as important to test-taking as they are to other schoolwork.
- Read the directions carefully when the teacher hands out the test. If you don't understand them, ask the teacher to explain.
- Look quickly at the entire examination to see what types of questions are included (multiple choice, matching, true/false, essay) and, if possible, the number of points for each. This will help you pace yourself.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, skip it and go on. Don't waste time worrying about it. Mark it so you can identify it as unanswered. If you have time at the end of the exam, return to the unanswered question(s).



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## Understanding Youth Violence Prevention

Youth violence refers to harmful behaviors that can start early and continue into young adulthood. The young person can be a victim, an offender, or a witness to the violence. Youth violence includes various behaviors. Some violent acts—such as bullying, slapping, or hitting—can cause more emotional harm than physical harm. Others, such as robbery, assault, or rape, can lead to serious injury or even death.

A number of factors can increase the risk of a youth engaging in violence. However, the presence of these factors does not always mean that a young person will become an offender. Risk factors for youth violence include:

- Prior history of violence
- Drug, alcohol, or tobacco use
- Association with delinquent peers
- Poor family functioning
- Poor grades in school
- Poverty in the community

Overall, the ultimate goal is to stop youth violence before it starts. Several prevention strategies have been identified. Parent- and family-based programs improve family relations. Parents receive training on child development. They also learn skills for talking with their kids and solving problems in nonviolent ways. Social-development strategies teach children how to handle tough social situations. They learn how to resolve problems without using violence. Finally, mentoring programs pair an adult with a young person. The adult serves as a positive role model and helps guide the young person's behavior. Changes can be made to the physical and social environment. These changes address the social and economic causes of violence.

# Children and Adolescents with Anxiety Disorders



Children and adolescents with anxiety disorders typically experience intense fear, worry, or uneasiness that can last for long periods of time and significantly affect their lives. If not treated early, anxiety disorders can lead to repeated school absences or an inability to finish school, impaired relations with peers, low self-esteem, alcohol or other drug use, problems adjusting to work situations, and anxiety disorder in adulthood.

Many different anxiety disorders affect children and adolescents, including generalized anxiety disorder, separation anxiety disorder, phobias, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, anxiety disorders are among the most common mental, emotional, and behavioral problems to occur during childhood and adolescence. Researchers have found that the basic temperament of young people may play a role in some child-

hood and adolescent anxiety disorders. For example, some children tend to be very shy and restrained in unfamiliar situations, a possible sign that they are at risk for developing an anxiety disorder. Research in this area is very complex, because children's fears often change as they age and it is also normal for children to suddenly become shy during certain periods of development.

Researchers also suggest watching for signs of anxiety disorders when children are between the ages of 6 and 8. During this time, children generally grow less afraid of the dark and imaginary creatures and become more anxious about school performance and social relations. An excessive amount of anxiety in children this age may be a warning sign for the development of anxiety disorders later in life.

If parents or other caregivers notice repeated symptoms of an anxiety disorder in their child or adolescent, they should talk with the child's health care provider. He or she can help to determine whether the symptoms are caused by an anxiety disorder or by some other condition and can also provide a referral to a mental health professional.

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