

The Impact of Misusing Prescription Stimulants

FACILITATOR TALKING POINTS

The Impact of Misusing Prescription Stimulants is a skit-based activity designed to equip college students with the skills to turn down invitations to misuse prescription stimulants and identify safe, sustainable approaches for achieving academic success. Participants will first watch a video that introduces issues relating to the misuse of prescription stimulants as study aids and then complete a skit-based activity according to the instructions below.

INSTRUCTIONS

Before the performances (i.e., the skit-based activity)

- **Introduce the program:** Welcome to today's program, "Generation Rx University: The Impact of Misusing Prescription Stimulants." You may be thinking: What is Generation Rx University? "Generation Rx University" encourages college students and young adults to incorporate the Generation Rx key messages into their individual, everyday lives. These messages focus on how to safely use medications in an effort to prevent their misuse. Today's program will focus on prescription stimulants. We'll first watch a video that addresses common misperceptions related to prescription stimulants, and then we'll conduct a skit-based activity that emphasizes skills for turning down invitations to misuse and positive alternatives to facilitate academic success.
- **Play the video** linked to GenerationRx.org, "The Impact of Misusing Prescription Stimulants"
- **Summarize the video:** This video explained why prescription stimulants are not a sustainable approach for improving your grades or for achieving long-term academic success. However, research indicates that by the time college students graduate, the majority will be invited to misuse a prescription stimulant. Let's conduct a skit-based activity to consider approaches for turning down these invitations to misuse and to identify positive alternatives to facilitate academic success.
- This activity may be delivered to either small or large groups (see below). Choose the appropriate format and inform participants of the activity instructions. Encourage participants to begin the activity.



For small groups:

- 1 Divide participants into groups of 4–6 individuals.
- 2 Distribute 1–2 copies of the script for one of the three scenes to each group (included in this resource). If you have more than three groups, ask two groups to perform the same scene.
- 3 Instruct each group to read their scene as well as the questions posed at the end. Their task is to think about the best approach for handling the situation depicted in their scene. They must perform the written scene (by reading the lines), perform how they've chosen to handle the situation, and offer 1–2 positive alternatives to misusing prescription stimulants. We recommend limiting each group's performances to 2–3 minutes each.

For large groups:

- 1 Distribute three notecards (or sheets of paper) to each participant.
- 2 Identify facilitators or participants who will read (or perform) each of the three scenes.
- 3 Instruct participants that, following the performance of each scene, their task is to think about the best approach for handling the situation depicted in the scene. They must write on a notecard how they would handle the situation and offer 1–2 positive alternatives.
- 4 Participants will then exchange notecards 2–3 times with other participants. After the final exchange, encourage participants to consider the approach offered on their notecard. Is this an effective approach they could utilize? Encourage participants to share and discuss approaches and positive alternatives with the larger group. Repeat this process for each scene.

After each performance:

- Discuss the approach offered for turning down the invitation to misuse, as well as the positive alternatives identified.
- Consider interjecting any additional talking points to this discussion—see suggested talking points and discussion questions following each scene.



SCENE 1 SET THE SCENE

Casey and Andy are friends, hanging out in Andy's dorm room and studying for mid-terms. Both are studying quietly, until...

CASEY: Hey, Andy, do you have any idea what Professor Taylor really wants us to know for this exam? I just feel like there's so much that we need to study, and the exam is tomorrow morning ...

ANDY: Yeah, I know what you mean. This mid-term covers way too much material. I really should have started studying earlier. Oh man...

CASEY: Yeah, and you're even using your Adderall® to help you study, right? If you can't do it, then I guess there's no hope for the rest of us.

ANDY: What? No, I take my Adderall® every day for my ADHD, not just to help me study. It helps keep me focused at work and with friends, too. Without it, I can hardly stay focused on anything. It just makes me feel like everybody else.

CASEY: In Professor Taylor's lecture on Wednesday, I overheard a student next to me talking about how they took their friend's Adderall® before the last exam, and it helped them pass. They said they would've failed for sure without it. I know you said taking the Adderall® every day helps you feel normal, but don't you think it could help people who are not diagnosed with ADHD study better?

ANDY: Uhh ... I'm not sure. It's considered a "controlled substance," so I'm not sure that it's a good idea to take it for a different reason than that intended by a healthcare professional when they prescribed it.

CASEY: We both need to pass this class in order to graduate with our declared major. What if we fail this exam tomorrow because we couldn't focus enough while studying? My parents are already on my case about getting a D in chemistry last semester; I can't afford to fail this time. Maybe taking Adderall® is just what I need to pass this exam and get back on track in this class. Could you help me out?

ANDY: Uhh...



HOW WOULD YOU HANDLE THIS SITUATION?

If you were Andy, how do you tell Casey "no"—that you will not share or sell your prescription stimulant for use as a study aid? How could Andy safely store or dispose of his or her medication to ensure others don't access it? Lastly, consider Andy's position—how do you think Casey's request makes him/her feel?

Think through these questions. Be prepared to perform the written portion of the skit (you can read the lines) and perform how you would handle this situation. Try to include a positive alternative for studying and achieving academic success without misusing prescription stimulants.



SCENE 1 TALKING POINTS

1. If you were Andy, how do you tell Casey “no”—that you will not share or sell your prescription stimulant for use as a study aid?

Here are three examples for how to handle this situation:

- Give a reason:** “No way, that’s illegal! I don’t want a drug-related offense on my record!”
- Give a reason (even if it’s not true):** “I only have enough medication to get me through the next few weeks.”
- Mention positive alternatives:** “No...these pills can cause some serious side effects. Instead, how about we help each other and study together?”

Other approaches for turning down the invitation to misuse include using humor or making a joke, leaving the situation, or simply saying “no”—by doing so, you become one of the majority of college students who use medications safely.

2. How could Andy safely store or dispose of his or her medication to ensure others don’t access it?



STORAGE: when prescribed a prescription medication, store it in a secure location such as a lock-box, medication safe, or other lockable spaces. Avoid storage places where children and others have easy access, such as drawers, nightstands, or counters/cabinets.



DISPOSAL: Once finished with a prescription medication, you have three options for safely disposing of it:

OPTION #1:

place the medication in a drug dropbox. To find a dropbox in your area, visit: rxdrugdropbox.org

OPTION #2:

take advantage of community drug take-back programs that allow the public to bring unused medications to a central location for proper disposal. Call your local law enforcement agency or ask your pharmacist to see if a take-back program is available in your community.

OPTION #3:

dispose of the medication at home. Before completing these steps, we encourage you to follow any disposal instructions on the drug’s label or patient information sheet. If disposal instructions are not given, complete these three steps:

Step 1: Remove the pills from the original container and mix them with an undesirable substance such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter.

Step 2: Throw away the sealed mixture into the trash.

Step 3: Remove the prescription label and dispose of the empty bottle. **NOTE:** In general, you should not flush medications down a toilet or drain; however, the FDA still recommends the disposal of certain drugs by flushing. For a list, visit: www.fda.gov.

3. Consider Andy’s position—how do you think Casey’s request makes him/her feel?

By asking a friend (or even a stranger) for some of their prescription stimulants, we put them in an incredibly vulnerable and uncomfortable position. For example, if you ask someone for their prescription stimulant, they often perceive that request as you:

- Using your friendship to obtain drugs. Your friend may begin to question whether your friendship is solely based on you gaining access to their medication.
- Disrespecting their health needs. Your friend has a legitimate need for their medication—if they cannot take their medication as instructed, their health is jeopardized.
- Putting them at risk for getting in trouble. Even if your friend simply gives (versus sells) you the medication, providing “controlled substances” to others without a prescription is illegal. Think about it—would a real friend ask someone to risk their future in order to help them “study”?



SCENE 2 SET THE SCENE

Jamie and Alex are at a large house party together, searching for their friend Taylor.

JAMIE: Wow, when Andrea told me about this party I had no idea it was going to be so big. Do you see Taylor anywhere? S/he isn't answering my texts.

ALEX: No wonder! This place is so crowded that s/he probably can't even hear the phone. This party is off the hook! Where can we find a drink? Oh, I see a fridge over there...I'll go check it out.

JAMIE: Taylor! Finally...did you get my texts?

TAYLOR: Hey! Oh, sorry! No...it's just so noisy in here. Are you enjoying the party?

JAMIE: So far, it's not too bad. We just got here and don't really know a lot of people. My friend is just grabbing us some drinks.

TAYLOR: Good to hear...you know, if you want to have a really good time, I've got some stimulant pills with me. It'll give you all the energy you need to stay up all night and enjoy the party.

JAMIE: Stimulant pills? As in the prescription medication my roommate takes for ADHD?

TAYLOR: Yeah! That's what's so great about it. It's a prescription, so it's WAY safer than the stuff they sell you on the street to stay awake. I would never do anything illegal like that. But these pills are great! I can go grab one for you, if you want. It's just \$5 a pill and that'll last you all night. Like, half the people here have taken it already.

JAMIE: Uhh...



HOW WOULD YOU HANDLE THIS SITUATION?

If you were Jamie, what would you do? How would you handle this situation? Is it dangerous to mix alcohol with other drugs? Is it legal to sell prescription medication? Could the individual selling the prescription stimulant be held liable if anyone was harmed after taking it?

Think through these questions. Be prepared to perform the written portion of the skit (you can read the lines) and perform how you would handle this situation. Try to include a positive alternative to have fun without misusing medications or mixing alcohol with other substances.



SCENE 2 TALKING POINTS

1. If you were Jamie, what would you do? How would you handle this situation?

Taylor speaks to a common misperception about prescription drug misuse—many people believe that because prescription medications are prescribed by a doctor, misuse is safe and legal. However, in some cases, prescription drugs affect the body the same way as illegal drugs—making them just as dangerous. Like illegal drugs, with some prescription medications (prescription opioid pain medications, sedatives, and stimulants), continued use can lead to physical dependency and addiction. As a result, the misuse of prescription drugs is not safe and actually illegal.

Here are two examples for how to handle this situation:

- a. **Give a reason:** “Actually, Taylor, taking those pills is illegal and can result in us getting arrested. I don’t know about you, but I have way too much at stake right now to add a drug-related offense to my record”.
- b. **Leave the situation:** if you feel uncomfortable, leaving the situation will likely always be the best option. Consider doing other things to have fun—like go to a movie, host a game night, attend a sporting event, or simply hang out with friends in a safe environment.

2. Is it dangerous to mix alcohol with other drugs?

Mixing alcohol with any substance, even if it is a medication you’re prescribed, can be dangerous. All prescription medications have side effects—and mixing alcohol with these products often enhances their negative side effects or the intoxicating effects of alcohol itself. The adverse effects of prescription stimulants include increased heart rate and blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, nervousness, and insomnia. When mixed with alcohol, prescription stimulants can mask the body’s natural warning signals of over-sedation, which can lead to alcohol intoxication or dangerously slow breathing. The majority of drug overdoses result from mixing prescription medications with alcohol or with other drugs.

3. Is it legal to sell prescription medication? Could the individual selling the prescription stimulant be held liable if anyone was harmed after taking it?

Most prescription drugs that are misused are called “controlled substances” (e.g., Vicodin®, OxyContin®, Valium®, Xanax®, Adderall®, Ritalin®), meaning they may be used for legitimate medical purposes but have a high potential for misuse and/or the development of dependence. These substances are controlled by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, and it is prohibited under federal law to manufacture, distribute, dispense, or possess them without a legitimate prescription.

Consider the following:

- Depending on individual state laws, possession of a controlled substance without a prescription may result in a felony charge, with penalties which could include fines and/or imprisonment.
- If someone is hurt when you give them your prescription drugs, you could be liable for any harm experienced by the person to whom you provided the medication.
- How would a drug-related offense impact your future? Note to facilitator: encourage participants to identify consequences. A felony offense appearing on your record can severely interfere with employment and education opportunities, such as graduate education, summer internships, scholarships, or employment following graduation.





SCENE 3 SET THE SCENE

Chris just graduated from college and is working on an important project for his/her job at an advertising agency, but s/he is having a difficult time focusing. The deadline for the project is tomorrow. Chris is desperate and calls a friend, Jordan, for help.

CHRIS: If I don't get this project done, they'll fire me! It's my first job out of college... this is so stressful!

JORDAN: Didn't you have three weeks to work on it?

CHRIS: Yeah, but I kept getting distracted. I was looking for a new apartment, and then I had to travel for my friend's wedding.

JORDAN: But didn't you always meet project deadlines in college? How did you do that?

CHRIS: How I did everything in college...I relied on a pill. My roommate was diagnosed with ADHD, but would allow me to use some medication when I needed to cram for an exam or complete a big project. I'd buy our drinks afterwards to celebrate—it was a great setup.

JORDAN: Hmm...interesting. Didn't your roommate move out-of-state last month?

CHRIS: Correct—that's why I have no idea what to do. I can't just call and ask him/her to FedEx me some pills, that sounds so sketchy. I didn't realize how much I relied on that medication until now.

JORDAN: That's really unfortunate...what are you going to do?



HOW WOULD YOU HANDLE THIS SITUATION?

How could Chris best handle this situation? If Chris could go back in time, would you encourage him/her to make similar or different choices with regards to relying on prescription stimulants for academic success? What approaches could Chris have taken in college to better prepare for long-term academic and professional success?

Think through these questions. Be prepared to perform the written portion of the skit (you can read the lines) and perform how you would handle this situation. Try to identify safe, sustainable approaches for academic and professional success.



SCENE 3 TALKING POINTS

1. How could Chris best handle this situation? If Chris could go back in time, would you encourage him/her to make similar or different choices with regards to relying on prescription stimulants for academic success?

As noted in the video, individuals can become physically dependent on prescription stimulants. At the very least, Chris developed a potentially dangerous habit by misusing prescription stimulants as a crutch to meet project deadlines. Some adults misuse prescription medications as a “quick fix” to deal with the demands and pressures of their lives. However, they are only a “quick fix”—life will continually present demands, stresses, and pressures. Learning healthy, positive ways to deal with stress is essential. Continued misuse of any substance is dangerous and may result in becoming physically dependent on, or addicted to, the drug.

Jordan could encourage Chris to develop safe approaches for managing stress, such as:

- Prioritizing tasks.
- Relaxing by watching a movie, taking a nap, or eating your favorite food.
- Exercising.
- Making a plan to meet project deadlines. Start with the deadline and work backwards. Schedule time to work on the project, and set aside extra time to account for events in your personal life.

2. What approaches could Chris have taken in college to better prepare for long-term academic and professional success?

It may be tempting to misuse prescription drugs as a “quick fix” to achieve academic success. However, this isn’t a sustainable approach for long-term success. Healthy alternatives and sustainable academic strategies include:

- Don’t skip class!
- Stay current with class material and review a little bit every day.
- Establish good study habits and a regular study schedule. Set aside extra time before important tests or deadlines.
- Use healthier “stimulants”—snacks, exercise, natural light, and even caffeine in moderation.
- Use your available resources (e.g., tutors, professors, friends, online tutorials, etc.) to get help when needed.
- Establish a study group to reinforce your learning.





NOTE TO FACILITATOR

Consider wrapping-up the program by engaging participants in the following three discussion questions.

- 1 Given the information presented in the video, as well as our recent discussions, do you think prescription stimulants are effective study aids?**

As the video noted, prescription stimulants are prescribed to manage the symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), not for misuse as study aids. In individuals not diagnosed with ADHD, these products may increase risk of drug dependency and addiction, as well as other negative side effects (as identified in the video). Think about it—do these effects equate to improved grades? Not necessarily—research shows students that misuse stimulants for academic-related reasons actually earn lower grades. This likely reflects the fact that misusing prescription stimulants is not a sustainable approach for academic success. We encourage you to utilize the safe approaches discussed in this program, as well as seek help through available campus resources. **Note to facilitator:** we encourage you to identify these campus resources (e.g., academic advisors, academic skills centers, etc.) and share them with participants.

- 2 Given the information presented in the video as well as our recent discussions, do you see any down-sides of misusing prescription stimulants as study aids?**

The misuse of prescription medications can result in numerous health, social, academic, financial, and legal problems for college students, many of which were discussed in the video and activity. Encourage participants to reflect on the sustainable approaches identified in the program to achieve academic success in order to prevent their college career from being derailed by these consequences.

- 3 Do you think the majority of college students misuse prescription stimulants as study aids?**

Students often overestimate the percent of their peers who misuse prescription medications. In reality, recent studies indicate that over 80 percent of college students have *never* misused prescription stimulants in their lifetime¹. Very few college students misuse these products regularly—only 1–5 percent have misused prescription stimulants in the past month.^{2,3} This certainly isn't the majority! It is true that the average age for initiating prescription drug misuse is during the college years (average age 21–22)⁴, but while college students remain vulnerable to misuse, it is not the norm on campus to misuse prescription medications for studying, partying, or self-medicating.

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