

Identifying Risky Behaviors

Risky behaviors encompass a wide range of legal and illegal activities which include: drinking and driving, drinking games, using drugs, misusing legal drugs, using a cell phone or texting while driving, not using seat belts when driving, participating in activities like the “choking game” or “cutting”.

Substance abuse continues to be a prime risky behavior in youth. Thirty-four percent (34%) of Ohio teens report having used marijuana at least once. While the use of illegal drugs continues to be a concern, the misuse of prescription drugs is a growing concern.

Alcohol use and abuse is one of the more common risky behaviors identified among youth. Statistics taken from the *Ohio Youth Risk Behavior Survey* indicated an increase in binge drinking (having five or more alcoholic drinks within an hour) from 2005 to 2007. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of youth surveyed noted that they had participated in binge drinking.

Twenty-three percent (23%) of high school students admitted to riding with someone who had been drinking. Automobile accidents, not involving drinking and driving, rank as the second leading cause of teen death. Not using seat belts, texting and using the cell phone while driving contribute to number of accidents recorded.

The third leading cause of deaths among youth is suicide. Thirteen percent (13%) of Ohio teens reported having seriously considered committing suicide. Some youth deaths, while self-inflicted, may be accidental. Participation in the “choking game” (deliberately cutting off your own air supply) and “cutting” increase one’s chance of serious injury or death.

What can adults and young people do to help those involved in risky behaviors? While changes in mood and activities may be common in young people, observation of several changes may be cause for action. Common signs of concern include: withdrawal from routine activities, change in friendships, change in physical appearance, a drop in grades, unexplained “marks” or injuries and prolonged mood changes. If these signs are observed talk to your child, speak with your child’s friends, or talk to their school counselor. Most problems can be resolved within normal family relationships but sometimes professional help is needed. Professional counselors can help people resolve many problems that teens and parents face.