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Teen heroin use not a problem in Woodinville



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Katie Couric has called heroin the "dirty little secret in the suburbs," reporting last month that for teens across the country, prescription drug abuse is leading to "skyrocketing heroin use."

Closer to home, the Issaquah Press reported heroin "is becoming a problem" in Issaquah, with the number of heroin possession, dealing and overdose cases on the rise among all age and economic groups.

Is it happening in Woodinville?

"There's no epidemic of heroin use," Police Chief Sydney Jackson said. "There's always been narcotics available, unfortunately."

But she said Woodinville has more arrests for driving under the influence and driving with a suspended license than for heroin-related crimes. (She said the Woodinville Police Department doesn't keep statistics on heroin-related arrests.)

Jackson said heroin "recently has kind of come to the forefront because it's much cheaper than [prescription painkiller] oxycontin," but current heroin use and arrests are "nothing out of the ordinary."

Deputy Ben Callahan, who serves as the school resource officer, acknowledged that "from a parent standpoint, it's terrifying, because it's not like any amount of heroin is OK."

"We're always going to look at it statistically," he said. "I work at the school, and we didn't get anything [related to heroin] this year."

Parents can be on the lookout for early indicators of substance abuse or mental illness, which often show similar symptoms, Callahan said.

Warning signs include changes in sleeping habits, irritable moods, odd behavior and acne.

Admittedly, those are common characteristics for teenagers in general. But Callahan tells parents "to go with their gut."

If parents think their child might be using drugs, he suggests they look through their kid's room for signs of drugs — but be prepared for the child to lie.

The best way to talk to kids about drugs — either to educate them about the dangers or to confront them about drug usage — depends on the child's personality and the relationship between the parent and the child, Callahan said.

If parents find out their child is using drugs, the best resource is the family physician, who "knows the background of the kid, regarding physical health and mental health," Callahan said.

The King County Crisis Line, which can be reached by calling 211, can also recommend options for drug and mental health treatment. And Callahan said he's always willing to answer questions from parents, who can contact him through Woodinville High School.

Dr. Kyle Good, a counselor in Kirkland and a former teacher and principal, specializes in treating children and adolescents. Children and teens who use drugs or alcohol usually do so because of other underlying fears about growing up, Good said. "As excited as they are ... they've never been 17 before," he said. "They're frightened."

Kids who are scared of growing up might use drugs and alcohol to "stop things" — even positive things such as making progress in school or moving away for college, Good said.

Alternately, if they're feeling bad about failures, such as bad grades or the end of a relationship, they might need to feel good by getting high.

He believes children who are using drugs or alcohol usually unconsciously want their parents to find out.

They might set themselves up to get caught by leaving their Facebook account open or leaving their phone where a parent will find it, as an indirect way of asking for more rules and restrictions. Once confronted, the child is usually willing to go to therapy.

"The kids come in and they want help," Good said. "They don't like hanging on to this."

A therapist who specializes in adolescents and drug and alcohol use can help the teen understand and deal with the underlying worries, Good said.

Parents often want to blame the environment — the fact that drugs are cheap and easy to find, or the influence of a bad group of friends — because it gives parents a sense of control.

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But the problem lies with the child, and their underlying fears or lack of self-esteem, not the environment, Good said.

"There's no easy solution to this kind of issue," Callahan said. "It's a terrifying thing for a parent to have to go through."

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