Take Action

- Work with local middle and elementary schools to start an inhalant abuse prevention project. It is not unusual for this kind of abuse to start as early as seven years of age.
- Educate your school about the dangers of inhalants through posters, newspaper articles, and announcements over the public address system at your school.
- Participate in National Inhalants and Poisons Week. Contact the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition at 800-269-4237 for more information.
- Educate adults about inhalant abuse. Many parents, coaches, and teachers may not know how widespread the problem is, the extent of the danger, or how to recognize abuse.
- If you're tempted to use, get help from a counselor—fast.

NCPC

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL

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SNIFFING YOUR LIFE AWAY

TAKE A BITE OUT OF CRIME®

Inhalant abuse can kill. And if it doesn't kill you, it can leave you with severe brain damage or severe respiratory problems. There's no fooling around—even a first-time user can end up dead after "sniffing or "huffing" inhalants.

Everyday products like glue, paint, lighter fluid, fingernail polish, permanent markers, WiteOut®, deodorants, and anything in an aerosol can are sniffed to get a rapid and dangerous high. While this type of substance abuse may seem harmless because the products are not legally classified as drugs, they are deadly chemicals and poisons. An inhalant "high" may give the feeling of well-being and reduce inhibitions, much like the effects of alcohol and other sedatives. Higher doses produce laughter and giddiness, feelings of floating, time and space distortion, and hallucinations. But the reality is inhalant abuse has serious short- and long-term side effects.

The Short Term

Sniffing can make you sick. For example, victims may become nauseated, forgetful, and unable to see things clearly. Some victims lose control of their bodies, including use of the arms and legs. You don't look real cool stumbling around high from inhalants. Side effects can last 15 to 45 minutes after sniffing. People who sniff often act intoxicated and experience short-term memory loss as well.

The Long Term

- potential "sudden sniffing death," even for first-time users
- permanent brain damage
- hearing loss
- increased heart rate
- arm or leg spasms
- bone marrow damage
- liver and kidney damage
- damage to an unborn baby, if pregnant.

Chronic inhalant abusers may exhibit symptoms such as anxiety, excitability, irritability, or restlessness that can lead to violent behavior.

What Are Some Signs of Inhalant Abuse?

Inhalant abusers may show some or all of these symptoms:

- unusual breath odor or chemical odor on clothing
- slurred or slowed speech
- a general drunken appearance
- paint or other products on the face or fingers
- red or runny eyes or nose
- spots or sores around the mouth
- nausea and/or loss of appetite.

What Should You Do if Someone You Know Is Sniffing and Seems To Be in Trouble?

- Stay calm.
- Call 911 or your local medical emergency number.
- Open the windows and doors to let in fresh air.
- Do not excite or argue with an abuser under the influence, as he or she can become aggressive or violent.
- Administer CPR until help arrives if the abuser is not breathing.
- Ask the abuser to sit down and stay calm—activity or stress may cause heart problems, which could lead to "sudden sniffing death."
- Talk with others present or check the area for clues to what was used.
- Help the abuser get professional help from a school nurse, counselor, physician, or health care worker. After recovery, offer to go with the abuser to his or her next appointment.

What Can You Do To Prevent Inhalant Abuse?

Know the facts. Remember that inhalants are not made for the body. They are deadly chemicals and poisons. Know the many ways inhalants can damage your mind and body. Tell your friends about the dangers of inhalant abuse. And refuse to hang out with friends who sniff.

As with many prevention efforts, preventing inhalant abuse takes a community effort. Organize with other teens to involve the media, retailers, schools, churches, health care providers, civic and volunteer organizations, elected officials, and the law enforcement community to stop kids from sniffing. Churches can educate their youth groups. Retailers can monitor sales of certain products. Health care providers can pass out literature to patients.