Synthetic Drugs: Bath Salts, K2/Spice:

A guide for parents and other influencers

Issues pertaining to synthetic drugs such as Bath Salts and K2/Spice:

Synthetic drugs are dangerous. They are not ‘safe’ as a second choice, or as an alternative to more well-known drugs, for your kids, and you must communicate that fact with them. This brochure will help provide you with the information and resources to have that discussion.

The first thing that parents should know is that the drug called Bath Salts is very different from the product that you put into a bath. The only reason why they have the same name is because the products look similar like a fine powder.

What are Bath Salts? They are a man-made, chemical (as opposed to organic) stimulant drug. Generally, stimulants are a class of drugs that elevate mood, increase feelings of well-being and increase energy and alertness. Amphetamines, or speed, are an example of stimulant drugs.

The technical term for Bath Salts is “substituted cathinone.” What does that mean? You may have heard of Khat, a plant that is cultivated and used in East Africa and the Middle East. It has a stimulant effect on the user and can be quite dangerous. Substituted cathinones are synthetic, concentrated versions of the stimulant chemical in Khat. Mephedrone and methylene are the chemicals most often found in “Bath Salts.” They can be ingested orally or snorted through the nose.
The physical signs of use are very troubling. You may notice increased agitation, profuse sweating, pale skin or vomiting. But what may be of the greatest concern is the loss of physical control—a kind of brain-body disconnect. This is where you may see seizures, a lack of pain response or uncontrolled/spastic body movements. Looking at the effects another way, parents should know that the onset of this drug is fairly quick, and—depending on a number of factors—the length of the high can last from one to eight hours.

The paranoia that is associated with K2/Spice is closer to the psychological reaction to PCP or angel dust than to the paranoia associated with marijuana.

One of the most frightening factors is that users may experience dysphoria. The best way to explain dysphoria is that it is the opposite of euphoria. A spice user posted a blog comment that read in part, "I felt as if I was in hell—this morbid place that I couldn't get out of."

As troubling as the short-term effects of this drug are, what is even more concerning is the fact that no one knows what their long-term effects will be. They simply haven't been around long enough for medical professionals to know how users will be affected in 10 years, 20 years or even further in the future.

Like Bath Salts, K2/Spice is sold online, in convenience stores and in "head" shops. It is often marketed as incense. While these drugs may be "news" to many parents, more than one in 10 American high school seniors used synthetic marijuana in the prior year according to the "Monitoring the Future" study, a survey conducted by the University of Michigan. At 11.4 percent, the annual prevalence of synthetic marijuana is:

- Eight times greater than meth (1.4 percent)
- Four times greater than cocaine (2.9 percent)
- Four times greater than inhalants (3.2 percent)
- 41 percent greater than Vicodin (8.1 percent)
- More than one in 10 American high school seniors

The challenge for regulators and parents, however, is to stay ahead of the new formulas and versions of these drugs that may not be covered by current law.

Congress is also working to act on this issue. However, regulators and parents face the challenge of staying ahead of new formulations. What can parents and other influencers say to young people about the dangers of these drugs?

A good overarching message to kids is to avoid putting anything in their bodies that would change their feelings or emotions—whether it is something they would smoke, drink, take in pill form or shoot with a needle. The human brain is an incredible machine, and you need to be even more careful with a teenage brain because it is a work in progress.

Additional messages include:

- It is impossible to know what these drugs contain, who made them or what you are going to get.
- Getting high—no matter how—carries risks of making unsafe or unhealthy decisions.
- Just because a drug is legal—or is labeled as legal—does not mean that it is safe.
- We don't know the long-term effects of synthetic drugs because the drugs are so new.
- It is a work in progress.
- You need to be even more careful with a teenage brain.
- Needle. The human brain is an incredible machine, and anyone who made them or what you are going to get.
- Wanting to feel good is a normal, healthy response.
- But what may be of the greatest concern is the loss of physical control—a kind of brain-body disconnect.
- This is where you may see seizures, a lack of pain response or uncontrolled/spastic body movements. Looking at the effects another way, parents should know that the onset of this drug is fairly quick, and—depending on a number of factors—the length of the high can last from one to eight hours.

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