

CPYU Trend Alert: Salvia: A New and Dangerous Drug

by Walt Mueller

"Does work or school have you down? Do you need a mini mental getaway from the realities of everyday life? The Mind Bender will jumpstart your senses with three distinct psychedelic trips." You might be surprised to learn that I didn't find those words posted in the window of an Amsterdam head shop where drugs are peddled, celebrated, and used legally right out in the open. No, I read them on my office computer screen as I was researching a new drug making its dangerous way through the consciousness of today's youth culture. The invitation to a drug-induced temporary escape appeared on one of the many internet sites touting *and* selling Salvia Divinorum, what many are saying just might be the next marijuana. . . only much more powerful. In this case, the site guaranteed "high quality," "discount prices," "great customer service," and "outstanding potency levels."¹

That site - and dozens of others like it that I discovered while conducting an Internet search for "Salvia Divinorum" - is easily accessible to the very same generation of kids who concerned parents have been encouraging to "just say no" to drugs for years. Sadly, one of the sites I encountered offers a distorted twist on that anti-drug slogan with its site name: "Just say once to Salvia."² Imagine being a vulnerable and easily-swayed young teen who encounters this invitation on the site: *"If you never try it, you'll always wonder. . . . what if? Salvia is capable of changing you, your family and friends and the world around you."*

It's no secret that we are raising our teens in a world that glorifies alcohol and drug abuse. The alarming statistics on teen substance abuse indicate that far too many kids are accepting the invitation, just saying "yes," and buying the lies. For that reason, it's important that we remain street-wise and ahead of the drug trends in order that we might equip them to say "no" to the many new drug options that continue to appear, including Salvia Divinorum. In order to fulfill a preventive role in the life of your teen, here's what you need to know about this relatively new drug craze that's sweeping across the country.

A member of the mint family, Salvia Divinorum (a.k.a. Divining Sage and herb-of-the-virgin, Sally-D, and Magic Mint) is a perennial herb and powerful natural hallucinogen that is as powerful as LSD. But unlike LSD, Salvia is entirely legal and unregulated, making it very easy and cheap to obtain. The drug can be bought at some record, health and "spirituality" stores, but is most easily obtained on the Internet (yes, you can even bid on it on eBay!). This explains the skyrocketing interest teenagers have in this mind-altering drug.

The Salvia plant is native to Oaxaca, Mexico, where it was originally used by the Mazatec Indians in spiritual and medicinal rituals. The plant grows in clusters to over 3 feet in height. It has large green leaves and squared hollow stems. Today, it is touted on one Internet site as "an extraordinary herb used in shamanism, divination, healing, meditation, and the exploration of consciousness."³ In today's teen world, this state of "divine inebriation" translates into a high that's unlike that of any other known hallucinogen. Teens typically smoke, chew, or drink the leaves in a brewed

tea. When smoked, the effects are felt within 30 seconds and last about 30 minutes to an hour. When chewed, the effects appear within 5 to 10 minutes. Users experience visionary trances (bright lights, vivid colors, pronounced shapes), a loss of control of their body, slurred speech, and a sense of being transported to a different place and time. The experience is intense.

Since the federal government has not yet regulated *Salvia Divinorum* or ruled it illegal, its use among the teenage population is sure to spread. However, due to the drug's rapid rise in usage among the teen population, eight states have issued some regulations and 16 others are considering bans. Besides warning our kids of the specific dangers related to *Salvia* abuse, parents and youth workers should be proactive and take the following preventive steps.

First, take a look in the mirror. When it comes to substance abuse, we need to evaluate the lifestyle we are modeling for our kids. Our level and use/abuse of alcohol, over-the-counter-drugs, and prescription drugs provides a powerful example for our kids.

Second, establish strict standards and rules. Contrary to what some people think, alcohol and drug use is relatively low among teens whose parents set and enforce strict rules about alcohol and drug abuse. Abusing any substance that alters one's consciousness for the purpose of recreation – legal or not - is dangerous and wrong.

Third, encourage involvement with a peer group that doesn't support alcohol and drug use. Proverbs 13:20 says, "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." Our teens are prone to become just like the company they keep.

And finally, deal with the problems that lead kids to abuse drugs. Prayerfully deal with and address their problems before they choose drugs and alcohol as an escape.

If our lives and words mirror the way and will of our Heavenly Father, our kids will be more likely to choose the narrow road that leads to life over the wide road that leads to destruction. And, when faced with questions like these - "*Does work or school have you down? Do you need a mini mental getaway from the realities of everyday life?*" - they will find their hope and salvation in Christ, not in the temporary hopeless escape of *Salvia Divinorum*.

To learn more about how to prevent substance abuse among the teenagers you know and love, check out chapter 10 in Walt Mueller's recently released book, *Youth Culture 101 (Youth Specialties/Zondervan)*, and visit the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding on the web at www.cpyu.org.

¹ www.salviasupply.com

² www.justsayonce.g2gm.com

³ www.sagewisdom.org