

Chapter 18

Methamphetamine

Speed Demons

Depiction Suggestions

The following points for consideration on the portrayal of methamphetamine use and addiction were created as a resource for entertainment development and production. They are not intended to limit the creative process.

Prevalence:

- ◆ Although methamphetamine is widely used in most states, the use varies significantly among geographical regions. It may be worth exploring the level of use in the area where your story is set.
- ◆ When dealing with youth and their use of methamphetamine, remember that it is used by teenagers in all socioeconomic groups.
- ◆ When looking at the age of characters who will use methamphetamine, keep in mind that use is on the rise with students in the 12th grade and in college settings.
- ◆ Bear in mind that adult use of methamphetamine is more prevalent than use by teens in some regions of the country because of cost on the black market.
- ◆ Try to reflect the reality that the majority of people don't use methamphetamine. Avoid reinforcing the false image that methamphetamine use is a normal, everyday activity.
- ◆ Attempt to realistically reflect methamphetamine use as a potentially addictive behavior rather than as a positive social activity.

- ◆ Unless a character's methamphetamine use truly reveals something important about the character, consider other unique behaviors as creative alternatives that might convey the same information.
- ◆ Occasional lines of dialogue with people reacting negatively to methamphetamine use can contribute to a more accurate public perception about methamphetamine norms that deglamorizes such use.
- ◆ Drug-prevention billboards can be used as a location set piece.
- ◆ The use of educational posters in scenes can send a subtle anti-drug message in such places as police stations, hospitals, schools, and public agency buildings. (For more information on education posters or additional materials, please call the Entertainment Industries Council, Inc., 800-783-3421.)

Health Consequences:

- ◆ Be aware that methamphetamine is a very powerful drug. When it is taken in any form, it has immediate effects on the central nervous system.
- ◆ When portraying someone who is using the drug, keep in mind that the brain cells are damaged after long periods of use and therefore can lead to some memory loss.

- ◆ Since the drug produces a high that lasts 8 to 24 hours, try to show the negative effects the drug has on the person immediately after use.
- ◆ Remember that methamphetamine is synthetic as opposed to other drugs such as cocaine that are plant-derived. Methamphetamine laboratories, generally unsophisticated operations in numerous local regions, usually use highly volatile ingredients contained in many common cold medications sold over the counter.
- ◆ Consider showing the frequent consequences of working with such volatile chemicals under such nonprofessional and unregulated circumstances, settings, and processes: fires, explosions, injury, and death.
- ◆ Emergency room physicians use established protocols to treat individuals who have had a methamphetamine overdose. Because hyperthermia and convulsions are common and often fatal complications of such overdoses, emergency room treatment usually focuses on the immediate physical symptoms. Overdose patients are cooled off in ice baths and anticonvulsant drugs may also be administered. Consider portraying this reality, where appropriate.
- ◆ When looking for reasons why infant characters might experience health problems, bear in mind the prenatal effects that methamphetamine has on a baby. Currently, research indicates that methamphetamine abuse during pregnancy may result in prenatal complications, increased rates of premature delivery, and altered neonatal behavioral patterns, such as abnormal reflexes and extreme irritability.

Spotlight on Depiction of Health and Social Issues

Proprietary To:

Entertainment Industries Council, Inc.

www.eiconline.org

1760 Reston Parkway, Ste. 415 • Reston, VA 20190-3303
Telephone: (703) 481-1414 • Fax: (703) 481-1418

500 S. Buena Vista St • Burbank, CA 91521-7283
Telephone: (818) 955-6845 • Fax: (818) 955-6870

Methamphetamine

Fact Sheet

Overview

Methamphetamine is a powerfully addictive stimulant that dramatically affects the central nervous system. The drug is made easily in clandestine laboratories with relatively inexpensive over-the-counter ingredients. It is a Schedule II stimulant, which means it has a high potential for abuse and is available only through a prescription that cannot be refilled. There are a few accepted but limited medical reasons for its use, such as the treatment of narcolepsy, attention deficit disorder, and, for short-term use, obesity.¹

Statistics and Information:

- ◆ Methamphetamine is a powerfully addictive stimulant that dramatically affects the nervous system.²
- ◆ The most commonly used name for methamphetamine is speed, however it has many other common slang terms (see Glossary, Chapter 27).³
- ◆ The short-term effects of methamphetamine use are:⁴
 1. Increased attention.
 2. Decreased fatigue.
 3. Increased activity.

4. Decreased appetite.
 5. Sense of euphoria and rush.
 6. Increased respiration.
- ◆ The long-term effects of methamphetamine use are:⁵
 1. Dependence and addiction psychosis in the form of paranoia, hallucinations, mood disturbances, and repetitive motor activity.
 2. Increased risk of stroke.
 3. Weight loss.
 - ◆ Researchers have reported that as much as 50 percent of the dopamine-producing cells in the brain can be damaged after prolonged exposure to relatively low levels of methamphetamine. Dopamine is the chemical that is released in the brain during a pleasurable experience.⁶
 - ◆ Smoking methamphetamine produces a high that lasts anywhere from 8 to 24 hours.⁷
 - ◆ Fifty percent of the drug is broken down in the body within 12 hours.⁸
 - ◆ Many methamphetamine users run a higher risk of contracting HIV and Hepatitis B and

C because of high usage by mainlining (see Glossary, Chapter 27).⁹

- ◆ Snorting methamphetamine produces an effect in about 3 to 5 minutes, and ingestion produces effects within 15 to 20 minutes.¹⁰
- ◆ Immediately after smoking the drug or injecting it, the user experiences an intense rush or flash that lasts only a few minutes and is described as extremely pleasurable.¹¹
- ◆ Prevalence of the drug is not as high with students because of the high cost on the black market. The adult market, however, shows that the prevalence is much higher despite the cost.¹²
- ◆ Increased transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and C, and other infectious diseases are likely consequences of increased methamphetamine abuse, particularly in individuals who inject the drug and reuse and share syringes, needles, or other paraphernalia equipment with others.¹³

Sources:

1. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), *Research Report*, Methamphetamine, p 1, 1998.
- 2-5. Ibid, pp 4-5, 1998.
- 6-13. NIDA, *Research Report*, Methamphetamine, pp 4-8, 1997.

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