

Marijuana and Teens



- Today's marijuana plants are grown differently than in the past and can contain two to three times more tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the ingredient that makes people high.
- THC affects the brain's control of emotions, thinking, and coordination.
- Talking with your child when they are in elementary or middle school in an honest and open way can prevent drug use in the future.

Teenage marijuana use is at its highest level in 30 years, and today's teens are more likely to use marijuana than tobacco. Many states allow recreational use of marijuana in adults ages 21 and over. Recreational marijuana use by children and teenagers is not legal anywhere in the United States. Today's marijuana plants are grown differently than in the past and can contain two to three times more THC, the ingredient that makes people high. The ingredient of the marijuana plant thought to have most medical benefits, cannabidiol (CBD), has not increased and remains at about 1%.

There are many ways people can use marijuana. These include:

- Smoking the dried plant (buds and flowers) in a rolled cigarette (joint), pipe, or bong
- Smoking liquid or wax marijuana in an electronic cigarette, also known as vaping
- Eating "edibles" which are baked goods and candies containing marijuana products
- Drinking beverages containing marijuana products
- Using oils and tinctures that can be applied to the skin

Other names used to describe marijuana include *weed*, *pot*, *spliffs*, or the name of the strain of the plant. There are also synthetic marijuana-like drugs such as "K2" and "Spice." These drugs are different from marijuana and are more dangerous.

Parents and Prevention

Talking with your child when they are in elementary or middle school in an honest and open way can prevent drug use in the future:

- Ask what he/she has heard about using marijuana. Listen carefully, pay attention, and do not interrupt. Avoid making negative or angry comments
- Offer your child facts about the risks and consequences of smoking marijuana.
- Ask your child to give examples of the effects of marijuana. This will help you make sure that your child understands what you talked about.
- If you choose to talk to your child about your own experiences with drugs, be honest about why you used and the pressures that contributed to your use. Be careful not to minimize the dangers of marijuana or other drugs, and be open about any negative experiences you may have had. Given how much stronger marijuana is today, its effect on your child would likely be much different than what you experienced.
- Explain that research tells us that the brain continues to mature into the 20s. While it is developing, there is greater risk of harm from marijuana use.



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800.232.4424 (phone)

860.793.9813 (fax)

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A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

The Following Are Some Common Myths About Marijuana:

- *"It's harmless and natural, it is only an herb, and it won't affect me long-term"*
- *"It's not addictive"*
- *"It doesn't hurt me as much as smoking tobacco"*
- *"It makes me feel calm"*
- *"It doesn't affect my thinking or my grades"*
- *"It's safe because it is used as medicine for cancer and other diseases"*

The following are common signs of marijuana use:

- Dizziness
- A smell on clothes, or the use of incense or other deodorizers
- Owning clothing, posters, or jewelry encouraging drug use
- Having pipes or rolling papers
- Stealing money or having money that cannot be accounted for
- Acting silly for no reason
- Being hungry and eating more than usual
- Red eyes or use of eye drops
- Increased irritability or grumpiness
- Reduced motivation and lack of interest in usual activities
- Trouble remembering things that just happened

Effects of Marijuana

Regular use of marijuana can lead to dependence, which causes users to have a very hard time stopping. When teens use marijuana regularly, they may crave marijuana and give up important activities to use marijuana. If they stop using, they may suffer from withdrawal symptoms which can include irritability, anxiety, and changes in mood, sleep, and appetite. Marijuana can also cause serious problems with learning, feelings, and health. THC is the active ingredient in marijuana. THC affects the brain's control of emotions, thinking, and coordination.

Short-term use of marijuana can lead to:

- School difficulties
- Problems with memory and concentration
- Increased aggression
- Car accidents
- Use of other drugs or alcohol
- Risky sexual behaviors
- Worsening of underlying mental health conditions including mood changes and suicidal thinking
- Increased risk of psychosis
- Interference with prescribed medication

Long-term use of marijuana can lead to:

- Cannabis Use Disorder
- The same breathing problems as smoking cigarettes (coughing, wheezing, trouble with physical activity, and lung cancer)
- Decreased motivation or interest which can lead to decline in academic or occupational performance
- Lower intelligence
- Mental health problems, such as schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, anger, irritability, moodiness, and risk of suicide

Connecticut Resources

Department of Mental Health
and Addiction Services
www.ct.gov/dmhas

www.drugfreect.org

National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov
1.800.662.HELP (4357)

National Institute on
Drug Abuse
www.drugabuse.gov