



Parents' Guide:
Talking With Youth
About Marijuana

Talking with youth about marijuana

It's important for parents to talk with their kids about marijuana early and often. Drug use of any kind can lead to injuries and illness and negatively impact development, performance in school, and involvement in family and community activities.

The conversation is as important as ever now that marijuana is legal in Alaska for adults 21 and older. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Children's brains keep developing until their mid-20s, which makes youth more susceptible to the negative effects of any and all drug use, including marijuana.



- Marijuana affects people differently. Some people get addicted or develop a dependency, which means they can't stop using it when they want to, even when their addiction messes up other important aspects of their lives, like their relationships, school work and involvement in sports, arts or family activities.



- Today's marijuana has a much higher potency than in previous decades. It can significantly impair judgment, distort thinking and perception, and make it hard to remember things.
- Marijuana is illegal for anyone under 21 to possess or use.

Conversations about drugs can seem awkward at first, but they build trust and give kids the support they need as they grow up. Children look to their parents and guardians for guidance, and parents can be extremely influential on how their kids think, act and make decisions.

When talking with youth about marijuana and other drugs, it's important to know what works. Research shows that lecturing, scare tactics and one-way conversations aren't effective.¹ What does work is open, positive communication that includes:

- Active listening
- Open-ended questions
- Objectivity
- Empathy and honesty

Conversations about drugs can go in many directions and sometimes can be hard, but staying objective, honest and really focused on hearing what a child says lets them know that their parents care about their well-being.

Why do children and teens use marijuana?

A lot of factors can prompt a child to try pot, including curiosity, a desire to fit in, peer-pressure and stress. Youth who already smoke cigarettes or use alcohol are more likely to try marijuana, and

children with untreated mental disorders, or who have experienced trauma, have a heightened risk of using marijuana and other drugs at an early age.¹

As with adults, drug use can begin as a means of fitting in or of coping with anxiety, anger, depression, boredom, trauma and other unpleasant feelings. Research suggests that family members' use of alcohol and drugs plays a strong role in whether kids start using drugs, too.¹

A child's home, school, neighborhood and community can all influence whether they try drugs.¹

How does marijuana use affect adolescent health?

Marijuana can be addictive,¹ and dependence/addiction is more common among teens than adults because their brains are still developing and vulnerable.^{3,4} The majority of 13-17-year-olds who enter substance abuse treatment programs in Alaska report that marijuana is the main or only drug they use.²

Marijuana is estimated to produce addiction in 17 percent (1 in 6) of users who start in their teens.¹

Some teens may believe that marijuana can help reduce issues with ADHD or anxiety, and improve their focus in school, but in truth adolescents who use marijuana can have:

- Increased difficulty memorizing things
- Distorted thinking and perception (exaggerated or irrational thoughts)
- Hallucinations
- Paranoia
- Anxiety
- Depression
- A possible decrease in IQ with prolonged use^{1,8,9}

Teens who use marijuana are more likely to perform poorly in school, which may lead to school dropout.^{1,5,7,8}

Adolescents who use marijuana on a daily or nearly daily basis (referred to as "heavy users") may struggle with mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and paranoia.^{1,7}

Heavy marijuana use can also make existing mental health conditions worse.^{8,9} When using marijuana heavily, adolescents may lack motivation and energy, and lose interest in activities they used to enjoy.

Other than alcohol, marijuana is the drug most commonly used by high school students who use drugs. In 2015, about 19 percent of Alaska students report having used marijuana in the past 30 days.⁷ Young people who use marijuana regularly may have a harder time learning and remembering things, and marijuana use has been associated with poorer academic performance, which may lead to a higher risk of dropping out of school.^{1,5,8}

The good news is that most Alaska high school students - 81 percent - report that they do NOT use marijuana.⁶



Parents can make a difference.

Most young people care about what parents say. One of the key reasons young people choose not to use drugs is because they know their parents don't approve of it.¹⁰

Children whose parents have a favorable attitude toward drug use are five times more likely to use marijuana by eighth grade,¹¹ so



start talking about it by the fourth or fifth grade. Be clear and specific.

- Let your kids know that marijuana is illegal for anyone under 21 years old to possess or use.
- Let them know that marijuana can do harm to their development.
- Let them know, if there is a family history of substance abuse. They should be aware that a family history of abuse may increase their risk of developing a substance abuse disorder.⁵
- Ask fourth and fifth graders some basic questions about marijuana and let them ask you questions: "What do you know about marijuana?" "Do you know that marijuana can hurt your health?" "Marijuana use is against the law for anyone under 21 years old. We want you to do well in school, so we have a family rule against using drugs, including marijuana."

Give your child ways to say no to marijuana and other drugs. Play out social situations where your child is offered marijuana and help them find the right words to refuse drug offers. Ask your child to suggest an alternative to using drugs.

Let your child know that it is fine to walk away from someone, including a friend, who is offering drugs. Make sure they can trust you for a safe ride home.

With teens, ask them if they've been offered drugs, if they have friends who use marijuana, and what they think about marijuana use. Remind them that you're there for them, that it's illegal for them to use, and that you have a family rule against using

marijuana. Help them come up with ways of refusing drugs, including marijuana, if offered.

If a teen says, "Well you've smoked weed before, so I don't see the big deal," stick with your real message: "Well, it's legal for adults to use marijuana now, but not for you. I'm concerned about your health, growth and well-being, and I know marijuana can be harmful to you."

Set clear guidelines.

Let your kids know the importance of healthy behaviors in your family and establish clear and specific rules about not using marijuana and other drugs. This can be part of a broader conversation about expectations for things like:

- Doing chores
- Following parental rules
- Showing respect for family members
- Bedtimes
- Curfews
- Following laws and school regulations
- School and class attendance

Provide consistent consequences for not meeting the guidelines. Remember to provide compliments for good choices and healthy behavior.

What to say: "It is important to our family that we all stay healthy and safe. One way to do this is to avoid drug use, including marijuana. This is important because marijuana might harm the developing brain, it's against the law, and it can do harm to you and others. That's why we have a family rule against using it."

Stay in touch with your child.

Monitor your child's behavior to ensure the rules are being followed, and remain actively involved in your child's life and get to know his or her friends. Stay in contact with other parents so that you may support one another. With your kids, always

- Keep lines of communication open.
- Eat dinner together.

- Do fun family activities together.
- Communicate the way your child does (texting, email, Facebook, Twitter).

Monitor your own behavior.

You and other family members are role models for your child, so think about what you do and the message it sends. Research suggests that family members' use of alcohol and drugs plays a strong role in whether a teen starts using drugs.¹ Parents, grandparents, and older brothers and sisters are models that children follow.¹

- Avoid heavy drinking around your child or teen.
- Do not use marijuana around your child or teen.
- Do not smoke or use tobacco in your home or car.

What do I do if I find my teen is using marijuana or other drugs or breaking other family rules?

Talk about it before reacting. When dealing with behavior, it's important to communicate your disapproval of the behavior without making your child feel rejected or shamed or like a bad person.

Remember and remind your child of the guidelines that were set and the consequences that go along with breaking them.

Leave the door open for your teen to problem-solve and change the outcome next time.

What to avoid?

Don't overreact. This may lead your child to take greater risks to prove that they are independent. When consequences feel overly punishing, your teen is more likely to:

- Rebel
- Feel resentment
- Take revenge, and you may see the behavior get worse.

This is not the time for anger, accusations, name calling or sarcasm.

Teens are smart enough to know that (like alcohol) some adults use marijuana without experiencing serious health or legal

consequences, so it is important to stick to the facts. Instead, discuss reasons not to abuse drugs.¹² Emphasize how drug use can affect things important to your teen — such as sports, driving, health and appearance.¹²

How can I tell if my child is using marijuana?

Be aware of changes in your child's behavior, such as carelessness with grooming, mood changes, and relationship problems with family members and friends, or changes in grades, skipping school, lost interest in favorite activities, and changes in eating or sleeping habits.

If someone is high on marijuana, they might:

- Seem dizzy or uncoordinated
- Seem silly and giggly for no reason
- Have very red, bloodshot eyes
- Have a hard time remembering things that just happened

If someone uses marijuana often, they might:

- Have an odor on clothes and in the bedroom
- Use incense and other deodorizers in their living space
- Increase their use of perfume, cologne or breath mints
- Use eye drops
- Have clothing, jewelry or posters that promote drug use
- Have unexplained use of money or may steal money
- Have items used with drugs such as pipes, bongs, scales, rolling papers, blunt wraps or vapor pens

What should I do if my teen continues using marijuana, even after suffering consequences?

If you think that your teen is addicted or cannot stop using marijuana or other drugs, contact his or her doctor or the SAMHSA's 24/7 Treatment Referral Line: 800-662-HELP (4357). Marijuana addiction treatment resources are available in Alaska. To find treatment resources near you, visit SAMHSA's Treatment Resources Website: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>.

What are the different ways marijuana is used?

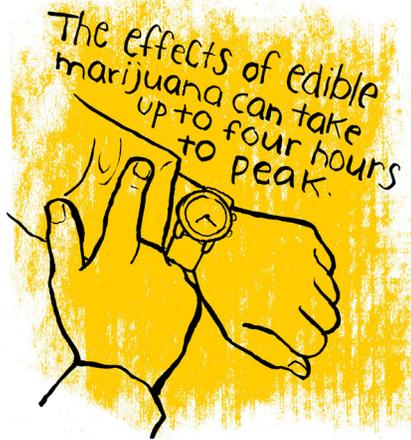
Inhaled products

When smoking marijuana, the effects peak just minutes after inhalation. Smoking marijuana has the added risk of harmful smoke exposure.

Edibles and infused products

Eating or drinking marijuana exposes users to THC, the chemical that makes people feel high. Teens may think eating or drinking something with marijuana is safer than smoking it, and they may accidentally eat or drink a product with marijuana that's not labeled or in its package.

The effects of edible marijuana can take up to four hours to peak.



This delay can make it hard for users to know how much they have consumed and may prompt them to consume more. Moreover, the effects from eating or drinking marijuana can last up to 10 hours. This means that a teenager can be impaired for a long time after eating or drinking marijuana. This impacts the ability to drive, bike, or perform other activities safely.

Legal users of marijuana should always store it safely away from children and pets. Products purchased from retail or medical marijuana stores are required by law to have child-resistant packaging. Keep marijuana in this packaging and in a locked area.

Marijuana dabbing

Dabbing is when THC extract from marijuana is heated at a very high temperature into a vapor that's inhaled by the user. These extracts can contain up to 60 to 80 percent THC. The effects peak seconds to minutes after inhalation and can cause significant impairment. Users who consume this highly concentrated form

of THC, particularly teens, can experience an unpredictable high with negative physical and emotional reactions.

These products are also called hash oil, dab, wax or earwax, and shatter. Since dabbing only became more common recently, the associated health risks have not been well studied.

Frequently Asked Questions.

Isn't marijuana safer for teens than alcohol and tobacco?

Marijuana, alcohol and tobacco are all potentially harmful drugs. Each affects teens differently. Teen marijuana use is associated with many health and safety problems like distorted perception, paranoia, anxiety, depression and decreased IQ.

Isn't marijuana natural and therefore OK for teens to use?

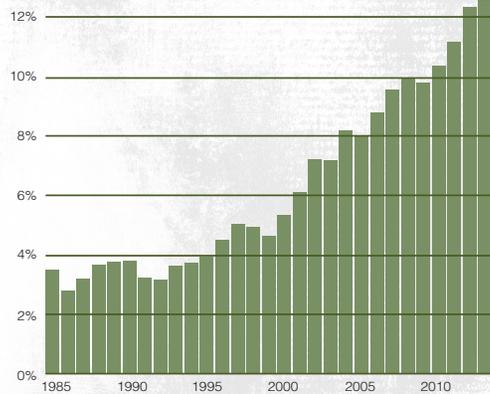
There are many natural things that are not good for our bodies. Regardless of it being "natural" or not, marijuana can harm a young person's health.

What about marijuana brownies and cookies? Aren't they safer than smoking marijuana?

Marijuana, no matter how it is used, can be harmful to teen health. Some marijuana products that are eaten or vaporized are more potent than smoked marijuana.

Marijuana is getting stronger

Average THC percentage in federal seizures of imported marijuana, 1985 - 2013



Source: White House Office of National Drug Control Policy

I smoked when I was a kid, why deny a rite of passage?

Keep in mind that most teens do not use marijuana, so it is not really a rite of passage. Today's marijuana is more potent than the marijuana that was available in the past. In addition, some marijuana products being sold are "concentrates" and are even more potent.

How do I tell my child not to smoke if I do now or did when I was younger?

Just like with alcohol, tell your child that it is against the law to use marijuana until they are 21. The teen brain can be harmed by regular marijuana use in ways that the adult brain is not. Using marijuana as a teen increases the likelihood that a person will become addicted to marijuana.

For more information

National Institute on Drug Abuse

<http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/marijuana-facts-parents-need-to-know/talking-to-your-kids-communicating-risks>

Alaska marijuana laws you should know.

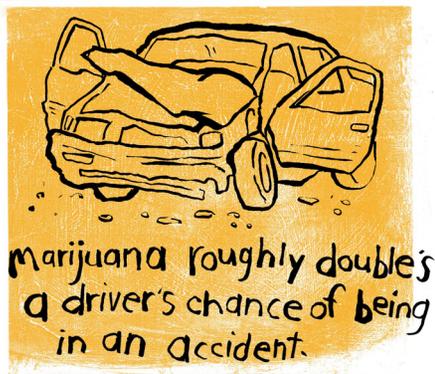
Alaska state law allows personal use of marijuana under certain conditions, but it is still a federal crime to possess and use even small amounts of marijuana. Federal law enforcement decides whether or not to prosecute these crimes.

A quick review of Alaska laws and regulations for people under 21:

- No one under 21 may sell, give, buy or possess marijuana.
- No one under 21 may enter a retail marijuana store.
- Anyone who is allowed to possess, sell, buy or use marijuana may not sell, give or otherwise provide marijuana to anyone under 21.
- A licensed retail marijuana store may not sell, give, distribute, deliver, or offer to sell, give, distribute, or deliver, marijuana or any marijuana product to anyone under 21.

An overview of Alaska's laws and regulations for legal users:

- If you are 21 or older, state law allows you to use and possess up to one ounce of marijuana, unless the use is prohibited by a property owner or other specific rule.
- Even if you are 21 or over, you may not sell marijuana unless you have a license for a commercial marijuana establishment issued by the state and you are approved by your local government. However, you may give up to an ounce and six immature plants as a gift to someone who is 21 or over.
- It is against the law to consume marijuana in public. Marijuana plants may not be visible to the public and must be kept in a secure place to protect those who are not authorized under state law to use marijuana.
- Driving while under the influence of marijuana remains illegal in Alaska.
- A variety of federal regulations specifically prohibit marijuana use or possession near schools and other places. These laws may be more likely to be enforced.



- Property owners and employers may prohibit the use or possession of marijuana on their properties. So if you are renting an apartment, the property owner may prohibit you from having marijuana there.
- Remember that marijuana use or possession is still a crime under Alaska law, unless you are 21 or over, it is one ounce or less, or you have

the proper licenses. You can be charged with a crime for possession or sale of marijuana for any activity relating to marijuana that falls outside the law.

- Testing positive for marijuana may be a violation of workplace policies or regulations, so you could be fired from a job for using marijuana. This could happen even if the use was outside of workplace hours and did not otherwise violate state law.

- Find the state regulations here or through the Alcohol & Marijuana Control Office at <https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/amco/MarijuanaRegulations.aspx>.

Resources

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services
Get The Facts About Marijuana
www.marijuana.dhss.alaska.gov

Monitoring Health Concerns Related to Marijuana in Colorado: 2014
http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Director/Documents/marijuana/Monitoring_Health_Concerns_Related_to_Marijuana_in_Colorado_2014.pdf

SAMHSA's Treatment Referral
Locates local substance abuse facilities near you
www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov
24/7 Treatment Referral Line: 800-662-HELP

The Partnership at DrugFree.org
Information for parents about substance abuse
www.drugfree.org

National Institute on Drug Abuse
Marijuana facts for parents and teens
www.drugabuse.gov

Seattle Children's Hospital Adolescent Substance Abuse Program
Provides teen substance abuse prevention, intervention, and out-patient treatment www.seattlechildrens.org/clinics-programs/adolescent-substance-abuse/

University of Washington Alcohol & Drug Abuse Institute A one-stop source of marijuana information in Washington state
www.LearnAboutMarijuanaWA.org

Speak Now Colorado
Provides information and resources to parents regarding youth substance abuse prevention
<http://speaknowcolorado.org/>

Sources

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- (5) Partnership for a Drug-Free Kids: <http://www.drugfree.org/> (accessed June 2015).
- (6) Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2013): <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Pages/yrbs/yrbsresults.aspx> (accessed June 2015)
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- (11) Risk and Protective Factors for Your Marijuana Use: Preliminary Findings, (2013). Hong, G., Becker, L. Presented July 10, 2013 at the What Works Youth Marijuana Symposium.
- (12) Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in-depth/teen-drug-abuse/art-20045921> (accessed June 2015).

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The Social Development Research Group (SDRG) at the University of Washington is known internationally for research on the prevention of substance abuse and other harmful behaviors. SDRG developed evidence-based programs that lead to reductions in substance abuse and a variety of other problems among youth.

Dr. Haggerty directed research studies that evaluated parenting programs including Guiding Good Choices, Staying Connected with Your Teen, Common Sense Parenting, Safe Drivers Wanted and Raising Healthy Children.

www.SDRG.org

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