

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

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Marijuana and Teens

Many teenagers experiment with marijuana. Friends, peer pressure, and portrayal of marijuana in the media often affect a teenager's decision to use. Parents can also play an important role in teaching their children about the risks of using drugs.

Buying and using marijuana is illegal. Still, teen marijuana use is at its highest in 30 years, and teens are now more likely to use marijuana than tobacco. In 2011, a national study showed that one in eight 8th graders, one in four 10th graders, and one in three 12th graders have used marijuana in the past year.

There are over 200 different street names for marijuana. Many of them are based on the type of drugs or tobacco that is mixed in with the marijuana, "brands" from various areas in the country or around the world, or specially bred strains. Some common names include blunt, bud, pot, spliff, and weed. "K2" and "spice" are examples of synthetic (man-made) marijuana-like drugs. There are also street names for smoking marijuana, including blazing, bonging, puffing, and toking.

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. The following are tips on for how to discuss marijuana with your child:

- 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 your reasons, be careful not to glamorize marijuana or other drugs, and discuss the negative things and dangers that resulted from you or your friends' drug use

Sometimes parents may suspect that their child is already using marijuana. The following are common signs of marijuana use:

- Dizziness
- 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

- 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

Many teenagers believe that marijuana is safer than alcohol or other drugs. When discussing marijuana with your child, it is helpful to know the myths and the facts. The following are some common myths about marijuana:

- *“It is harmless and natural, it is only an herb, and it won’t affect me long-term”*
- *“It is 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”*

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. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the active ingredient in marijuana. THC affects the brain’s control of emotions, thinking, and coordination.

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
- Increased risk of suicide
- Increased risk of psychosis

Long-term use of marijuana can lead to:

- The same breathing problems as smoking cigarettes (coughing, wheezing, trouble with physical activity, and lung cancer)
- Decreased motivation or interest
- Lower intelligence
- Mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, anger, moodiness, and psychosis
- Decreased or lack of response to mental health medication
- Increased risk of side effects from mental health medication

Medical Marijuana

Currently, only man-made forms of THC are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for a very small number of specific medical uses. **There are no FDA-approved medical reasons for children or teenagers to use marijuana or THC in any form.**

“Medical marijuana” is not checked for ingredients, strength, or safety. There is no evidence that medical marijuana is any safer than other marijuana.

The use of marijuana is illegal in the United States and prohibited by Federal law. However, medical marijuana laws are different from state to state. Several states allow the use of medical marijuana for adults. Almost all of these states still say that it is a crime for minors to sell, have, or use marijuana.

Conclusion

Marijuana use in teens can lead to long-term problems. Teens rarely think they will end up with problems related to marijuana use, so it is important to begin discussing the risks with your child early and continue this discussion over time. Talking openly with your child will help with prevention. If your child is already using, open communication will help you know more about his or her use. If you have concerns about your child’s drug use, talk with your child’s pediatrician or a qualified mental health professional.

Related Facts for Families include:

[#3 Teens: Alcohol and Other Drugs](#)

[#41 Substance Abuse Treatment for Children and Adolescents: Questions to Ask](#)

[#68 Tobacco and Kids](#)

[#93 Drinking Alcohol in Pregnancy \(Fetal Alcohol Effects\)](#)

For more information about marijuana, drugs, and teenagers, you can check out:

HBO Series on Drugs and Addiction

- http://www.hbo.com/addiction/adolescent_addiction/221_marijuana.html

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

- Information for Parents about Drugs: <http://drugabuse.gov/parent-teacher.html>
- Information for Parents about Drugs: <http://drugabuse.gov/students.html>
- Information about Marijuana: <http://drugabuse.gov/DrugPages/Marijuana.html>
- Marijuana Facts for Teens and Parents: <http://drugabuse.gov/MarijBroch/Marijteens.html>

See also: *Your Child* (1998 Harper Collins) / *Your Adolescent* (1999 Harper Collins)

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