

WHY NOT POT?

Ten Talking Points for Discussing Marijuana with Our Kids

No matter what you call it – weed, pot, grass, bud – marijuana is the most widely used drug among today’s youth. At BHS, nearly half of senior students report ever having tried marijuana, and 1 in 4 teens who try it are likely become heavy users. That trend is likely to increase -- the recent legalization of marijuana for those 21 and older leads teens (and some adults!) to believe it’s not that harmful. However, studies also show marijuana use can negatively impact the teen brain at a crucial time in its development. This can lead to a range of social, learning, and mental health issues, impairing judgment and leading to risky behavior (including driving while stoned).

So how can we have constructive conversations with our kids about marijuana? Consider these ten talking points:

- 1) **Marijuana is still illegal for those under 21**, despite recent legalization. Consequences include a fine, and students under 18 are required to attend a Marijuana Education Program.
- 2) Contrary to popular belief, **NOT everybody is doing it**. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, a recent national survey shows five out of six 10th graders and three out of four 12th graders are NOT using marijuana. So the question may be “Why pot?” Are there underlying issues (pain, loss, insecurity, etc.) that could be better addressed with healthy coping mechanisms?
- 3) Research shows that kids who use marijuana in early adolescence are more likely to engage in **risky behaviors** that may put their futures in jeopardy, such as delinquency, violence, having multiple sexual partners, and perceiving drugs as not harmful. Because **marijuana impairs judgment**, adolescents are more likely to get themselves into situations in which they could be especially vulnerable to situations such as rape and assault.
- 4) Marijuana is especially **dangerous during the brain development** of the teen years. Regular marijuana, even as little as once a week, actually changes the structure of the developing brain and has been shown to be associated with **cognitive deficits, memory, and poor academic performance**. Heavy marijuana use compounds these deficits and is also associated with higher rates of depression and other mental health problems.
- 5) Marijuana can lead to increased anxiety, panic attacks, depression and other **mental health problems**. Frequent, long-term marijuana users can show signs of amotivational syndrome -- **not caring** about what happens in their lives, **no desire to work, fatigue**, and a lack of concern about how they look. As a result, some users tend to **perform poorly in school** or at work.
- 6) Marijuana has serious **harmful effects on the skills** required to drive safely: **alertness, concentration, coordination, and reaction time**. Marijuana use can make it difficult to judge

distances and react to signals and sounds on the road, and data have also shown that while smoking marijuana, people show the same lack of coordination on standard "drunk driver" tests as people who have had too much to drink

7) Studies show that long-term use of marijuana may play a role in some kinds of **cancer**. Marijuana smoke contains **50-70% more carcinogenic hydrocarbons** than tobacco smoke and induces high levels of an enzyme that converts certain hydrocarbons into their carcinogenic form. Puff for puff, smoking marijuana may be more harmful to the lungs than smoking tobacco.

8) Marijuana smokers may develop many of the same **respiratory problems** that tobacco smokers do, such as daily cough and phlegm production, more frequent acute chest illnesses, and a heightened risk of lung infections.

9) Studies show the average amount of **THC in marijuana has more than tripled** since many adults were teens, and **edible marijuana** might be even more dangerous than smoking, since manufacturers can't guarantee amounts and distribution of THC in the candy and baked items they produce. THC (the psychoactive ingredient in pot) also **impairs the immune system's** ability to fight disease.

10) Research has now established that **marijuana is psychologically addictive**. Each year, more teens enter treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than for all other illicit drugs combined. Long-term marijuana use can lead to "tolerance," meaning users need larger and larger amounts of marijuana to get the same effects they once got from smaller amounts.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- www.B-PEN.org
- <https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/factsheets/teens.htm>
- www.drugfree.org
- <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana>
- <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/marijuana>
- https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/04/20/teens-tend-to-think-marijuana-use-is-no-big-deal-but-theyre-wrong/?utm_term=.91cc26197cd3
- <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/pediatricians-step-up-warnings-about-marijuana-use-by-teens/>
- <http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2014/02/25/282631913/marijuana-may-hurt-the-developing-teen-brain>
- <https://www.verywell.com/marijuana-frequently-asked-questions-by-teens-63133>

www.B-PEN.org

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