

___The Bottom Line___

THE MARIJUANA ROAD SHOW: PRODUCTS & PARAPHERNALIA

On May 16 at 7 p.m. in the Heath School Auditorium, the Brookline Department of Public Health and the BHS Prevention/Intervention team presented an educational forum for parents and the community called “The Marijuana Road Show: Products and Paraphernalia.”

With marijuana now legal for 21+, the forum addressed the importance of being aware of the culture of illicit marijuana use among teens and understanding the variety and strength of marijuana-infused products on the market. BHS Peer Leaders shared an original [10-minute video](#) that addressed the new marijuana laws, showed some different types of marijuana products and paraphernalia, and introduced some mental health consequences marijuana can have on the teen brain. (Click here to watch the video.) Participants left with a useful handout as well – [“Why Not Pot? Ten Talking Points for Discussing Marijuana with Our Kids.”](#)

The Peer Leaders also offered their perspectives on a number of questions:

What is the culture of marijuana use at Brookline High? Some products, like vaping and dab pens, have made it easier for teens to smoke marijuana and be discreet because you just need to take a quick hit off the pen and can hide it easily. There are more habitual/regular smokers than there used to be, which means that there are more people smoking everyday, but we don’t think there’s necessarily a higher percentage of the student body using marijuana. There isn’t really a lot of social pressure to smoke.

How prevalent or common is marijuana use at BHS? Changes in laws regarding medicinal marijuana and recreational use cause many teens to doubt the dangers of marijuana use and might be more likely to try it. There are also a lot of kids who choose not to smoke, because they don’t want it to impact their grades, their sports or extracurriculars, or they just have no interest.

When do young people usually try marijuana for the first time? It really depends on the kid and their social group, friends, and sometimes older siblings. Marijuana use is less prevalent in lowerclassmen, but vape and dab pens have made it easier for kids to try it quickly and discreetly.

Where do students get marijuana? Usually students get marijuana from their friends who smoke, or if they have older siblings or older friends who smoke.

What is the spectrum of marijuana use among BHS students? There’s a wide range of use and it depends on the individual student. Some students use marijuana just once in a while at a party or recreationally. Some students might try to self-medicate with marijuana if they’re feeling anxious or depressed, which can escalate into dependency or addiction. Some students can smoke a lot but still function pretty well, or they may feel the need to smoke in order to function. Some students smoke every day, even before and during school.

Why do some young people stay away from marijuana or never try it? For some, marijuana is just not appealing and they don’t have the desire to try it. There are a lot of unknowns about the side effects of marijuana on developing teen brains and that can deter kids from using it. Other students don’t want to jeopardize their grades or sports. Some students have seen their friends or family members have problems

with dependency and don't want the same thing to happen to them. Examples set by parents and the values or morals instilled by parents can also be influential.

What kind of problems might a teen experience from using too much marijuana? We all know students who have gotten heavily involved in using and screwed up their high school career. They fall behind in their classes from not doing their homework or studying. They might skip classes to avoid a quiz, or because they haven't done their homework, or they want to hang out with their friends and get high. School can become less important. Some students can become dependent on marijuana, where they need to smoke to function in their daily lives. Some students say they can't fall asleep without it. Students may also think it is safe to drive while high and get into car accidents.

Do students recognize when a friend has a problem? What signs might they see? Does the social group they are in impact what might stand out as problem usage? If a student's friend group also smokes, it might make it harder to see if someone has a problem because smoking has become the norm in that group. Students might recognize a problem if their friend falls behind in their schoolwork, or is not as passionate or as interested in their extracurriculars. Friends from a non-smoking social group might notice if their friend starts hanging out with people who do smoke.

And if so what do they do about it? It can be hard to confront your friend if you are concerned about their marijuana use, but it's important to tell them that marijuana use is serious. Just because marijuana is legal, doesn't mean that it's not dangerous. As adolescents we need to realize that our brains are still developing and we don't know how marijuana use will impact our mental health 5 or 10 years down the road. We can talk to the social workers and counselors at the school if we're concerned about one of our friends.

What signs should parents look for? Acting goofy or out of character for no reason, acting really goofy and then really tired, losing interest in and motivation to do usual activities, having red eyes or urges to eat outside of usual mealtimes, stealing money or having money that cannot be accounted for.

What do you recommend parents do when they find out that their child is using marijuana on a regular basis?

Don't push them away or be angry with them. Understand that it is really hard to go back to not using once you have really developed a habit. Maybe it is more about harm reduction, emphasize positive behaviors and outcomes if they really cut way down.

What is your advice for parents? Have an open and honest dialogue with your kid, and talk about it early. Ask kids what they know or have heard about marijuana, without interrupting. Talk to them about the unknown risks and effects of marijuana use on teen's brains and educate them on the side effects that are known, like anxiety, depression, and dependency. Try not to overreact and punish kids if you find out they are using marijuana, because that might backfire and make them want to use marijuana more. Expressing disappointment can be more effective than punishing them. You can also talk to a social worker at the high school if you have specific questions.

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Concerned or simply curious? Don't hesitate to reach out to the BHS Prevention/Intervention Team in Rm. 149, 713-5155 – social workers Mary Minott (mary_minott@psbma.org) and Kendell Jones (kendell_jones@psbma.org)