

PARENT UPDATE
TEENS & MARIJUANA

from

*The Changing Landscape:
Addressing the Challenges of Teen Substance Abuse*

Brookline's recent community Wellness Summit gathered parents, students, Brookline Schools staff/administration, health experts, police, and community members to explore current trends in risky adolescent behavior and brainstorm strategies. One of the major focuses was on teens and marijuana, which is the most widely used illegal drug among today's young people. Teen marijuana use is on the upswing, fueled in part by an increasing teen misperception that marijuana is harmless, despite numerous studies showing that today's marijuana, which is twice as potent as it was decades ago, can negatively impact the teen brain at a crucial time in its development.

GOAL - Reduce the number of students who use marijuana, which has cognitive, emotional and health risks. Keep in mind the changes in marijuana laws, addressing reduced perception of risk, increased access, and changing social norms.

FACTS:

- 27% of BHS students report having tried marijuana
- 1 in 4 teens who try marijuana are likely to go on to becoming heavy users
- Heavy marijuana use impacts memory, attention span and cognition, and can lead to poor school performance, lower IQ, school failure.
- Heavy marijuana use is associated with higher rates of depression and other mental health problems.
- As of Dec 15th, anyone 21 years or older can buy, possess, and use up to one ounce of marijuana, and grow up to 6 marijuana plants (12 per household).
- Penalty of use/possession under age 21 includes fine (less than \$100) fine attendance in a drug awareness program.
- Kids often use MJ and drive, thinking they are not compromised.

STRATEGIES & RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Try to de-normalize marijuana use, accepting the reality that teens will have easier access and be able to smoke legally when they grow up – students get mixed messages from parents using.
- Update the health curriculum to add lessons and/or “day of education” about marijuana and marijuana laws. Extend the half-year of freshman health education to a full year, and add junior and senior year components.
- Consider “Drug Awareness Week.”

- Get more involved in politics, making sure pot shops are far from schools, advocating for safe places.
- Clarify policies for chemical health and consequences. Let students know the difference between getting “caught” or voluntarily seeking advice, as well as where to go if they have a problem or suspect an issue with someone else. Make community policies more clear, clarifying that it is safe to contact police if a student needs help.
- Make students aware that the psychologists/social workers have confidential policies, and students can talk to them without fear of reprisal or parent involvement.
- Clarify for parents/teachers what to do when a kid comes to them about substance issues.

CURRENT ACTION PLANS:

- Peer Leader substance abuse awareness presentations in 8th grade health classes
- “The Other Talk” presentation to help parents of soon-to-be college students communicate accurate, healthy and practical messages to their children regarding college alcohol/drug use and other risky behavior
- BETCO performance for students, “Higher Education” to dig into conversation among students
- Planning Day of Education around substance use for next year, supported by Brookline Community Foundation

For more information, go to B-PEN’s [“Marijuana”](#) page. If you or your organization would like to work with us on any of the above strategies, please contact Mary Minott, mary_minott@psbma.org.