



Know! to have a Meaningful Conversation about Marijuana

Know! to dispel the myths

If they say...

Weed is safer than other drugs and alcohol. Would you rather be drinking or using other drugs?

Try responding with...

To be honest, I don't want you to be doing anything that could be harmful to you, whether it's smoking pot, drinking, or behaving recklessly. I'm interested to know why you think marijuana is safer than alcohol or other drugs.⁹

If they say... Marijuana is used as medicine, and it's legal in some states. How could it be bad for me?

Try responding with...

- It's true that using marijuana recommended for medical reasons is legal. But, like any medication, it isn't always safe, and you should never take it if it is not recommended to you.
- That's a good question. Marijuana, like alcohol and cigarettes, is legal in some states for people of a certain age. We know that alcohol and cigarettes are both addictive and cause cancer and are legal for people over 21. Just because something is legal and regulated doesn't mean it is safe or harmless.⁹

Marijuana is one of the most-used substances among adolescents.¹ The national marijuana landscape has changed in recent years and continues to evolve. Misinformation about marijuana and its effects is common, and increased visibility of marijuana products means that more young people may believe that marijuana is not as harmful as other substances. It's important that the youth in your life understand that you don't approve of marijuana use in the same way that you don't want them to smoke cigarettes, vape, drink alcohol, or use other substances. Meaningful conversations about marijuana can help guide the young people in your life toward making safer choices and staying healthy.

Know! the basics

What is marijuana?

Marijuana is the dried leaves, flowers, stems, and seeds of the cannabis plant. It contains various chemical compounds known as cannabinoids. The two most well-known cannabinoids in marijuana are delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD). THC is a psychoactive chemical that affects the brain and produces the "high" experienced by people that use marijuana. CBD does not cause a "high" and is often sold separately as an oil or an extract.² Decades ago, marijuana contained more CBD than THC. However, today's marijuana has three times the concentration of THC compared to 25 years ago, and THC potency continues to rise. Higher amounts of THC lead to stronger effects on the brain and may contribute to higher rates of dependency and addiction.^{3,4}

How do people consume marijuana?

Marijuana can be consumed in several ways, including:

- Smoking the dried plant in a hand-rolled cigarette (joint), pipe, or bong,
- Smoking liquid or wax marijuana using a vape pen or dab pen (vaping),²
- Eating "edibles," which are any food that contains THC, commonly baked goods and candy, or
- Drinking beverages that contain marijuana products.⁵

What is delta-8 THC?

You may have heard of or seen delta-8 in your local gas station or convenience store. Delta-8 THC is found naturally in cannabis plants and, like delta-9 THC, is a psychoactive compound that can produce a euphoric high. Delta-8 THC can be created synthetically from CBD and hemp. Delta-8 products are unregulated by the Food and Drug Administration, and many products contain high levels of delta-8 THC and impurities that increase the potential for harm.^{6,7}

Are young people using marijuana?

According to the 2022 Monitoring the Future Survey, 11% of 8th graders, 24% of 10th graders, and 38% of 12th graders reported having used marijuana in their lifetimes. While this means that **most young people have not used marijuana**, it's important to know that many young people will be exposed to marijuana use during adolescence.¹

Know! the risks

Marijuana use, like any other drug use, can lead to addiction and dependence. About 1 in 10 people who use marijuana will develop an addiction, and the rate of addiction rises to 1 in 6 when use begins before the age of 18. Because the teen brain is actively developing, marijuana use is particularly risky for young people. Additional risks of marijuana use include:

- A decline in brain health and function, which can lead to poor academic performance,
- Poor mental health, including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and serious mental illnesses like psychosis and schizophrenia,
- Impaired coordination, leading to poor athletic performance and impaired driving, and
- Cannabis hyperemesis syndrome (CHS), or nonstop vomiting in regular marijuana users.^{3,4,8,9}

Know! what to look out for

Potential warning signs of marijuana use in youth include:

- Declining schoolwork and grades
- Sudden changes in friends
- Abnormal health or sleep issues
- Less openness and more secretive behavior
- Presence of rolling papers, cigars, pipes, small plastic bags, containers, and lighters

You know your young person best – if something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.⁹

Know! what to say

Young people will likely be exposed to marijuana, whether they have friends who try it, notice products in stores, or see marijuana use in popular media and advertising. Caring adults should be comfortable talking with young people about uncomfortable topics like marijuana use. You can use your influence and open communication to help young people stay safe, make informed choices, and avoid unsafe situations. If you avoid talking with the young people in your life about these tough subjects, you could be doing more harm than good.³ Try using these tips to guide your conversations with young people about marijuana:

Establish your goals.

Take a few minutes before you talk to write down what you hope to accomplish with your conversation, like "I want to gain insight into how my teen feels about marijuana" or "I want to understand what pressures my teen is facing when it comes to marijuana." After you talk, you can look back to see what went right and wrong and what you might do differently for future conversations.⁹

Be calm and positive.

Avoid approaching the conversation with anger, scare tactics, shame, or panic. Instead, enter the conversation with curiosity, respect, understanding, and attention.⁹

Be prepared.

Teens may have incorrect information about marijuana that they learned from other young people or the media. Come prepared with facts about the risks and consequences of marijuana use. If they ask you a question you don't have the answer to, it's okay to say that you aren't sure and work with your teen to find the answer.^{5,6}

Be honest about your experiences.

If you choose to share your experiences with marijuana, be honest about why you used marijuana and be open about the pressures you faced, any negative experiences, and why you stopped smoking marijuana.⁵

Resources

[Marijuana Talk Kit.pdf \(drugfree.org\)](#)

[Marijuana FactCheck: Marijuana, Cannabis and Vaping News for Parents & Teens \(mjfactcheck.org\)](#)

[Marijuana Resource Center - Partnership to End Addiction \(drugfree.org\)](#)

[Marijuana IQ Quiz | SAMHSA](#)

[Superscript sources are hyperlinked at the start of this document](#)

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If they say...You can't get addicted to weed, so why should I be worried?

Try responding with...

- I'm genuinely curious about why you think that marijuana isn't addictive. Could you tell me more about that?
- I would much rather you find healthy ways to cope with difficult feelings than use drugs. Can we brainstorm activities together?⁹

If they say...Marijuana is a plant. It's natural. It can't be that harmful.

Try responding with...

- Not all plants are necessarily good or harmless. Think about poison ivy or heroin, which comes from poppies.
- The truth is that even though marijuana is a plant, using it can hurt your brain and impact your judgment. I want you to be healthy and safe, and I'm concerned that you feel that marijuana isn't harmful.⁹



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