

Marijuana Use: What Parents Need to Know

Marijuana use in children can have harmful short-term and lifelong effects on their health and well-being. Here is information from the American Academy of Pediatrics about marijuana use in children, including risks and how to prevent marijuana use. (Parents include caregivers, and *child* refers to a child or teen, in this publication.)

Talk about the risks of marijuana use

Marijuana use is often portrayed as harmless, but the truth is that marijuana can be an addictive drug, especially for teens, that can cause serious risks and consequences.

Start talking with your child at an early age about the dangers of marijuana use. Encourage them to ask questions and tell you about their concerns. Remember to listen, and do not lecture or do all the talking. You may find teachable moments from news stories or even TV shows or movies that portray marijuana use in their storylines.

- **Affects growth and development.** Children's brains and bodies keep growing and developing from infancy to young adulthood. Smoking or vaping anything, including marijuana, is not good for lung health. Regular marijuana use can alter typical brain development. Marijuana use may also lead to addiction.
- **Leads to school problems.** Those who use marijuana often have a hard time thinking clearly, concentrating, remembering things, and solving problems. Frequent marijuana use often causes grades to drop. Those with regular or heavy use often lose interest in school and may quit.
- **Impairs judgement.** Marijuana use impairs judgment, complex motor skills, and the ability to judge speed and time. For example, those who drive after smoking marijuana are much more likely to be injured or killed.
- **Is linked to sexual consequences.** Teens who use marijuana are more likely to take sexual risks, including having unwanted or unprotected sex. This can lead to unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, or sexual assault.

Note: In most medical marijuana states, doctors can recommend medical marijuana for almost any condition. Although there may be some benefit of cannabinoids (one of the active ingredients in marijuana) in adults with specific diagnoses and in certain rare types of childhood seizures, there have been no studies supporting other cannabinoid use in children and adolescents. Also, all patients need to be aware that there can be side effects.

Be aware of the signs of marijuana use

Knowing the signs of drug use is the first step in getting help for your child. Signs of marijuana use may include

- Marijuana smell on your child's clothing or around an area they smoked in
- Marijuana and/or devices to smoke or vape marijuana in their room, pockets, or backpack
- Comes home high (talkative, giggly, or red/glassy eyes) or goes straight to their room
- Spends less time with family and friends and more time alone or away from home
- Often seems moody or irritable
- School problems
- Loses interest in hobbies and activities

- Changes in dress and grooming
- Changes in eating and sleeping
- Does illegal things, like stealing
- Buys things like T-shirts with pro-marijuana messages or symbols

Note: Dried marijuana plant material may be rolled with tobacco into cigarette joints or cigar blunts and smoked, or in liquid form, marijuana may be inhaled with a vaping device. Some people mix it in food or brew a tea. Other drugs, like PCP (phencyclidine) or crack cocaine, can also be added to the joint, increasing the dangers from use.

Remember, you are a role model

Be a positive role model in the ways you express, control, and relieve stress, pain, or tension. Actions speak louder than words! Teach children healthy values that are important to your family and that they can use when deciding what is right and wrong.

Help build resilience

Help your child cope with emotions. Children might consider using marijuana to help them cope with depression or anxiety. Explain that everyone has these feelings at times, so it is important for each person to learn how to express their feelings, cope with them, and face stressors in healthy ways that can help prevent or resolve problems.

Get support

Your child's doctor understands that good communication between parents and children is one of the best ways to prevent marijuana use. If talking with your child about marijuana is difficult, your child's doctor may be able to help open the lines of communication. If you suspect your child is using marijuana or any other drug, ask your child's doctor for advice and help.

About Teen Confidentiality

All teens should be screened for marijuana and other drug use as part of routine medical care. Your child's doctor will want to ask questions about marijuana in private to get honest answers. If your child reports marijuana use, the doctor will determine whether your child needs very brief advice, a return visit, or a referral to a specialist. Every doctor will have their own policy about what information must be shared with a parent and what will stay confidential (between the patient and their doctor), but most doctors will protect a teen's confidentiality if they believe the teen's drug use is not an immediate safety risk to the teen or others. It is important for you to respect the doctor's decisions about confidentiality to encourage your child to have an open and honest discussion with the doctor.

Visit www.HealthyChildren.org for more information.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is an organization of 67,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

In all aspects of its publishing program (writing, review, and production), the AAP is committed to promoting principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

