

Critical Talk with Your Teen and Preteen: Marijuana

If there is one topic parents must cover with their preteens and teens, it is marijuana. As with other potentially tricky topics, keep the lines of communication open – ask questions and avoid preaching. Taking a “no-use” position is important for their health and well-being. Here’s the lowdown:

- **ADDICTION:** Currently more young people are admitted to treatment centers for marijuana addiction than any other drug. Addiction is defined as compulsive drug seeking and abuse despite the known harmful effects on functioning within the context of family, school, work, and recreational activities. Addiction is more common in young people who are struggling with other mental health issues, such as ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), depression, anxiety or ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder).
- **HARM:** You don’t have to be “addicted” to marijuana for it to cause harm. For teens, especially those with mental health concerns, “self-medicating” actually worsens mental health. Marijuana intoxication can cause distorted perceptions, impaired coordination, difficulty with thinking and problem solving, and problems with learning and memory. It is not surprising that marijuana use significantly affects athletic performance and driving skills - reaction times, depth and time perception and avoidance skills. Marijuana use compromises lung health – users report more bronchitis, pneumonia, coughing, sputum, and breathing difficulties. Research has shown that, in chronic users, marijuana’s adverse impact on learning and memory can last for days or weeks after the acute effects of the drug wear off.
- **AVAILABILITY:** Marijuana is readily available - medical marijuana dispensaries and legalization efforts could make it even more available. Suburban environments are not immune from marijuana production and distribution. Your child could get it if they wanted it with a little networking – it circulates in certain groups more than others. Availability of any drug makes its use and abuse more likely.
- **BUZZ:** The average percentage of THC (the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana) has increased from 3% to 10% over the last 25 years - making it a much more potent drug.
- **COST:** The teen brain is in a very active developmental phase. Time spent under the influence of marijuana takes away from time spent on schoolwork, sports, the arts, volunteering, developing social skills and other positive “brain-development” activities. Kids who use miss out.
- **COMPROMISE:** Use of marijuana sends a young person on an unknown trajectory – some can get back on track without too much trouble, others struggle their whole life because of use. Studies of adolescents who were heavy users show that, 20 years later, they report lower rates of university degree attainment, increased welfare dependence, increased unemployment, decreased satisfaction with relationships and decreased life satisfaction.

Information from: <http://www.drugabuse.gov/Infofacts/marijuana.html>

Presentation at MHS from Dr.Charlie Reznikoff, Addiction Specialist

Here are a few clips from the presentation: (view entire video at www.tonkacares.org)

1. Is marijuana a medicine? (3 min) http://minnetonka-k12.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?publish_id=119
2. How is early risk-taking behavior related to marijuana use? (1 min)
http://minnetonka-k12.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?publish_id=120
3. Is marijuana addictive? (2 min) http://minnetonka-k12.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?publish_id=121
4. What do you do with a kid who smokes too much marijuana? (1 min)
http://minnetonka-k12.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?publish_id=122

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