

Say “YES” to a Healthy Lifestyle



Discovery
EDUCATION



GRADE
RANGE
5–7

RISKY BEHAVIOR | FAMILY ACTIVITY

ASK, LISTEN, LEARN WHEN IT COMES TO TEENS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CANNABIS

Overview

Cannabis is one of the most controversial recreational substances. While federal and state governments wrestle with how and whether to legalize its use, data suggests that cannabis use among teens comes with lasting consequences. Discuss marijuana with your kids and work with your family to open the lines of communication.

Cannabis can be used in many ways, but “vaping,” or smoking a liquid marijuana extract, has become popular with kids and teens. More research is needed to determine the long-term health impact of cannabis use, but this is what we know about how cannabis affects the developing brain:

1. Decision making, concentration and memory can be affected even days after using cannabis.
2. Long-term cannabis use has been linked to mental health problems like depression and anxiety.
3. Cannabis can become addictive—about 10% of people who use cannabis develop marijuana use disorder, which is defined by drug use that impacts normal activities like attending school, socializing and sports.

Talk About It

Engage Them in the Conversation

- Talk with your tween about how cannabis use can affect their health and influence their performance in school and with hobbies they enjoy.
- For facts and resources that can help you guide the conversation, visit the [National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens: Marijuana Drug Facts](#) website.
- You may be unfamiliar with the topic or how to start discussing it with your kids. Here are some tips to help make the conversation a little easier and effective.
 - Pick a neutral time when you can both focus on what you’re discussing—conversations in the car are always a great idea!

- Be prepared—make sure you have some background knowledge on the topic.
- Be open and calm.
- Limit distractions.
- Go at a pace that is comfortable for both of you. If either of you gets overwhelmed, take a break.

Discussion Starters

You may want to have a discussion with your child about this important issue but aren't quite sure where to start. Keep the lines of communication open by engaging in regular conversations. One-on-one conversations may not always yield the results you would like. Be patient and keep initiating conversations. Here are some possible conversation starters:

- I see that your school has been taking part in a substance use prevention program. There is so much in the news right now, and I am not sure I understand all of it. What have you learned from this program?

This approach can be useful for children who are reluctant to talk about their personal feelings or relationships. Get the conversation started by asking your child to explain factual or scientific knowledge and listen for opportunities to ask follow-up questions.

- There is a lot of contradictory information about the legality of cannabis. It's important to recognize that even though cannabis is legal in some states, it is only legal for adults 21 or over. Your brain is actively developing and often will not be fully developed until your mid 20s. That is why cannabis influences adolescents more than adults. It negatively impacts developing brains that are still building connections that help you with decision-making, self-control, and creative thinking.

This approach can help you open up conversations based on news articles instead of making it personal. It focuses on the facts and clarifies why there are age restrictions with cannabis.

Take Action

Learn More

It's important for your family to have resources available that can answer your questions, present the real facts, and help you learn more about how cannabis use impacts the developing brain.

Different resources are geared toward different audiences, and what resonates with one teen or adult may not resonate with another. Below is a list of resources designed to help tweens, teens, and adults understand the risks of cannabis use. Share all of the websites with your family, so you can each try to find at least one that you find helpful. Consider presenting them in one of the following ways:

- Post them in a spot at home where your family can refer to them as needed and on their own time.
- See if your child has any questions about cannabis. Then search together through the websites to see if you can find an answer.

- Take a look through the resources yourself, and bring your child’s attention to a few facts that surprised you. Use these as discussion starters, and see if they can also find facts that surprise them!
- Share the web resource(s) that you learned the most from, and encourage your child to do the same. Discuss why you may have selected similar or different resources.

Resources

- [Ask, Listen, Learn: How Alcohol Effects the Developing Brain Module](#)
- [High-Risk Substance Use Among Youth \(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\)](#)
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens: Marijuana](#)
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse: Marijuana](#)
- [Just Think Twice: Marijuana](#)
- [SAMHSA \(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration\): Marijuana](#)
- [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America: Long-Term Effects of Marijuana Use on the Brain](#)