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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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Know! To Weed Out The Facts For Youth

Whether or not your state has legalized some form of medical and/or recreational use of marijuana (or is potentially looking to do so), it is more than likely a topic of discussion in and around your community. Such conversations are undoubtedly taking place among our youth as well. But with all the talk and increased messaging on the drug, it becomes difficult to distinguish what information is based on research versus opinion. This is where parents and other caregivers come in. It is our responsibility to provide a filter for those incoming mixed messages and weed out the facts for youth.

Child: If marijuana is used as medicine, doesn't that mean it is safe and maybe even good for you?

Filter: It is true that some chemicals in marijuana may have some medicinal purposes, but there is not much controlled research. And identifying and extracting those potentially helpful chemicals and putting them in a safe form is the job of medical researchers, in order to protect the public. Even if some day there are safe and effective medicines extracted from the plant, that still wouldn't mean using them to get high is safe any more than abusing other medications is safe.

Using marijuana in the forms available today is not safe. Marijuana is known to impair one's ability to think, remember and reason. In the classroom, users may struggle to concentrate and recall information. Marijuana impacts decision-making and changes the way people behave. It also impairs coordination and balance, which leads to a greater risk for accident, injury and death. And contrary to popular belief, marijuana can increase heart rate and cause panic and anxiety in some users, especially with new high-potency forms of marijuana.

Child: Some people say you can't get addicted to marijuana, but others say you can. Which is it?

Filter: The fact is, 1 in 11 users become addicted to the drug (similar to alcohol). For those who begin using it during adolescence, the chances of addiction increase to 1 in 6 (similar to cocaine). Like nicotine, kicking the marijuana habit can be difficult, with similar withdrawal symptoms including irritability, sleeping difficulties, cravings, anxiety and increased aggression. And out of all the people in treatment for drug abuse, 1 in 4 is being treated for marijuana.



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Child: Grandpa admitted to smoking marijuana when he was younger, and he's fine. It is no different today, people just like to make a big deal about it.

Filter: Today's weed is not your Grandpa's "grass." The potency of the marijuana now available is far beyond that of Grandpa's era. On average, in the 1970s, a marijuana "joint" contained less than 1% THC (the chemical in marijuana that produces a high). In comparison, that same size joint today would contain, on average, about 13% THC. And that's not all; today there are even higher potency forms of marijuana, where THC is extracted using heat; producing forms referred to as "budder," "shatter," "dabs," and "wax." In these new forms, THC levels can be as high as 80 – 90% (not even in the same ballpark as Grandpa's).

Note to parents: This extremely potent marijuana is also now commonly vaporized and breathed into the lungs using e-cigarette devices. And the old home-baked marijuana brownies have now morphed into an endless list of "marijuana edibles" including a variety of baked goods, candies and sodas, available for purchase in stores (in some states) and online.

The fact is, our children are talking about marijuana. The question is, are you engaging in those conversations with them? We can reduce our children's risk of suffering the negative consequences that accompany its use by getting educated on marijuana, initiating conversations on the topic and consistently providing a filter for the confusing and conflicting messages being received by our children.

In the next tip we will focus on the direct impact of marijuana use on adolescents.

Sources: https://www.drugfreeactionalliance.org/files/dfaa_marijuana_crimesafety_050715.pdf, <http://thenablog.com/tag/university-of-mississippi-potency-monitoring-project/>, <http://www.nature.com/npp/journal/v26/n4/full/1395810a.html>



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Know! The Impact of Marijuana on Adolescents

"We are the New Americana, getting high on legal marijuana," are the lyrics to a popular new song by 21-year-old singer/songwriter 'Halsey.' Her song reflects the unfortunate reality of the world our children are growing up in, as marijuana becomes not only legal, but socially acceptable in more and more states. It would be only natural for young people to assume that if all these adults have fought for or are fighting for marijuana to be legalized, then the drug itself must be pretty harmless.

This assumption is incorrect and dangerous. While marijuana use is risky for people of all ages, it is especially hazardous for youth. Here's why:

Marijuana impacts the developing adolescent brain:

- Studies show that chronic (and sometimes casual) marijuana use during adolescence can actually change the physical shape, volume and density of a person's brain, negatively impacting learning and memory. The severity of such brain abnormalities is shown to increase as frequency of use increases.
- Heavy use of marijuana during adolescence may also reduce a person's IQ by as much as 8 points. A loss of 8 points could drop a person of average intelligence into the lowest third of the intelligence range.

Marijuana impacts school performance:

- Research consistently shows that marijuana users earn lower grades, are more likely to skip classes, have higher incidences of school suspension/expulsion and higher dropout rates, and are subsequently more likely in adulthood to experience unemployment, social welfare dependence and dissatisfaction in quality of life.

Marijuana impacts health and safety:

- Marijuana use has the potential to increase heart rate, cause lung and breathing problems, and is linked to anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts among youth.



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- Marijuana affects a person's coordination, balance, reaction time, alertness and ability to concentrate – increasing one's risk for accidental injury and death.
- Because the adolescent brain has not yet matured, many young people have a tendency to act on impulse, without regard for risk. Adding marijuana to the mix only increases the likelihood of poor decision-making, including engaging in risky sexual behaviors, getting into a car with an impaired driver, or taking part in a criminal act.

If the risks of marijuana continue to be downplayed by adults, there is a greater likelihood of more youth, including our sons and daughters, giving this drug a try. Young people must be made aware that marijuana is not harmless; that use of this drug causes people to think and behave differently; that marijuana negatively impacts brain function, intelligence, school performance and health and safety; and that marijuana use not only threatens success in the present, but jeopardizes a hopeful future.

For more information, visit Drug Free Action Alliance's [Marijuana Resource](https://www.drugfreeactionalliance.org/marijuana_resources) page at https://www.drugfreeactionalliance.org/marijuana_resources.

Sources: Meier et al. (2012). Persistent cannabis users show neuropsychological decline from childhood to midlife. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Neurology Advisor: Marijuana-Related Emergency Department Visits on the Rise, December 17, 2014. National Institute on Drug Abuse: Marijuana – Selected Effects on the Brain, Body & Behavior. Rocky Mountain HIDTA Report: Volume 2, 2014.



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Know! What's Up With Weed

Marijuana has become a regular subject on the nightly news, along with heated debates between those for legalization of the drug and those against it. It seems everyone is talking about marijuana, including our children. Depending on what state you're in, the laws surrounding "weed" will vary, as well as attitudes and perceived risk of using the drug.

Regardless of where your state stands on weed, where do you stand on weed? Do your children know where you stand? Are you even sure where you stand? If you're unsure on the subject, more than likely, your children are too, which can open the door to adolescent experimentation.

In the U.S., as state laws surrounding marijuana began to loosen, attitudes began to soften. And as perceived risk of marijuana began to decrease, use of the drug increased. While this is unfortunate news, there is hope. Studies show that as knowledge on marijuana increases, use of the drug decreases.

With this in mind, we need to know what's up with weed and share that information with our children.

Marijuana has the potential to negatively impact adolescent brain development and function and cause various breathing problems. Marijuana use also changes the way many people think, impacts the choices they make and alters the way they behave.

Marijuana use in the short-term:

- Causes cognitive dysfunction when it comes to memory, perception of time, and ability to complete complex tasks and learn (some of which can become long-term issues as well);
- Negatively impacts decision-making, including increased risky sexual behavior;
- Impairs coordination and balance, leading to an increased risk of accident, injury and death.
- And while marijuana may have a calming effect on some users, it significantly increases the heart rate of others, and can cause panic and anxiety.



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Marijuana use in the long-term has been linked to:

- Higher incidences of students dropping out of school;
- Poorer life outcomes and life satisfaction, including career and relationship matters;
- Poorer physical health and mental health problems, including depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts among teens;
- Addiction – about 1 in 11 marijuana users become addicted and the odds may increase to about 1 in 6 for those who begin using in their teens.

This is certainly not what any of us want for our children. Federal law says one thing, some state laws say another. Regardless, your voice and your actions matter. Your parental influence is powerful when it comes to your children and the decisions they make. Talk to your children about the dangers of marijuana.

You can get the conversation started by asking your child what he/she knows about marijuana, and his/her opinion on the topic. Listen closely and keep your cool even if your son or daughter's opinion is not in line with yours. This is your opportunity to provide the facts, make your stance known and your expectations for non-use clear.

Sources: MSNBC: UN report: Number of marijuana-related injuries is on the rise. June 27, 2014. Neurology Advisor: Marijuana-Related Emergency Department Visits on the Rise, December 17, 2014. National Institute on Drug Abuse: Marijuana – Selected Effects on the Brain, Body & Behavior.