



## **FACTS, FICTION AND CONVERSATION STARTERS WITH YOUTH about Marijuana**

As parents and caregivers, we can have non-threatening conversations with our teens that allow us to express our values and expectations in ways that are more likely to be heard. A good way to start the conversation is to allow teens to generate ideas about the commonly held beliefs of marijuana use. Generally, youth have heard many ideas about marijuana and marijuana use. Asking them about what they know and what they have heard is a good way to start.

### Other conversation starters and ideas to foster open and honest conversations with youth:

- The most important part of the conversation is your ability to listen and to be willing to have a back-and-forth dialogue. Instead of thinking of yourself as having to implant the right ideas in your teen's head, think of yourself as an explorer and a guide. Be sincere and curious about what they know, and ask questions that help them think about those ideas. (For example: Does "natural" mean it has no effect? Can a natural substance have negative effects – such as tobacco?)
- Almost all teens will need to make choices around marijuana use at some point. Most teens choose not to smoke marijuana. A great conversation starter is to ask young people: 'Why do you think some people choose not to smoke weed?' It's a great way to find out the risks and potential harms that youth are aware of and to encourage thoughtfulness.
- Use open-ended questions to explore several sides of the issue in a general way. For example: What do young people think about someone who chooses not to smoke weed? What about those who do?
- Not using is a valid, common and socially acceptable choice; keep that idea present in the conversation. Reasons people might not use marijuana include: don't want to feel out of control; don't need it to have fun; don't want to disappoint parents, friends, or teachers; like feeling healthy and thinking clearly; don't want to impact their sports or creativity; like being a good role model for younger youth. You can turn these into mild questions: What do younger kids think about older youth using? Is it important to youth in general to be a good role model for younger youth?
- The issue of legalization is often of interest to youth. It is good to point out that if cannabis were decriminalized or legalized it would still be a prohibited substance for minors. Cannabis, like alcohol, poses higher risks for young people and would have similar restrictions.
- It is important that we help down play the glorification of cannabis culture while providing facts about the potential harms of marijuana use. A conversation starter is, "Do you think there are harms associated with smoking marijuana?" Youth should know that there are different risks associated with marijuana use for adults and youth and there are great benefits to avoiding or delaying marijuana use as a teen.

- Parents can inadvertently send a message that encourages substance use. “I know I can’t stop you...” or “I know all kids do it...” or “if you’re going to do it, then...” can leave youth feeling like their parents expect them to use, and maybe there is something wrong with them if they don’t. Then when social pressure hits, they may feel that they have no solid reason to decline. The younger the youth, the more problematic this is.
- Let your teen know you are not happy with teen substance use because as their parents, you care about their health and well-being. In other words, it isn’t teen defiance that worries or upsets you – it is the concern. There are strong reasons related to development that substance use in adolescence is problematic.
- If an adult supports de-criminalization and recreational use of cannabis, it is responsible to remember that teens are not adults and can be seriously impacted by regular use. Set boundaries about what is healthy for youth and encourage delay. Teens are developmentally different than adults and delaying use until adulthood makes a difference in numerous areas of teen social, emotional and cognitive development.
- Consider watching a documentary (such as “The Downside of High”) together and discuss. (<http://www.cbc.ca/documentaries/natureofthings/2010/downsideofhigh/>)
- As a parent, listen to and discuss all sorts of opinions, and then set limits and expectations. Be clear about your expectations AND clear that you will be there to help if something goes wrong. (You may need to have a conversation afterwards, and there may be consequences, but you won’t “freak out” in the moment.)
- Many youth might suggest that they see marijuana as being ‘natural’ and thus ‘non-harmful’. Having conversations to help expand youth thinking on this aspect is important. You can help by supporting youth in understanding that there are harms that come with cannabis use that are beyond lung damage. For example, youth have identified that marijuana use and the lifestyle that often goes with it can have consequences that negatively impact the following aspects of their lives:

|                               |                           |                                |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>romantic relationships</i> | <i>stress with family</i> | <i>stress with peer groups</i> | <i>being judged</i>       |
| <i>coping skills</i>          | <i>legal issues</i>       | <i>ability to travel</i>       | <i>trust building</i>     |
| <i>employability</i>          | <i>reputation</i>         | <i>identity</i>                | <i>school performance</i> |
| <i>diet</i>                   | <i>financial</i>          | <i>risk taking</i>             | <i>motivation</i>         |

- Through open discussion, youth have been able to identify that marijuana use can impact their:
  - Mental health (especially related to anxiety and depression, memory changes and paranoia)
  - Ability to get support early (marijuana use can mask symptoms of depression and anxiety)
  - Interest in passions and participation in hobbies and recreational activities
  - Ability to have honest relationships with friends and family
  - Sense of control in their lives – may feel like they need to use marijuana to feel ‘normal’
  - Health (overall health and immune system well-being)
- When teens are active in interests of their own, they build confidence, a sense of competency, self-worth, create friendships and strengthen social and emotional development. Help your teen get involved, even if the interest doesn’t make sense to you. Examples: soccer, paint ball, music, writing, MMA, car racing, rock bands, performance, creating games, anime, film-making, skate boarding, Canadian Reserves, work, driving the car... Support those activities with your money, your time, your attention.

We all have a role to play in prevention. Learn more about cannabis at:

[www.heretohelp.ca](http://www.heretohelp.ca)

[www.xperiment.ca](http://www.xperiment.ca)

[www.ades.bc.ca](http://www.ades.bc.ca)

<http://heretohelp.bc.ca/factsheet/cannabis>

<http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/workbook/cannabis-use-and-youth-a-parents-guide>

<http://ncpic.org.au/>