

# KNOW! HOW TO TALK ABOUT MARIJUANA WITH TEENS

Marijuana is one of the most-used substances among adolescents. The national marijuana landscape has changed in recent years and continues to evolve. Misinformation about marijuana and its effects is common, and increased visibility of marijuana products means that more young people may believe that marijuana is not as harmful as other substances. It's important that the youth in your life understand that you don't approve of marijuana use in the same way that you don't want them to smoke cigarettes, vape, drink alcohol, or use other substances. Meaningful conversations about marijuana can help guide the young people in your life toward making safer choices and staying healthy.

## KNOW! THE BASICS

Marijuana is the dried leaves, flowers, stems, and seeds of the cannabis plant. It contains various chemical compounds known as cannabinoids. The two most well-known cannabinoids in marijuana are delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD). THC is a psychoactive chemical that affects the brain and produces the "high" experienced by people that use marijuana. CBD does not cause a "high" and is often sold separately as an oil or an extract.

Decades ago, marijuana contained more CBD than THC. However, today's marijuana has three times the concentration of THC compared to 25 years ago, and THC potency continues to rise. Higher amounts of THC lead to stronger effects on the brain and may contribute to higher rates of dependency and addiction.

Marijuana can be consumed in several ways, including:

- Smoking the dried plant in a hand-rolled cigarette (joint), pipe, or bong
- Smoking liquid or wax marijuana using a vape pen or dab pen (vaping)
- Eating "edibles," which are any food that contains THC, commonly baked goods and candy
- Drinking beverages that contain marijuana products.

## KNOW! THE RISK & WARNING SIGNS

About 1 in 10 people who use marijuana will develop an addiction, and the rate of addiction rises to 1 in 6 when use begins before the age of 18. Because the teen brain is actively developing, marijuana use is particularly risky for young people. Additional risks of marijuana use include:

- A decline in brain health and function, which can lead to poor academic performance,
- Poor mental health, including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and serious mental illnesses like psychosis and schizophrenia,
- Impaired coordination, leading to poor athletic performance and impaired driving, and
- Cannabis hyperemesis syndrome (CHS), or nonstop vomiting in regular marijuana users.



Potential warning signs of marijuana use in youth include:

- Declining schoolwork and grades
  - Sudden changes in friends
  - Abnormal health or sleep issues
  - Less openness and more secretive behavior
  - Presence of rolling papers, cigars, pipes, small plastic bags, containers, and lighters
- You know your young person best – if something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.

# KNOW! WHAT TO SAY

Caring adults should be comfortable talking with young people about uncomfortable topics like marijuana use. Open communication helps young people stay safe, make informed choices, and avoid unsafe situations. If you avoid talking with the young people in your life about these tough subjects, you could be doing more harm than good.

Tips to guide conversations:

- Establish your goals.
  - Take a few minutes before you talk to write down what you hope to accomplish with your conversation, like “I want to understand what pressures my teen is facing when it comes to marijuana.” After you talk, you can look back to see what you might do differently for future conversations.
- Avoid scare tactics.
  - Enter the conversation with curiosity, respect, understanding, and attention.
- Be prepared.
  - Teens may have incorrect information about marijuana that they learned from other young people or the media. Come prepared with facts about the risks and consequences of marijuana use. If they ask you a question you don’t have the answer to, it’s okay to say that you aren’t sure and work with your teen to find the answer.

# KNOW! TO DISPEL MYTHS

If They Say...	Try Responding...
“It’s natural”	Not all plants are necessarily good or harmless. Heroin comes from the poppy plant.
“It’s a medicine”	Marijuana, like alcohol and cigarettes, is legal in some states for people of a certain age; however, we know that alcohol and cigarettes can cause harm - addiction, car accidents, cancers, etc. Just because something is legal and regulated doesn’t mean it is safe or harmless.
“It’s not addictive”	Research suggests that between 9 and 30 percent of those who use marijuana may develop some degree of marijuana use disorder. People who begin using marijuana before age 18 are four to seven times more likely than adults to develop a marijuana use disorder.
“People can’t overdose on marijuana”	Overdose should not be a measure of safety - for anything. Overdoses can occur when marijuana is combined with alcohol or other drugs, including over-the-counter and prescription medicines. Accidental marijuana poisoning is becoming common, requiring emergency room visits or hospitalizations.

Adapted from  
Prevention Action Alliance (PAA)

For more information from PAA, visit  
[preventionactionalliance.org](http://preventionactionalliance.org)



KY Senate Bill 47 legalizing medical  
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