

Parents Page



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THE MARIJUANA TALK

Marijuana, legal or otherwise, is a hot topic, so it is more important than ever for parents to protect their kids' health and development by addressing this issue early and often.

Why Talking About Marijuana Matters



The new marijuana landscape doesn't change the fact that all substances — including marijuana — are harmful for the still-developing teen brain. During the adolescent years, your teen is especially susceptible to the negative effects of any and all drug use. Marijuana use directly affects the parts of the brain responsible for memory, learning and attention.

So what should this new drug talk look like? It involves open and positive communication, active

listening, open-ended questions, objectivity, empathy and specific language that avoids polarizing words such as disapprove, bad, stupid and disappoint. The tools that we will provide you with in this guide will actually give you more insight into your teen's life and the way they think about marijuana, as well as allow you to address your concerns about marijuana use in the most effective way. Kids who learn a lot about the risks of drugs at home are significantly less likely to use.

Marijuana: How to Talk to Your Teen

While every conversation will pan out differently and some of these responses may not work for your specific situation, here are some examples of how you can talk to your teen and answer some of the tough questions about pot that he may ask you.

"I know, I know. You've talked with me about this before."

Your response: "I know we've had conversations about drugs before, and I'm sorry if you feel like I'm being a nag. I want us to be able to discuss difficult topics because I love you and I want to be of help during these years when you're faced with a lot of difficult choices. My concern is that the drug landscape is drastically changing, and that's why it's important that we talk about it. Would that be okay?"

"I'm only doing it once in a while on the weekends, so it's no big deal."

Your response: "I'm happy to hear that this is not something you do on a regular basis. My concern is, using any drug can be harmful at your age because your brain is still developing. I heard you say that you don't think it's a big deal. What would make it feel like a big deal to you? What are some things that keep you from using pot more often than you already do?"

"Would you rather I drink alcohol? Weed is so much safer."

Your response: "What is going on in your life that makes you feel like you want to do either? Honestly, I don't want you to be doing anything that can harm you — whether that's smoking pot, cigarettes, drinking or behaving recklessly. I'm interested in knowing why you think weed is safer than alcohol."

"You smoked weed in college. Don't pretend like you didn't."

Perhaps you smoked pot when you were younger. The fact that you've had experiences with marijuana may actually work in your favor. When talking to your kids about pot, remember: this isn't about what you did or didn't do. It's about the choices your child is going to make. You can use your experiences to help your kids understand the risks of using. You may be caught off guard, but our advice? Don't lie.

"Marijuana is a plant. It's natural. How harmful could it be?"

Your response: "I understand that, and I am not suggesting that you're going to spin out of control, or that your life as you know it is going to be over. I would just like to redirect you to the idea that when a person is high, her judgment is not what it ordinarily is and that can be harmful. People I know who use alcohol or pot on a regular basis are using it to numb themselves or avoid feelings. I would much rather you do other things to help you cope with difficult feelings, rather than turning to drugs in order to avoid them. Can we brainstorm healthy activities that make you feel better?"

"Come on, I only did it once and I'm totally fine."

Your response: "Okay. Why did you do it only once? Why did you stop, or decide not to do it again? Will you tell me about your experience? I'm genuinely curious to know what that was like for you."

The most important thing is to remember that you, as a parent, have the power to influence your teens. One of the most cited factors teens give on why they choose not to use is "disappointing their parents." Whether your child chooses to use or not, it is important to remind her of the risks, that you do not want her to use, and that you are there to help. So even if your kid admits to having tried pot, that doesn't mean you should throw in the towel. It just means you may have to work harder to make sure that your teen's marijuana use doesn't become more frequent or harmful.



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