LET'S TALK CANNABIS

HOW PARENTS AND MENTORS INFLUENCE YOUTH CANNABIS USE

Parents are the #1 influence on youth substance use — meaning you play a major role in whether or not your child uses cannabis. It is not uncommon for pre-teens, teens, and youth in their early 20s to seek out new experiences and engage in risky behaviors, such as using cannabis. Starting a conversation about cannabis with the youth in your life, and making sure they are aware of potential consequences, can deter underage use. Here are important facts about cannabis and some tips for talking with youth.

Cannabis Can Affect a Young Person's Brain

- The brains of young people do not fully develop until they reach their mid-20s. Regular cannabis use during the early years of life can lead to harmful physical changes in the brain. [1]
- Research shows that when youth use cannabis their memory, learning, and attention are harmed.

Some studies suggest a permanent impact as well. [2]

The Role of Parents and Mentors

Parents and mentors influence the behavior of young people and what they perceive as normal and acceptable.

- Talking with teens about cannabis is likely to affect their opinions about consumption. While they may seem like they're not listening, studies show that parents are the #1 influence on youth substance use.
- Children who learn about the possible consequences of drug use from their parents are significantly less likely to use drugs.
- Keep an eye out for small signs such as changing sleep patterns, increased time alone, shifts in relationships, and a more secretive demeanor that may signal substance use. Dramatic shifts in behavior and physical appearance are signals to check in with your teen.
- Monitor your teen's friends, activities, and digital movement to help them stay on track and out of trouble. Constant monitoring can be overwhelming so aim for consistent check-ins in specific areas of your teen's life.

Other Negative Effects of Cannabis on Youth

- Driving under the influence of cannabis increases the risk of getting into a car crash. Cannabis can negatively affect the skills that are needed to drive safely, including reaction time, coordination, and concentration. [3, 4]
- The harmful effects of cannabis on a young person's brain may impact their educational and professional goals and how successful they are in life. [5] Research shows that youth who start using before age 18 or who use cannabis regularly may be at higher risk for:
  - Skipping classes. [6]
  - Getting lower grades. [7]
  - Dropping out of school. [8]
  - Unemployment or having less fulfilling jobs later in life. [8, 9]
  - Mental health problems including anxiety, depression, suicide, and schizophrenia. [10, 11, 12, 13]
  - Cannabis dependence and a higher risk for using or abusing other substances and illegal drugs. [14]

- Like tobacco, smoking cannabis is harmful to the lungs. The smoke from cannabis has many of the same toxins and chemicals found in tobacco smoke, and when inhaled can increase the risk of developing lung problems.

- The additives, tools, and high temperatures used for vaporizing cannabis may expose you to toxic substances, which may cause serious lung injury.

Young People and Cannabis Use

- In 2017, most high school students in Vermont reported they were not using cannabis. Only about 24% reported using cannabis in the past 30 days. [17]

- Many youth do not believe cannabis is harmful. 50% percent of high school students believed that using regularly is not risky or only slightly risky for someone their age. [17]

Tips for Encouraging Youth Not to Use Cannabis [18]

- Talk openly and provide guidance about the risks of using cannabis.
  - Youth who have supportive parents, teachers, and other adults are less likely to use cannabis and illegal drugs.
  - Stay positive.
  - Focus on how using cannabis can get in the way of achieving goals such as graduating high school, getting into college or getting a good job. Do not focus on negative outcomes.
- Listen carefully to the questions and thoughts youth have.
- Set shared guidelines and expectations for healthy behaviors.
  - Youth are less likely to use cannabis when parents set clear limits and house rules.
- Be aware of your own attitudes and behaviors.
  - You are a role model. If you use cannabis in front of young people, they are more likely to use it too.

Recognizing if a Youth is Using Cannabis [19]

- Look for behavioral changes related to cannabis use such as: mood swings, spending less time with friends, skipping school, loss of interest in sports or other favorite activities and changes in grades and sleeping habits.

- Young people under the influence of cannabis may lack coordination, giggle for no reason, act silly, have red eyes and short-term memory loss.

What to Do if a Youth is Using Cannabis

- Stay calm. Overreacting may lead youth to rebel, feel resentment or take greater risks.

- Talk about your concerns and give positive reasons for wanting youth to stop using cannabis.

- Keep the conversation open for problem solving.

- Remind youth of the ground rules you set earlier, or set new ground rules and consequences.

- If needed, seek help from trusted adults and resources in your community.

- Call 9-1-1 and get help if there is a medical or mental health emergency.

Under Vermont law, adults 21 or older can use, carry, and grow cannabis (marijuana, weed, pot, etc.), with important restrictions. Vermont Law, known as Act No. 86 (H.511): Eliminating Penalties for Possession of Limited Amounts of Marijuana by Adults 21 or Older took effect on July 1, 2018, and includes information about where you can use cannabis, how much you can possess, and the penalties for illegal use. Adults 21 or older are also permitted to purchase cannabis if they are registered medical marijuana patients or authorized caregivers. Only medical marijuana dispensaries registered with the Department of Public Safety may sell cannabis in Vermont. For more information, visit: https://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/status/2018/H.511

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