

## Give your child the facts about marijuana

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) provides information on what marijuana is and what it does to the body. Present the facts to your child objectively and use them to explain why marijuana use is still illegal for people under age 21.

Some basic facts about marijuana:

- Marijuana can affect the brain, particularly the vulnerable, developing brain (under age 25).
- Marijuana can affect learning, memory and sleep patterns. It can contribute to an increase in depression, anxiety, panic, and paranoia over time, and there is evidence that marijuana can permanently decrease IQ.
- Marijuana is addictive and with chronic use, can cause withdrawal symptoms.
- One can injure his or herself when using marijuana, especially in excess.
- Marijuana use can affect a person's ability to effectively deal with emotions.
- It is possible that marijuana may help with certain medical conditions, although we need much more research on this topic to fully understand the link. When talking about medical marijuana, say something like, "It is prescribed for a specific purpose, for a certain period of time."

## Let them know they can call you

It's important that your child feels he or she can call you if they get in a situation where they don't feel safe.

## Acknowledge if there is a family history of addiction

There is a line between experimentation and dependence. Marijuana affects the brain's reward pathways, and, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, long-term marijuana use can lead to addiction. If you know that your family has a history of addiction, communicate that to your child right away, because that's a huge risk factor. He or she might not take that seriously now, but may store it away.

**We cannot keep our children from interacting with the world, and cannot control their lives. We have to give them good information and trust they will make good decisions by creating a safe environment where everyone can speak openly, and by staying engaged in their lives.**

A big thank you to  
Children's Hospital Colorado  
for allowing the use of their materials  
in this brochure.



Children's Hospital Colorado

For more information visit:

<https://www.childrenscolorado.org/conditions-and-advice/marijuana-what-parents-need-to-know/talking-to-kids-about-marijuana/>  
and

[www.childrenscolorado.org/conditions-and-advice/marijuana-what-parents-need-to-know/resources/](http://www.childrenscolorado.org/conditions-and-advice/marijuana-what-parents-need-to-know/resources/)



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# TIPS FOR TALKING TO KIDS & TEENS ABOUT MARIJUANA



Now that medical marijuana is legal in 34 states for people aged 21 and over, it presents a new challenge for parents: how do you talk to kids about a once-banned drug that society has started to accept?

Although it is still illegal in Wyoming some kids will try marijuana at some point in their lives. Here are some tips on how to talk to your kids about marijuana from the Clinical Psychology Department at Children's Hospital Colorado.

**If you haven't taken a stance on pot yet, you should still talk to your child about it now. Learn the facts so you can have confident conversations. It's imperative that your child has accurate information.**

### **Look for opportunities to start casual conversations**

Maybe it's when you are driving or see a character on TV smoking pot. Start by asking questions like, "What do you know about marijuana?" or, "What are some questions you have about marijuana?" Avoid formal conversations like calling a family meeting, since those tend to make people nervous, making it more likely they'll shut down.

Parents can begin talking to their children about marijuana around age 10, but if the child asks questions younger than that, start the conversation then.

### **Create an environment that encourages communication**

The most important thing is that your child feels safe talking openly (this is also the first major step in prevention). Parents can achieve this by doing the following:

- Learn how to have age-appropriate conversations with young children, tweens, teens and young adults.
- Have conversations, not lectures.
- Ask questions, and avoid making judgments.
- Remain engaged in your child's life.
- Be an active listener by making time for the conversation and making sure you are not distracted.
- Make it an ongoing conversation, not something you talk about once.
- Do not approach this topic with anger or demonize marijuana, because that increases the chances that kids will shut down.

### **Tips for talking to young children (under 10 years old)**

At this age, parents have the most influence to impart their thoughts about marijuana and other life choices. Experts recommend:

- Parents should deliver messages for young kids in terms of health and safety by saying something like, "We don't want to put things in our body that could be unhealthy for us."
- If your child asks, "What is pot/marijuana?" a good response is straightforward: "It is a plant that people use to change how they feel. It can make people feel confused or fuzzy." "It is illegal in Wyoming and people can get in trouble with the law for using it."
- Give them tools to refuse marijuana. Say something like, "It's okay to say no if someone asks you to do something that is bad for your health. Say no and tell an adult you trust."

### **Tips for talking to "tweens" (ages 10 to 12)**

This is a really powerful age to have these life skills conversations. Tweens are less likely to have proper information about marijuana and are less likely than teenagers to have formed an opinion. That's more of an opportunity to give the facts and lay the groundwork for how to refuse it.

This may be a time when kids start to experience peer pressure. If you haven't already addressed peer pressure with your child, this is a good time to do that.

If peer pressure plays a role in your child's curiosity about marijuana, continue to have open conversations by asking questions like, "Do you have a friend who smokes pot? I'm curious: what does that look like?"

### **IMPORTANT FACTS**

- **The marijuana of today is not what it was in the past – there has been a 212% increase in THC potency over the past 20 years.**
- **The higher the potency of a drug, the higher the potential for addiction.**
- **The brain is most vulnerable to addiction from ages 13 to age 26.**

-Dr. Libby Stuyt, M.D., Addiction Psychiatrist, in presentation to the Sublette Prevention Coalition Feb 9, 2021. For all sources and research citations go to: [www.sublettepreventioncoalition.org/post/high-concentrate-thc-and-the-adolescent-brain](http://www.sublettepreventioncoalition.org/post/high-concentrate-thc-and-the-adolescent-brain) and see powerpoint.

### **Tips for talking to teenagers (ages 13-19)**

Teens are able to use logic to think about drug use. Parents can serve as a positive influence on teens, if they have a strong relationship. This is why it is important for parents to build a relationship with open communication when their children are younger. Parents can also influence their children by modeling positive behaviors like healthy coping, being responsible, openly communicating and acknowledging mistakes.

### **What to do if your teen experiments with marijuana**

While most Sublette students report not using marijuana ([www.pna-survey.org/ExploreData/Chart/SubstanceUse/MarijuanaPast30DaysUse](http://www.pna-survey.org/ExploreData/Chart/SubstanceUse/MarijuanaPast30DaysUse)) it is common for some teenagers to experiment. Beyond the concern for your child breaking the law, and the impact on his or her brain, a parent should be concerned if it seems that any substance is negatively affecting his/her functioning.

Whatever the case, a good way to start talking about marijuana with your teen is to have a mature conversation by asking questions to assess what they already know.

### **If your child is using, try to understand why**

If your child is caught using or admits to using marijuana, this is an excellent opportunity to talk about it, and learn why he/she was doing it. Ask questions like, "What happened?" and "What are some of the reasons you used marijuana?" Let them know you are concerned.

Try to determine if there is a deeper problem. If they used marijuana more than once, or are currently using, assess whether or not it is negatively affecting their daily functioning. For example, determine if/how their relationships with others have changed, if conflict has increased, if their grades have changed, or if they're hanging out with a different crowd. If you believe your child may have a serious problem with marijuana, talk to your doctor or call 1-800-662-HELP (4357), a treatment referral helpline offered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

### **Be clear about expectations**

Kids thrive in environments with clear boundaries. Always be honest about your concerns for their health and safety. If they know you will have a conversation about it, teens may feel more likely to seek your help.