

How to Talk to Your Teen about Marijuana (and Actually Get Somewhere!)

As legislation and public attitudes about marijuana (or cannabis) shift, it can be a tricky topic to address with teens. Yet, teens who have conversations with their parents/caregivers, and know their no-use expectations, are HALF as likely to ever use drugs like cannabis compared to their peers. Parent UP is here to encourage and equip you to use your influence to prevent youth marijuana use and these tips should help!



Setting the Stage for Conversations with Your Child

Try to put yourself in your child's shoes.

Try to talk to your teen the way you would want to be spoken to about a difficult subject. Practice refraining from judgement or anger, and instead be curious, calm, and listen with respect and empathy. Be curious and open-minded about their experiences. It's more important – and effective – to listen and discuss rather than to lecture. Ask them questions about what they think about marijuana. Ask them what they know or what they've heard about cannabis at school or from friends. Finding out what your child knows and thinks about marijuana first will help you know where to start your conversations about the drug.

Keep an open mind, but a firm stance.

Make it clear to your child that you care about them so you don't approve of them using marijuana. Tell your child you don't want them to risk their safety, brain development, or future and you expect them to remain marijuana-free. Express concern and set clear boundaries so they know where you stand. You are building a foundation for a relationship with your child that is honest, trusting, and open, which is an important protective factor to safeguard your child against cannabis and other drug use now and in the future.

Talk often!

Conversations are more likely to be successful when they take place more casually. For example, while you're driving in the car, taking a walk, or washing dishes after dinner with your teen. Sometimes there's even something in your environment that can spur a conversation, like when you drive past a smoke shop with your teen or you're watching a TV show that shows drug use. Taking advantage of these smaller moments and potential in-roads will help the conversation seem less threatening and more natural.

Some Statements to Make when Talking to Your Teen about Marijuana

- "There's a lot of information about marijuana out there, but I want you to come to me with your questions."
- "If you're concerned about your friends using marijuana, let me know and we can talk about it." (In Missouri, more than 1 in 3 youth (34.5%) had at least one friend who smoked marijuana.)
- "There's a lot of information about marijuana out there, but I want you to know that it is never okay for kids to use."
- "Your brain is growing and marijuana isn't good for growing brains."



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What Your Teen Might Say:	How You Can Respond:
 <p>“Ugh, again? We’ve already talked about this!”</p>	<p>“Yeah, I know we have, but it’s important to me that you know where I’m coming from and why I expect you to be drug-free. I care about you and love you. I want what’s best for your growing brain and body, so I’m going to check in with you sometimes or remind you of our rules because they keep you safe. I know you’re facing a lot of choices as you grow up and I want you to know where I stand.”</p>
<p>“Weed is safer than alcohol.”</p>	<p>“I’m not surprised to hear you say that. Many people think that because the risk of overdose or death is so small compared to alcohol, that marijuana is “safe.” But the truth is, even IF it’s less harmful, that doesn’t mean it’s NOT harmful. Your brain and body are growing so much right now, and using drugs during this time can have long term impacts on your brain and your health. Using marijuana/cannabis as a teenager can also put you at greater risk of car accidents and making poor choices about sex or other drug use.”</p>
<p>“Medical marijuana is legal here now. Why would it be legal if it’s harmful?”</p> 	<p>“Many things are legal that can harm people, and especially kids and teens, like tobacco or alcohol. In fact, any drugs - including marijuana - can be more harmful to you than adults because you’re at a stage in life where your brain and body are growing so fast that it leaves you more vulnerable to addiction and the other harmful consequences of drug use.”</p>
<p>“I hear kids at school saying it’s from nature, so it can’t be harmful.”</p>	<p>“I get that, but when you really think about it, that doesn’t make much sense. There are many natural plants that are harmful to humans, like poison ivy, tobacco, and the fact that heroin is made from poppy flowers. Just because someone says it’s ‘natural’ doesn’t mean it isn’t harmful.”</p>
<p>“Did you smoke weed when you were younger?”</p>	<p>{Answer with the truth, but bring it back to the present.} “Marijuana was a much less potent substance when I was a kid and I am really not happy with the decisions that I/my peers made when I/they did smoke. When you’re high or stoned, the ability to make good decisions is questionable and because today’s marijuana is so strong, the risk is just too high.”</p>
<p>“My friend only smokes weed on the weekends and he’s fine.”</p> 	<p>“I am glad your friend isn’t using it throughout the week, but I am worried because using any drug during the teen years can be really harmful to your brain. I don’t want you to do anything that can be harmful, that’s why I expect you to not use cannabis.”</p>