



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

Whether you know it as marijuana, THC, cannabis, weed, or pot, one fact is clear:

No amount of marijuana use is safe for youth.

- With more marijuana being sold and used in our community, it's more important than ever we know the risks of youth use and protect them from early experimentation.
- Because teens' brains are still developing, they are much more sensitive to the negative effects of marijuana use such as difficulties in learning, memory, and attention, increased anxiety and depression, and even addiction.
- Teens who learn about marijuana and other drugs from their parents or caregivers - and know their no-use expectations - are HALF as likely to ever use these drugs compared to their peers.
- Parent Up is here to encourage and equip parents and caring adults to use their influence to prevent youth marijuana use, and these tips should help!



Setting the Stage for Conversations with Teens

Try to put yourself in their shoes.

Try to talk to teens 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 what they think, know, or have heard about cannabis at school or from friends. Finding out what our teens know and think about marijuana first helps us know where to start our conversations about the drug.



Keep an open mind, but a firm stance.

We should make it clear to our teens that we care about them so we don't approve of them using marijuana. We can tell our kids we don't want them to risk their safety, brain development, or future, and we expect them to remain marijuana-free.

Let's express concern and set clear boundaries so they know where we stand. We are building a foundation for a relationship with our teens that is honest, trusting, and open, which is an important protective factor to safeguard them against cannabis and other drug use now and in the future.



Talk often!

Conversations about marijuana are more likely to be successful when they take place more casually. For example, while driving in the car, taking a walk, or washing dishes after dinner. Sometimes there's even something in our environment that can spur a conversation, like when we drive past a smoke shop or we're watching a movie with our teen 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 Teens about Marijuana

"There's a lot of information about marijuana out there, but I want you to come to me with your questions."

"I've heard a lot of talk about marijuana recently so I want you to know that it's never okay for kids to use. In fact, it's illegal."

"If you're concerned about peer pressure or your friends using marijuana, let me know and we can talk about it."

In Missouri, more than 30.2% of youth had one or more friends who smoked marijuana (2022 Missouri Student Survey).

"Your brain is still growing until your mid-20s and marijuana isn't good for growing brains."





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What Teens Might Say:

How We Can Respond:

“Weed is safer than alcohol.”



“I’m not surprised to hear you say that because many people think that. But the fact is, there is no amount of safe drug use as a teen. Your brain and body are growing so much right now, and using any drugs during this time can have long term impacts on your brain and your health. Using marijuana as a teen can also put you at greater risk of car accidents and making poor choices about sex or other drug use.”

“Marijuana is legal here now. Why would it be legal if it’s harmful?”

“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.”

“I hear kids at school saying it’s from nature, so it can’t be harmful.”



“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 heroin, which is made from poppy flowers. Just because someone says it’s ‘natural’ doesn’t mean it isn’t harmful.”

“Did you smoke weed when you were younger?”

{We recommend answering 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 risks are just too high.”

“My friend only smokes weed on the weekends and he’s fine.”

“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 marijuana, even if other kids are.”

“Ugh, again? We’ve already talked about this!”



“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.”

