



SHARING THE RISKS OF CANNABIS WITH YOUR TEEN

Cannabis is most likely not the topic of choice at your family dinner table. Whether or not this is the case in your home, it's important that you talk with your teen about not using marijuana.

Being upfront about the risks of cannabis with your teen can influence their beliefs and actions. Research shows that teenagers are less likely to try marijuana when parents talk to them about the harm of underage use, compared to those who are not engaged by their parents.

While the “drug landscape” is changing for parents and teens alike, it's important to note that parents still have considerable influence on their children's' decisions.

Teens will hear about marijuana one way or another, and it's essential they hear accurate information from you. The truth is that their friends, social media, and the songs they listen to can all have a take on marijuana. Make sure that you use your voice to share the facts.

EARLY AND OFTEN

The first step in discussing the risks of marijuana with your teen is simply beginning the dialogue. It's beneficial to have this conversation early before they consider experimenting.

If you haven't yet talked with your teen, don't feel discouraged. You can still be a voice of reason in their life by opening the conversation.

Once you begin sharing the risks of using marijuana, be sure that it is not a one-and-done type of event. Keep the conversations going! Risk factors for substance use can change and multiply as teenagers deal with the different trials and pressures of adolescence.

CASUAL, BUT CLEAR

Marijuana use is a serious matter, but your conversations around the subject don't need to feel so heavy. When talking with your teen, have casual conversations instead of formal family meetings or lectures. Look for natural opportunities to discuss cannabis, whether that's when you're driving past a dispensary or watching a character consume weed on television.

Be sure to avoid ambiguity when discussing marijuana. Set clear expectations around a zero-tolerance policy. You don't want to leave any doubt as to where you stand.

GROUNDING AND FACT-BASED

You may have your own set of emotions around the topic of marijuana, but try and refrain from relying on your feelings when it comes to the discussions with your teenager.

Focus on the facts and how cannabis use might affect them. Teens know when you're trying to scare them, so focus on real-life situations and believable consequences. Do research beforehand, so you know the real risks that come with underage cannabis use. [SAMHSA](https://www.samhsa.gov) or the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov) provide excellent resources.

OPEN AND WITHOUT JUDGEMENT

If you want your teen to be receptive, the key is to listen carefully to their thoughts, free of judgment. Ask questions that encourage them to feel heard and elaborate. Correct any misconceptions they may have, such as “everyone smokes weed” or “marijuana won't hurt me.”

Having genuine conversations lets your teen know that they can come to you when they have questions or problems. Being an active listener can lead your teen to know that you are truly hearing and understanding them. Let them know they can come to you if they're in trouble and that their safety and well-being are your number one priority.

SOURCES:

Partnership for Drug-Free Kids <https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/PATS-2013-FULL-REPORT.pdf>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration <https://www.samhsa.gov/marijuana>

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PREPARING TO TALK WITH YOUR TEEN ABOUT CANNABIS

Parents have significant influence over their teenager's behaviors. It's crucial to capitalize on this fact when it comes to preventing them from using marijuana.

Teens are less likely to try cannabis if their parents talk to them about the risks and harms of underage use. With the changing "drug landscape" in Illinois, parents must be equipped to have these conversations.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Before you begin the conversation with your teen, know the facts. If you want to have a successful dialogue on the topic of marijuana, keep it grounded and fact-based.

Discuss how cannabis might affect them personally. Understand how marijuana use has unique effects on adolescents and potentially long-term impacts on the developing brain. Visit reliable and trusted sources like the [National Institutes of Health](#) or the [CDC](#) to gather more information.

Avoid using scare-tactics or dramatizing your points. Teenagers know when you're trying to scare them, and they don't usually receive that approach well. Focus on real-life situations and believable consequences.

PREPARE FOR THE DEFENSE

As you do your homework and prepare to talk with your teen about cannabis, be ready for the rebuttals.

Get yourself up to speed with common misconceptions among adolescents like “everyone smokes weed” or “marijuana won’t hurt me.” Research shows that most teens don’t think marijuana use is risky. In fact, around 50 percent of Illinois high school students reported believing using cannabis 2-3 times a week was not risky.

If your teen has a similar mindset, don’t feel discouraged. Be patient and help them understand the real risks that marijuana use poses.

BE IN A GOOD HEADSPACE

Before opening the conversation with your teen, first, check-in with them and with yourself. You want to make sure you’re both in a positive mental state.

You want to avoid emotionally charged conversations, which are rarely productive. Instead, discussions are generally more successful when both parties are in a healthy space to talk.

Free yourself from distractions during a serious conversation. Make sure you can be fully present and give your teenager your full attention.

GIVE YOURSELF GRACE

While it’s true that your words hold weight and these conversations are essential, don’t forget that you’re still human. Despite all your good intentions and preparation, parenting isn’t always a piece of cake.

There is no magic formula for ensuring the perfect conversation and outcome with your teen. What matters is that you make an effort and time to have real conversations with them about the risks of underage marijuana use.

Rather than striving for perfection, strive for connection. Help your teen see that you care about their well-being and their choices. Continue the ongoing conversation and stand firmly by your guidelines.

SOURCES:

Illinois Youth Survey https://iys.cprd.illinois.edu/UserFiles/Servers/Server_178052/File/state-reports/2018/Freq18_IYS_Statewide.pdf

Partnership for Drug-Free Kids <https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/PATS-2013-FULL-REPORT.pdf>

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SETTING HEALTHY GUIDELINES

WITH YOUR TEEN

Establishing rules for your teenager helps teach them self-discipline and how to make healthy choices. It's an ongoing process that sets a precedence for the type of behavior that is and isn't permissible.

While each household operates under its own set of rules, there are standard guidelines that parents should consider setting with their teen. These guidelines should cover substance use and beyond.

RULES AROUND CANNABIS AND OTHER SUBSTANCE USE

When it comes to underage substance use, it's crucial to maintain a zero-tolerance policy. Not only should parents comply with the law, but it's also important to set healthy expectations with teens.

Teenagers are less likely to try marijuana when their parents talk to them about the risks and harms of underage use and set clear boundaries.

Make sure your teen knows where you stand around underage substance use. Be clear, and avoid ambiguity. When setting the rules, also provide the reasons for your decision. Help your teen see that the rules are in place to protect them from the harm that marijuana and other drugs can have.

EXPECTATIONS AROUND TV AND PHONE USE

Parents may not have eyes on their teen every moment of the day, but this shouldn't prevent you from setting expectations with them.

There's no running from the fact that television, social media, and the internet are a normal part of teenagers' lives. With this being the case, they're more prone to exposure to risky behaviors, like substance use.

Parents must face the doors that the digital world can open and be proactive in protecting and guiding their teens. Consider looking into the privacy settings on your teen's devices or setting ground rules on what sites and channels they can access.

PROMOTING OPEN COMMUNICATION

As you establish guidelines with your teenager, make sure these rules are reinforced by discussing them regularly.

While it's essential to stand firm in the boundaries you set, it can also be helpful to leave space for your teen to discuss openly with you.

Allow them to ask questions and express their perspective, but make sure they know that you are the rule maker. At the end of the day, you are setting boundaries to protect them. Communicate that their safety and well-being are your number one priority.

Be mindful about checking in on your teen regularly. Not conversing with them still sends a message. You want to be proactive and use your words to build your teen up and set them up for success.

SOURCES:

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UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS OF UNDERAGE MARIJUANA USE

When it comes to understanding the risks of underage marijuana use, it's okay not to have all of the answers. What matters is that you make the time and effort to learn the facts. When you understand the risks, you can help your teen understand those risks.

EFFECTS ON THE BRAIN

When someone uses marijuana, the main chemical called tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) passes from the lungs or digestive tract into the bloodstream, where it is then carried directly to the brain.

When the THC interacts with the teenage brain, the risks are higher because the brain is still developing, making it more vulnerable. In fact, your teen's brain won't stop developing until their mid to late twenties. Marijuana use before then can impair critical cognitive functions, including attention, memory, and learning.

One study found that teens who regularly use marijuana lose an average of six IQ points by the time they reach adulthood. Another study found that marijuana has a more negative impact on a teenager's cognitive development than alcohol.

MENTAL HEALTH RISKS

Not only does adolescent marijuana use affect one's physical health, but it has also been linked to mental health problems. Teenagers who use marijuana regularly are at a higher risk for depression, anxiety, suicide planning, and psychotic episodes.

As a parent, you can equip yourself with [new information and resources](#) regarding mental health to understand the risks of marijuana and help protect your teen's mind.

DECLINING PERFORMANCE

Marijuana use can negatively affect a teen's day-to-day activities. Regular use has been proven to affect performance and how well people do in life.

Those who use marijuana are more likely to have relationship problems, worse educational outcomes, and reduced life satisfaction.

THE RISK IN NOT SHARING

As a parent, it's important to recognize the influence you have on your teenager's perceptions and behaviors. Research confirms that teens who have supportive parents who talk to them about the harm of marijuana are less likely to use, compared to those who do not.

The reality is that teens will hear about marijuana from other sources, whether from social media, television, or friends. You have an opportunity to counter false information they may have with the facts.

Care for your teen by understanding and sharing the risks of underage marijuana use.

SOURCES:

Partnership for Drug-Free Kids <https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/PATS-2013-FULL-REPORT.pdf>

American Addiction Centers <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/marijuana-rehab/effects-of-marijuana-on-teenage-brain>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration <https://www.samhsa.gov/marijuana>

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