

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO CANNABIS AND KIDS

If there's one thing that seems to worry many parents, it's the idea of teens using cannabis (aka marijuana). But it seems that a big part of the worry stems from not knowing what to make of the conflicting messages about the drug.

Cannabis is confusing

Some experts say cannabis is harmless or even helpful. Others claim it causes harm and is dangerous. Some people warn parents to “know the signs” of using the drug and “take action” against it, while others see the growing number of medical cannabis shops as a sign of progress. Some communities support legalizing and regulating cannabis for recreational use (like we've done with alcohol and tobacco), while some school communities support policies that suspend kids for using it.

Almost all of us know people who've had fun or otherwise benefited from using cannabis. And most of us know of someone who has had bad experiences. So, the first set of questions worried parents might want to ask themselves is: “What do I think about cannabis, and why? Where's my information coming from? Is it based on evidence?”

The fact is, there's no “one way” for all parents to look at cannabis, and no one-size-fits-all cannabis policy for families.

Things to consider

- All psychoactive (mind-altering) drug use carries some degree of risk, especially for youth. Therefore, the low-risk rule applies for cannabis as it does for alcohol or any other drug—not too much, not too often, only in safe contexts.
- According to the McCreary Centre Society's 2013 Adolescent Health Survey, all substance use, including cannabis use, is in decline. (As with adults, alcohol is still the most commonly used drug among youth).
- Only a small percentage of young people who experiment with cannabis develop problems (also true with alcohol and other drugs).
- A recent comprehensive review of evidence revealed:

o cannabis use is unlikely to be the main factor in a teen dropping out of school,

o cannabis is unlikely to be a gateway to other illegal drug use,

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o cannabis has a greater impact on younger, developing brains than older brains, and

o cannabis use is not likely to be the sole cause of psychosis (a variety of factors seem to make some people more susceptible than others to the drug's negative effects).

What about my teen?

Key risk factors for developing problems with cannabis include:

- age (the younger, the riskier)
- amount and frequency (using more, more often, is more risky)
- motive (using to cope with daily life is more risky than using out of curiosity)

Another main risk factor is disconnectedness from caring adults at home and school. This is why your relationship with your teen is key to helping them avoid problems with cannabis or any other drug.

Building a trusting relationship involves finding ways to inspire your child to want to communicate with you—about cannabis or anything else. Opening up a discussion about cannabis could be part of the process. It might happen naturally while watching a movie together or while swapping stories about what happened at work and school that day. Or it could be brought up in the context of other drug use. For instance, if you're having a beer or taking medication, you could ask, “Why do you think some people accept the use of alcohol and medication but not cannabis?”

It may be more comfortable to talk when you're not sitting across the table looking directly at each other. You could try starting a conversation in the car or on the basketball court

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The TRB website (www.bcteacherregulation.ca) is a valuable resource for any parent or member of the public. The following areas or functions of the TRB website may be of particular interest to BC parents:

- o The Standards for Educators in BC: www.bcteacherregulation.ca/Standards/StandardsOverview.aspx
- o Check a Teacher's Status/Online Registry: www.bcteacherregulation.ca/CertificateServices/FindATeacher.aspx
- o Professional Conduct Discipline Outcomes: www.bcteacherregulation.ca/ProfessionalConduct/DisciplineDecisions.aspx
- o Professional Conduct Searchable Discipline Database: www.bcteacherregulation.ca/ProfessionalConduct/SearchDisciplineDecisions.aspx
- o Discipline Process Brochure: www.bcteacherregulation.ca/documents/FormsandPublications/ProfConduct/discipline_process.pdf
- o Making a Compliant Brochure: www.bcteacherregulation.ca/documents/FormsandPublications/ProfConduct/mc_brochure.pdf
- o Recent Statistics - Certification & Conduct: www.bcteacherregulation.ca/Newsroom/RecentStatistics.aspx

If you would like general information or some clarification on any matter related to the regulation of BC educators, I encourage you to contact the TRB. We are here to help! Let us serve as an information resource to BC parents.

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10. Develop a game plan to release stress: Children often report to me that it can be helpful to develop and follow their game plan to release stress and to relax their body. Here is a 5-step plan that I collaboratively developed with an 8 year-old boy to help him regulate his emotions:

- Do 5 shoulder shrugs, rolling the worrying emotion out of the body as the shoulders roll back
- Make a fist and then let the hand drip water off limp lettuce, 5 times
- Breathe in to the count of 5 and then slowly out to the count of 10, five times
- Slowly count my Pokemon cards while looking at each side of each card
- Say: "I am relaxed and I can handle this."

Appreciate the Ups and Downs

When they come up against disappointments and discontents, children will need to rely on the support of a caregiver or mentor whenever their coping skills are strained too far. They need to know that, even when they have stepped out of line, they can lean on someone who cares—a parent, a teacher, a trusted adult who has their best interests at heart. To internalize the feeling of self-love that they need in order to do the hard work of learning self-regulation, they need to know that they are accepted as they are.

For more interesting articles by Barry MacDonald please visit his website: <http://www.mentoringboys.com/>

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by saying, "I've heard things on the news about kids smoking pot at school. How about your school? How does your principal deal with students who use drugs?"

Tips for talking about cannabis:

- Be a good listener. Let them do at least half of the talking.
- Acknowledge their point of view. You don't have to agree with them, but try not to shut down their desire to tell you how they think and feel.
- Use open-ended questions that encourage reflection and expression of feelings and views rather than simple yes/no answers.
- Be clear about your expectation. Be honest about how you think or feel about cannabis use, and why you think or feel that way.
- Avoid "lecture mode" and judgmental comments. Keep in mind that exaggerating the negative aspects of cannabis will not work on a child who has witnessed or experienced its positive effects.

For more tips on addressing substance use with your children, visit: <http://carbc.ca/KnowledgeinPractice/HelpingSchools/Partnerships/SourcesParent.aspx>