



## **Youth Voices on Marijuana**

The following excerpts are from *Blunt Talk: Harms Associated with Early and Frequent Marijuana Use among BC Youth*, a report released in 2016 by the McCreary Centre Society and based on the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey completed by almost 30,000 students in Grades 7-12 across British Columbia. Some of the key findings from the report include:

*“Predictors of early and frequent marijuana use included stressful life circumstances (including sexual abuse, dating violence, and going to bed hungry), a history of risk-taking behaviours, mental health challenges, and having no positive future plans.”*

*“Among youth who used marijuana, a number of protective factors were identified which reduced the risk of early and frequent use, even among youth who were experiencing one or more of the risk factors for such use. These included having family support, positive relationships at school, feeling connected to community, and engaging in meaningful extracurricular activities.” (p. 5)*

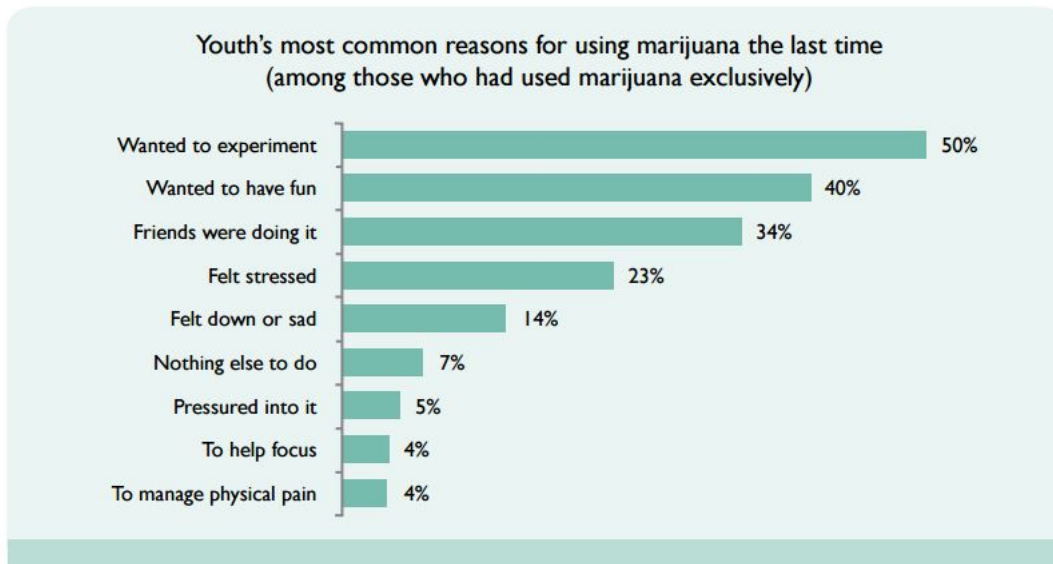
Students filling in the survey also provided a rich collection of comments. Some of those comments are included as quotes in *Blunt Talk* and are used in the following instructional strategies.

An election promise by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to legalize access to marijuana for adults makes it imperative that we engage students in thoughtful dialogue about marijuana (cannabis). Students have provided a lot of information about their attitudes, beliefs and practices related to marijuana. These are summarized in the *Blunt Talk* report. The quotes (in bold) below, however, are the voices of the students themselves. They are used here to start a dialogue. Students can use the voices of their peers to consider factors that influence marijuana use, the potential for harm and the social policies that should be adopted.

It is important for teachers facilitating discussions based on these quotes, instead of focusing on combatting risk or emphasizing a fact-based-approach, to realize that the goal is to build partnerships with youth to support their normal socialization and healthy development. This is achieved by getting students to engage in critical dialogue with each other about their ideas. While we may be uncomfortable with some ideas, it is important to explore them and understand why someone may hold them.

### **Instructional Strategies**

1. Draw attention to [\*Blunt Talk: Harms Associated with Early and Frequent Marijuana Use among BC Youth\*](#) and in particular to the following graph from page 37 by projecting it on a screen. Mention the fact that this graph only represents answers from those students who have used marijuana but have not used alcohol or other drugs. After students have had a chance to reflect on the graph, use questions like those provided to engage students in a class discussion.
  - What do you see as significant in this graph? Are you surprised at all about the results?



Note: Youth could choose more than one response.

- Would the results be different if the graph showed the reasons for the most recent use of marijuana among students who also use alcohol or other drugs? How do you think they would compare? Why?
  - Would the results be different if the graph showed what parents/teachers thought the reasons were? How do you think they would compare? Why?
  - What implications does this information have (if any) for understanding marijuana use among teens?
  - How should this information be used in developing policies or rules about marijuana use? What other information would also need to be considered in developing the policies or rules?
2. Point out that [Blunt Talk: Harms Associated with Early and Frequent Marijuana Use among BC Youth](#) contains a number of quotes from students who filled out the Adolescent Health Survey in 2013 and that the following exercise uses some of those quotes and other excerpts from the report to focus discussion. Choose one or more of the themes below and draw attention to the associated quotes or excerpts. Then facilitate a class discussion or have students work in groups to discuss the issues using questions like those supplied.

#### Coping mechanism

*"Students are increasingly finding themselves under a lot of pressure from school, teachers, parents, and colleges. As a result we experience sleep deprivation, anxiety, depression, and excessive levels of stress. Different students deal with this in different ways: procrastination, binge eating, caffeine, alcohol, marijuana, excessive sleeping, and self-harm."* (p. 22)

*"I don't feel good about my appearance at all... I get called names, and get bullied. My stomach is chubby and that makes me feel really bad about myself because I try to be perfect (pretty, long*

*hair, skinny, cute clothes, perfect life)... I have thought about cutting but I couldn't do that, I am considering marijuana." (p. 23)*

*"I used marijuana for 2 years every day after an encounter with a pedophile at age 12." (p. 18)*

*"You did not ask how drugs/alcohol have affected me in a positive way. i.e., I'm not suicidal anymore because of pot." (p. 22)*

- What do you make of these comments? How do you think the students who wrote them felt? Discuss the different emotions/feelings they may have experienced.
- How do the students describe their experiences with marijuana or other drugs?
- How (in what various ways) might someone experiencing difficult situations deal with them? Are some ways better than others? Explain.
- Why do you think some students chose or considered marijuana in order to address their feelings/situations?
- How can you tell if your friend or classmate is going through a tough time? How could you approach them to help?

#### Appreciation

*"Marijuana makes me happier." (p. 34)*

*"When I smoke marijuana, I feel like I can focus on what I want and I don't feel overwhelmed or pressured. All my worries go up in smoke :) It truly has shown a new light to my life, and I truly believe if it wasn't such a part of my life, I would not be where I am. First time in my life I'm really proud to be me, and first time in my life I do not wish to be someone else. Saved my life." (p. 34)*

*"I mix cough syrup with marijuana. It gives me a really detached feeling. Like I am watching my life at the theatre." (p. 27)*

*"I do marijuana once a year (family tradition)." (p. 10)*

- What are your thoughts on these quotes?
- How do the students describe their experiences with marijuana? How do you interpret these reports? How much of their reported experiences is about marijuana, and how much do other factors contribute to the experiences, do you think? Explain?
- In what ways do you think marijuana is being useful to these students? Do you think these students are aware of any risks related to marijuana?

### Ambivalence

***“I don't know why I use marijuana. I have to smoke a lot to get high and it's a waste of time and money.” (p. 20)***

- Why do you think this student is saying that smoking marijuana is a “waste of time”?
- How would you interpret the quote “I don’t know why I use marijuana”?
- Did you ever experience mixed feelings about something you were part of? How did you come to resolve the issue?
- How can you help someone who has mixed feelings about something? What is not likely to be helpful?

### Inequity, discrimination and victimization

***“I get bullied because of my weight. My friends want me to do weed and I’m curious.” (p. 24)***

*“Youth who lived in challenging circumstances or had experienced stressful life events were more likely to have been using marijuana frequently. For example, youth who came to Canada as refugees were more likely than their Canadian-born peers to have used marijuana on 20 or more days in the past month (47% vs. 12%). Youth who went to bed hungry often or always because there was not enough money for food at home were also more likely to have used marijuana this frequently (35% vs. 11%).*

*“Experiences of discrimination were also linked to frequent use. For example, youth who experienced discrimination based on their race or ethnicity were more likely than those who did not experience this type of discrimination to have used marijuana on 20 or more days (15% vs. 11%). Similar patterns were found for youth who felt they had been discriminated against for being seen as different (15% vs. 10%) and because of how much money they or their family had (19% vs. 10%).*

*“Youth with other victimization experiences were also more likely to use marijuana frequently in the past month. For example, those who had been sexually abused were more likely to use marijuana on 20 or more days in the past month (15% vs. 10% who had not been abused).” (p. 31)*

- What do the results suggest about why some people use a lot of marijuana or other drugs?
- Do you think there is a “need” behind using marijuana or other drugs for those who experience discrimination?
- To help immigrants and/or refugees experience less struggle, what do you suggest could be done?
- In this report, some of the students mentioned their experience of being bullied, sexually abused and facing discrimination. How do you think we can create a more accepting and inclusive environment in our school and communities?

### Community Support

***“My community is very boring, kids around here lose interest in activity and continue to use drugs and alcohol. If there were to be more focus on youth activity in [our community] I can guarantee that the depression, inactivity and drug use would go down significantly. To whoever is reading this I hope my message gets passed on.” (p. 37)***

***“I live in a dangerous area (shootings, most people are doing drugs). My dad and older brother smoke weed, boyfriend is a stoner. I am exposed to weed daily.” (p. 44)***

- What are your thoughts on these quotes? What do they have in common? How are they different?
- Who is responsible for fixing a “boring” community? Who is responsible for fixing a “dangerous” community?
- How can you help build a neighborhood or community that is more engaging, fun and safe?
- How can you help or support yourself to be a healthy and responsible member of your community?
- How can someone increase their connectedness and sense of belonging with their community, family, or school?
- How can you help someone increase their connectedness with their community, family, or school?

3. Break students into groups and assign each group one of the following quotes from [Blunt Talk: Harms Associated with Early and Frequent Marijuana Use among BC Youth](#). Ask each group to think together about the described experience and explore all possible ways of dealing with such struggles in life. They can write the quote and their list of suggested possibilities on a sheet of flip chart paper.

***“I have smoked weed 76 times in the past 30 days... It helps me relieve stress, manage anger, it acts as my anti-depressant AND anxiety reliever, it calms me down, helps me make it through the day.” (p. 22)***

***“My community is very boring, kids around here lose interest in activity and continue to use drugs and alcohol. If there were to be more focus on youth activity in [our community] I can guarantee that the depression, inactivity and drug use would go down significantly. To whoever is reading this I hope my message gets passed on.” (p. 37)***

***“I heavily use marijuana. It helps me find new ways of coping in life and it has helped me realize that I do not need to commit suicide.” (p. 22)***

***“I live in a dangerous area (shootings, most people are doing drugs). My dad and older brother smoke weed, boyfriend is a stoner. I am exposed to weed daily.” (p. 44)***

Have each group post their sheet on the wall and then invite all students to go through the gallery, reflecting on the situations behind the quotes and the proposed possible ways of dealing with them. And then, using sticky notes, encourage students to post one empathetic thought, idea or feeling or what they might say if they could talk to one of the students. Then debrief the experience.

4. Review the fact that the Canadian government has promised to legalize access to marijuana for adults. You might draw attention to the work of the [Task Force on Marijuana Legalization and Regulation](#). The goal of this activity is to promote *understanding* of various ideas and beliefs on cannabis legalization by listening to each other’s ideas and becoming aware of (reflecting on) our own ideas and then trying to deepen our *understanding* of each other and our various perspectives. The goal is not to come up with an agreement on “the right” position or find the solution.

**Round 1:** In small groups of 4 or 6 (an even number if possible), have each student very briefly express their ideas about the legalization of cannabis (and why) to the group. While listening to each person's ideas, students should try to see whose idea/position on cannabis legalization is *the least aligned* with their own.

**Round 2:** Encourage students to pair with the person whose ideas are the least aligned with their own. Ask students to try to put their own ideas and beliefs about cannabis legalization *in suspension* for a few minutes. Their task is to see beyond their own perspective and gain as much understanding of the other person's perspective as they can – beginning with honest curiosity, asking a couple of questions and probing for clarification. Then have each student express in their own words, as sympathetically as they can, the other person's perspective.

**Class debrief:** Ask students to reflect on the experience of putting themselves in another's position. How did it feel? Was it comfortable/uncomfortable/interesting/surprising/shocking? Ask questions like: In what way did it affect you? Did it have any impact on you at all? Do you think you have a better understanding of the other and their ideas now?

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## Related resources

### Addressing cannabis with students

[Cycles](#) – a film-based resource for classroom use with Grades 8-12

[www.drugsanddriving.ca](http://www.drugsanddriving.ca) – an online cross-curricular module for Grades 9-11

[The Art of Motivation](#) – an online training resource for a motivational approach to behaviour change

### For sharing with parents/caregivers

[Cannabis Use and Youth: A parent's guide](#)

[Parenting – The Drug Question](#) – practical tips and resources

### Grants available

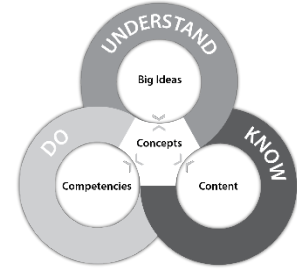
[Youth Action Grants](#) – up to \$500 for youth-led projects which aim to improve youth health in the school or community



## Drug literacy

### Big ideas

- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
- We can learn how to control drugs by examining human thinking through time, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other



### Competencies

- Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs
- Develop personal and social strategies to manage the risks and harms related to drugs

For a complete look at the drug literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: <http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/assets/docs/iminds/hs-pp-drug-curriculum.pdf>

## Links to Curriculum

### First Peoples' principles of learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

### Big ideas

- Exploring text and story helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world (English Language Arts 6/7/8)
- Exploring and sharing multiple perspectives extends our thinking (English Language Arts 6/7/8/9)
- Advocating for the health and well-being of others connects us to our community (Physical and Health Education 8/9/10)
- Healthy choices influence our physical, emotional, and mental well-being (Physical and Health Education 7/8/9/10)
- Healthy relationships can help us lead rewarding and fulfilling lives (Physical and Health Education 8/9/10)
- Examining societal interactions makes us aware of social justice issues (Social Justice 11/12)
- The causes of social injustice are complex and have lasting impacts on society (Social Justice 11/12)
- Social justice issues have both individual and systemic effects (Social Justice 11/12)



### English Language Arts competencies

- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts (Grade 7/8/9/10/11/12)
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts (Grade 7/8/9/10/11/12)
- Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways (Grade 7/8/9)
- Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking (Grade 7/8/9)
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world (Grade 8/9/10/11/12)
- Respectfully exchange ideas and viewpoints from diverse perspectives to build shared understanding and extend thinking (Grade 10/11/12)

### Physical and Health Education competencies

- Reflect on outcomes of personal healthy-living goals and assess strategies used (Grade 7/8)
- Identify and describe/propose strategies for avoiding and/or responding to potentially unsafe, abusive, or exploitive situations (Grade 7/8/9)
- Describe and assess/propose/analyze strategies for responding to discrimination, stereotyping, and bullying (Grade 7/8/9/10)
- Describe and apply/propose strategies for developing and maintaining healthy relationships (Grade 7/8/9/10)
- Explore strategies for promoting the health and well-being of the school and community (Grade 7)
- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others (Grade 7/8)
- Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use, for others (Grade 7/8)
- Create strategies for promoting the health and well-being of the school and community (Grade 8/9/10)
- Propose healthy choices that support lifelong health and well-being (Grade 9)
- Analyze strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others (Grade 9/10)
- Explore and describe factors that shape personal identities, including social and cultural factors (Grade 10)

### Social Justice 11/12 competencies

- Use inquiry processes and skills to: ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Ask questions and corroborate inferences about the content, origins, purposes, and context of multiple sources and multiple perspectives (evidence)
- Determine and assess the long-and short-term causes and consequences of an event, legislative and judicial decision, development, policy, and movement (cause and consequence)
- Recognize implicit and explicit ethical judgements in a variety of sources (ethical judgment)

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