



This Parent newsletter has been created by RI Student Assistance Services. Please feel free to share! Parenting IS Prevention.

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Marijuana and Teens

Teenage marijuana use is at its highest level in 30 years, and today's teens are more likely to use marijuana than tobacco. Many states allow recreational use of marijuana in adults ages 21 and over. Recreational marijuana use by children and teenagers is not legal anywhere in the



US. Today's marijuana plants are grown differently than in the past and can contain two to three times more tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the ingredient that makes people high. The ingredient of the marijuana plant thought to have most medical benefits, cannabidiol (CBD), has not increased and remains at about 1%.

Parents and Prevention

Parents can help their teens learn about the harmful effects of marijuana use. Talking to your children about marijuana at an early age can help them make better choices and may prevent them from developing a problem with marijuana use later. Begin talking with your child in an honest and open way when they are in late elementary and

early middle school. Youth are less likely to try marijuana if they can ask parents for help and know exactly how their parents feel about drug use.

Tips on discussing marijuana:

- **Ask what they have heard about using marijuana. Listen carefully, pay attention, and try not to interrupt. Avoid making negative or angry comments.**
- **Offer facts about the risks and consequences of smoking marijuana.**
- **Ask your child to give examples of the effects of marijuana. This will help you make sure that your child understands what you talked about.**
- **If you choose to talk to your child about your own experiences with drugs, be honest about why you used and the pressures that contributed to your use. Be careful not to minimize the dangers of marijuana or other drugs, and be open about any negative experiences you may have had. Given how much stronger marijuana is today, its effect on your child would likely be much different than what you experienced.**
- **Explain that research tells us that the brain continues to mature into the 20s. While it is developing, there is greater risk of harm from marijuana use.**

Sometimes parents may suspect that their child is already using marijuana. The following are common signs of marijuana use:

- **Acting very silly and out of character for no reason**
- **Using new words and phrases like "sparking up," "420," "dabbing," and "shatter"**
- **Having increased irritability**
- **Losing interest in and motivation to do usual activities.**
- **Spending time with peers that use marijuana**
- **Having trouble remembering things that just happened**
- **Carrying pipes, lighters, vape pens, or rolling papers**
- **Coming home with red eyes and/or urges to eat outside of usual mealtimes**
- **Stealing money or having money that cannot be accounted for**

Effects of Marijuana

Many teenagers believe that marijuana is safer than alcohol or other drugs. When talking about marijuana with your child, it is helpful to know the myths and the facts. For example, teenagers may say, "it is harmless because it is natural," "it is not addictive," or "it does not affect my thinking or my grades."

However, research shows that marijuana can cause serious problems with learning, feelings, and health.

Short-term use of marijuana can lead to:

- **School difficulties**
- **Problems with memory and concentration**
- **Increased aggression**
- **Car crashes**
- **Use of alcohol or other drugs**
- **Worsening of underlying mental health conditions including mood changes and suicidal thinking**
- **Increased risk of psychosis**
- **Interference with prescribed medication**

Marijuana use in teens can lead to long-term consequences. Teens rarely think they will end up with problems related to marijuana use, so it is important to begin talking about the risks with your child early and continue this discussion over time. Talking with your child about marijuana can help delay the age of first use and help protect their brain. If your child is already using marijuana, try asking questions in an open and curious way as your teen will talk more freely if not feeling judged. If you have concerns about your child's drug use, talk with your child's pediatrician or a qualified mental health professional.

Read more [here](#)

And [here](#)



Why is Adolescence a Critical Time for Preventing Substance Use Addiction?

Early use of drugs increases a person's chances of becoming addicted. Remember, drugs change the brain—and this can lead to addiction and other serious problems. So, preventing early use of drugs or alcohol may go a long way in reducing these risks.

Risk of drug use increases greatly during times of transition. For an adult, a divorce or loss of a job may increase the risk of drug use. For a teenager, risky times include moving, family divorce, or changing schools. When children advance from elementary through middle school, they face new and challenging social, family, and academic situations. Often during this period, children are exposed to substances such as cigarettes and alcohol for the first time. When they enter high school, teens may encounter greater availability of drugs, drug use by older teens, and social activities where drugs are used. When individuals leave high school and live more independently, either in college or as an employed adult, they may find themselves exposed to drug use while separated from the protective structure provided by family and school.

A certain amount of risk-taking is a normal part of adolescent development. The desire to try new things and become more independent is healthy, but it may also increase teens' tendencies to experiment with drugs. The parts of the brain that control judgment and decision-making do not fully develop until people are in their early or mid-20s. This limits a teen's ability to accurately assess the risks of drug experimentation and makes young people more vulnerable to peer pressure.

Because the brain is still developing, using drugs at this age has more potential to disrupt brain function in areas critical to motivation, memory, learning, judgment, and behavior control.

Can Research-based Programs Prevent Substance Use Addiction in Youth?

Yes. The term research-based or evidence-based means that these programs have been designed based on current scientific evidence, thoroughly tested, and shown to produce positive results. Scientists have developed a broad range of programs that positively alter the balance between risk and protective factors for drug use in families, schools, and communities.

Studies have shown that research-based programs, such as described in NIDA's [*Principles of Substance Abuse Prevention for Early Childhood: A Research-Based Guide*](#) and [*Preventing Drug Use among Children and Adolescents: A Research-Based Guide for Parents, Educators, and Community Leaders*](#), can significantly reduce early use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. Also, while many social and cultural factors affect drug use trends, when young people perceive substance use as harmful, they often reduce their level of use.

How do research-based prevention programs work? National drug use surveys indicate some children are using drugs by age 12 or 13. Prevention is the best strategy!

These prevention programs work to boost protective factors and eliminate or reduce risk factors for drug use. The programs are designed for various ages and can be used in individual or group settings, such as the school and home. There are three types of programs:

- **Universal programs** address risk and protective factors common to all children in a given setting, such as a school or community.
- **Selective programs** are for groups of children and teens who have specific factors that put them at increased risk of drug use.
- **Indicated programs** are designed for youth who have already started using drugs

Check out the evidence-based [Project Success program](#) at this school!
More [info here](#)



Helping A Child or Teen Whose Parent Is Struggling With Addiction

What can you do if you're a teacher, a neighbor, a churchgoer, a coach ... and you suspect a child is being impacted by a parent's addiction?

Maybe you're thinking, "I'd love to help but it's not my business." Or "I want to reach out but I don't know much about addiction."

[Read here](#) to find out how to help. You can do it!

Other resources:

- Sesame Street has created [a series of videos](#) that includes 6-year-old Karli, talking to her friends about her mom's struggle with drug addiction.
- [The Hazelden Betty Ford Children's Program](#) provides support, education and care to kids who grow up in a family with alcohol or other drug addiction.
- National Association for Children of Addiction or NACoA offers [a range of resources](#) about the impact of substance use on children and families. They also offer resources to help build resilience in children.