



Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.

Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free



Click here to print a PDF of this article so you can start a conversation with your child

Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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Know! To Weed Out the Facts for Youth

Whether or not your state has legalized some form of medical and/or recreational use of marijuana (or is potentially looking to do so), it is more than likely a topic of discussion in and around your community. Such conversations are undoubtedly taking place among our youth as well. But with all the talk and increased messaging on the drug, it becomes difficult to distinguish what information is based on research versus opinion. This is where parents and other caregivers come in. It is our responsibility to provide a filter for those incoming mixed messages and weed out the facts for youth.

Child: If marijuana is used as medicine, doesn't that mean it is safe and maybe even good for you?

Filter: It is true that some chemicals in marijuana may have some medicinal purposes, but there is not much controlled research. And identifying and extracting those potentially helpful chemicals and putting them in a safe form is the job of medical researchers, in order to protect the public. Even if some day there are safe and effective medicines extracted from the plant, that still wouldn't mean using them to get high is safe anymore than abusing other medications is safe.

Using marijuana in the forms available today is not safe. Marijuana is known to impair one's ability to think, remember and reason. In the classroom, users may struggle to concentrate and recall information. Marijuana impacts decision-making and changes the way people behave. It also impairs coordination and balance, which leads to a greater risk for accident, injury and death. And contrary to popular belief, marijuana can increase heart rate and cause panic and anxiety in some users, especially with new high-potency forms of marijuana.

Child: Some people say you can't get addicted to marijuana, but others say you can. Which is it?

Filter: The fact is, 1 in 11 users become addicted to the drug (similar to alcohol). For those who begin using it during adolescence, the chances of addiction increase to 1 in 6 (similar to cocaine). Like nicotine, kicking the marijuana habit can be difficult, with similar withdrawal symptoms including irritability, sleeping difficulties, cravings, anxiety and increased aggression. And out of all the people

in treatment for drug abuse, 1 in 4 is being treated for marijuana.

Child: Grandpa admitted to smoking marijuana when he was younger, and he's fine. It is no different today, people just like to make a big deal about it.

Filter: Today's weed is not your Grandpa's "grass." The potency of the marijuana now available is far beyond that of Grandpa's era. On average, in the 1970s, a marijuana "joint" contained less than 1% THC (the chemical in marijuana that produces a high). In comparison, that same size joint today would contain, on average, about 13% THC. And that's not all; today there are even higher potency forms of marijuana, where THC is extracted using heat; producing forms referred to as "budder," "shatter," "dabs," and "wax." In these new forms, THC levels can be as high as 80 – 90% (not even in the same ballpark as Grandpa's).

Note to parents: This extremely potent marijuana is also now commonly vaporized and breathed into the lungs using e-cigarette devices. And the old home-baked marijuana brownies have now morphed into an endless list of "marijuana edibles" including a variety of baked goods, candies and sodas, available for purchase in stores (in some states) and online.

The fact is, our children are talking about marijuana. The question is, are you engaging in those conversations with them? We can reduce our children's risk of suffering the negative consequences that accompany its use by getting educated on marijuana, initiating conversations on the topic and consistently providing a filter for the confusing and conflicting messages being received by our children.

In the next tip we will focus on the direct impact of marijuana use on adolescents.

Sources: https://www.drugfreeactionalliance.org/files/dfaa_marijuana_crimesafety_050715.pdf, <http://thenablog.com/tag/university-ofmississippis-potency-monitoring-project/>, <http://www.nature.com/npp/journal/v26/n4/full/1395810a.html>