



## What Parents and Mentors Need to Know about Cannabis

It is legal for adults 21 or older to possess, consume and cultivate cannabis in California. Sale of cannabis from licensed retail outlets will become legal January 1, 2018. If you are 18 or older, you can use cannabis if you have a current qualifying physician's recommendation or a valid county-issued medical marijuana identification card. Pre-teens, teens and youth in their early 20s often seek out new experiences and engage in risky behaviors, such as using cannabis. Here are some important facts you should know about cannabis and some tips for talking to youth.



### Cannabis Can Affect a Young Person's Brain

- The brains of young people do not fully develop until they reach their mid-20s. Regular cannabis use during the early years of life can lead to harmful physical changes in the brain.<sup>3</sup>
- Research shows that when youth use cannabis their memory, learning, and attention are harmed. Some studies suggest a permanent impact as well.<sup>4</sup>

### Other Negative Effects of Cannabis on Youth

- Driving under the influence of cannabis increases the risk of getting into a car crash. Cannabis can negatively affect the skills that are needed to drive safely, including reaction time, coordination, and concentration.<sup>5,6</sup>
- The harmful effects of cannabis on a young person's brain may impact their educational and professional goals and how successful they are

in life.<sup>7</sup> Research shows that youth who start using before 18 or who use cannabis regularly may be at higher risk for:

- Skipping classes<sup>7</sup>
- Getting lower grades<sup>9</sup>
- Dropping out of school<sup>10</sup>
- Unemployment or having less fulfilling jobs later in life<sup>10,11</sup>
- Mental health problems may include:
  - Anxiety, depression, suicide, and schizophrenia<sup>12,13,14,15,16</sup>
  - Cannabis dependence and a higher risk for using or abusing other substances and illegal drugs<sup>17</sup>
- Like tobacco, smoking cannabis is harmful to the lungs. The smoke from cannabis has many of the same toxins and chemicals found in tobacco smoke, and when inhaled can increase the risk of developing lung problems.<sup>18</sup>

### Young People and Cannabis Use

- In 2016, most high school students in California reported they were not using cannabis. Only about 15 percent (less than 1 in 5) reported using cannabis in the past 30 days.

- However, most youth do not believe cannabis is harmful. Eight out of 10 youth in California, aged 12-17, reported believing using cannabis once a month was not risky.<sup>2</sup>



### Tips for Encouraging Youth Not to Use Cannabis<sup>19</sup>

- Talk openly and provide guidance about the risks of using cannabis.
  - Youth who have supportive parents, teachers, and other adults are less likely to use cannabis and illegal drugs.
  - Stay positive.
  - Focus on how using cannabis can get in the way of achieving goals such as graduating high school, getting into college or getting a good job. Do not focus on negative outcomes.
- Listen carefully to the questions and thoughts youth have.
- Set shared guidelines and expectations for healthy behaviors.
  - Youth are less likely to use cannabis when parents set clear limits and house rules.
- Be aware of your own attitudes and behaviors.
  - You are a role model. If you use cannabis in front of young people, they are more likely to use it too.

### Recognizing if a Youth is Using Cannabis<sup>20</sup>

- Look for behavioral changes related to cannabis use such as: mood swings, spending less time with friends, skipping school, loss of interest in sports or other favorite activities and changes in grades and sleeping habits.
- Young people under the influence of cannabis may lack coordination, giggle for no reason, act silly, have red eyes and short-term memory loss.

### What to Do if a Youth is Using Cannabis<sup>19</sup>

- Stay calm. Overreacting may lead youth to rebel, feel resentment or take greater risks.
- Talk about your concerns and give positive reasons for wanting youth to stop using cannabis.
- Keep the conversation open for problem solving.
- Remind youth of the ground rules you set earlier, or set new ground rules and consequences.
- If needed, seek help from trusted adults and resources in your community.
- Call 911 and get help if there is a medical or mental health emergency.

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