



Talking to Youth About Marijuana: Tips for Parents

Now that marijuana is legal for adults over 21 to use in California, it is important to talk to youth about making healthy choices. Parents, mentors, guardians, and other trusted adults are important sources of information for youth. When talking with your youth about reasons to avoid marijuana, stay away from scare tactics. Most young people, especially teens, know friends or celebrities who use marijuana and appear to be successful, so it is important to be factual. To learn how marijuana affects young people's health, see the [Let's Talk Cannabis Parent and Mentors Fact Sheet](#) and [Youth Fact Sheet](#).

Here are some tips on how to talk to your child (or other youth in your life) about marijuana, and ways you can support their healthy decision-making. Developing open, trusting communication is essential to preventing marijuana use among youth.

Tips on talking to your youth¹:

- **Stay positive.** Approach conversations with attention, curiosity, and understanding. Keep calm and relaxed and avoid judgement, shame, or scare tactics.
- **Become an active listener.** Pay attention to what your child has to say. Don't interrupt.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** Encourage your child to express how he or she thinks and feels about issues you're discussing.
- **Control your emotions.** If you hear something you don't like, do not respond with emotions. Instead, take a few deep breaths and share your feelings in a constructive way.
- **Be respectful.** If you value your child's viewpoint, he or she will be more likely to listen to and respect yours.
- **Words Matter.** Be mindful of your tone of voice, facial expressions, and choice of words. For example, instead of saying "Marijuana is bad." Try saying, "Marijuana is unhealthy because your brain is still growing and using marijuana can have long terms effects."

Talk about how marijuana use affects youth's health:

- Marijuana damages their growing brains.
- Marijuana can cause problems with short-term memory, attention, reaction time, and motor skills.
- Marijuana can make it harder to learn and be successful in school.

To learn how marijuana affects youth health, see the [Let's Talk Cannabis Parent and Mentors Fact Sheet](#) and [Youth Fact Sheet](#).



¹ Adapted from Prevention Lane. (2018). Talking to Childs about Marijuana: Tips for Parents.

² Adapted from Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. (June 2017). Retail Marijuana: Tips for Parents.

Talk about how marijuana can impact their goals²:

- *Breaking family and community trust:* Share that younger siblings, family members, friends, and neighbors see them as role models, so they should not use marijuana because they could have a negative impact on people they care about.
- *Breaking school or after school activity rules:* youth may be referred for drug counseling, suspended, expelled or face prosecution.
- *Breaking California cannabis laws:* Youth may get a minor in possession charge which can lead to fines, community service, and attend drug counseling.
- *Breaking federal laws:* Marijuana is still illegal outside of California.

How to respond when your child says...³

“But it’s natural, marijuana is a plant!”

- Remind your child that not all plants are good for your body. Many plants are poisonous and harmful (cocaine, heroin, tobacco, poison ivy). Using marijuana can affect developing brains and bodies and prevent them from growing to their full potential.

“But it’s legal here!”

- Marijuana use is only legal for adults 21 and over, and medicinal marijuana should only be used by those with a doctor’s recommendation. There are many legal drugs that are dangerous and can be abused, if not under doctor supervision.

“Weed is safer than alcohol!”

Marijuana and alcohol are both drugs that impair your thinking. You should not use any substance that inhibits your ability to think clearly and make good decisions.

“Didn’t you smoke weed?”

- If you used marijuana, be honest with your child. You may also choose to share other effects of your choice, or perhaps an example of a risky moment that jeopardize your behavior and abilities. If you didn’t use marijuana, explain why you made that choice for yourself — for your health, activities you enjoyed, etc.

“It’s medicine, isn’t it safe?”

- Marijuana is used by some people for serious medical conditions; these individuals have a doctor’s recommendation to use marijuana for specific health conditions. If you are under 21 or do not have a medicinal marijuana recommendation by a doctor, it can be very harmful to your body and can have serious negative effects.



What to do if your child is using marijuana⁴:

- Keep calm.
- Communication is key! It is important to say that you want your child to stop using marijuana. However, do this without making your child feel rejected or like a bad person. For example, “Using pot can be harmful for your health and brain, which is why I am concerned. I want you to stop using pot, and I’m here to help you.”
- Don’t overreact or overemphasize the possible negative consequences. This may lead youth to take a greater risk to prove that they are independent.
- Leave the door open for problem solving.

³ Adapted from Prevention Lane. (2018). Talking to Childs about Marijuana: Tips for Parents.

⁴ Adapted from Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division. Preventing Underage Marijuana Use-Parent’s Guide to Talking with Your Kids.

Resources for Parents:

Marijuana's Lasting Effects on the Brain

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/directors-page/messages-director/2013/03/marijuanas-lasting-effects-brain>

Marijuana Talk Kit: Partnership for Drug-Free Kids

Guidance and sample scripts for parents to talk to children and youth about marijuana.

www.drugfree.org/MJTalkKit/

Parent Engagement Tips

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/parent_engagement.html

Positive Parenting

www.kidshealth.org/parent/positive/index.html

National Institute on Drug Abuse

Marijuana facts for parents and teens

www.drugabuse.gov

Partnership for Drug-Free Kids

Information for parents about substance abuse

www.DrugFree.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

“Talk. They Hear You” information and app

www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking