

CDPH Youth Cannabis Education and Prevention Media Campaign

Creative Concept Testing Executive Summary

The [Youth Cannabis Prevention Initiative](#) (YCPI) of the [Substance and Addiction Prevention Branch](#) (SAPB), within the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), partnered with Rescue Agency (Rescue) to conduct creative concept research with youth ages 13-17 and parents/guardians ages 35-55 in May 2022. The objectives of this research included:

1. Exploring the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding cannabis use.
2. Exploring which social norms, values, social activities, and/or environments are more likely to encourage or discourage cannabis use.
3. Identifying factual statements that motivate youth to prevent the initiation, escalation, or quitting of cannabis.
4. Identifying factual statements that motivate parents/guardians to have conversations with their children about cannabis and cannabis use.
5. Assessing the receptivity to youth and parent/guardian campaign names, icons, and campaign ads (creative concepts) to identify preferences in style, tone, and framing.

The information provided by research participants will assist in the development of campaign materials and messaging approaches to prevent and reduce youth cannabis use among the priority audiences in California. The research consisted of 17 virtual focus groups, 62 participants, and was conducted among four youth audience segments which are outlined below, and two parent/guardian audience segments. Key findings from the qualitative focus group discussions are shared in this summary report for youth and parents/guardians.

[YOUTH RESEARCH](#)

Cannabis Youth Audience Segments

- I. **Susceptible Non-Trier** (N=11): Individuals who responded that they have never tried cannabis, but answered with an affirmative response (i.e., did not answer “definitely not” to all questions) to any of the susceptibility questions (i.e., have they ever been curious about using marijuana; if one of their best friends were to offer them marijuana, would they try it; do they think they would use marijuana in the next year; do they think they would use marijuana soon) were assigned to the “susceptible non-trier” category.
- II. **Experimenter** (N=9): Individuals who indicated on the screener that they have tried cannabis 1 to 9 times during their lifetime were assigned to the “experimenter” category.
- III. **Experimenter-Coping** (N=6): Individuals who indicated on the screener that they have tried cannabis 1 to 9 times during their lifetime and reported using cannabis to cope with mental health (not exclusively) were assigned to the “experimenter-cope” category.
- IV. **Consistent User** (N=12): Individuals who indicated on the screener that they have used cannabis 10 to 99 times during their lifetime were assigned to the “consistent user” category.

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Key findings from the creative concept testing are summarized below for the youth audience group:



Youth Audience: Overall Cannabis-Related Insights

1. **“Otherizing” the Risk:** Youth recognize that people can become dependent on cannabis, but “otherize” who this happens to and impacts. Youth think dependence on cannabis varies based on who the person is and feel that each individual is in control of their own use.
2. **Reasons for Use:** Youth reported that their reasons for cannabis use is fluid (e.g., to bond or socialize with friends, enhance the moment, or help relieve stress and anxiety). Youth were not always choosing one reason over the other as a motive for cannabis use.
3. **Perceived Benefit of Using to Cope:** Youth reported that using cannabis to cope with mental health challenges, like stress or anxiety, provides an instant relief from uncomfortable feelings, thoughts, and moments. Some youth recognize cannabis use as only a temporary solution, while others reported feel better and more relaxed after the “high” wears off. Some youth also reported that they perceive using cannabis to cope with stress and anxiety as less risky than using cannabis to bond and socialize, citing “medicinal cannabis use” as a rationale.
4. **Cause for Stress:** Youth universally reported finding school a stressful part of their lives. Youth recognize that school is important to their future and their education impacted by their ability or inability to perform well or be motivated to do their work. In addition to school, work, relationship problems, and/or social anxiety, were reported by youth as causes of stress
5. **Mental Health Awareness:** Youth demonstrated the ability to articulate what stress and anxiety mean and illustrate what they feel and experience when they are stressed or anxious. Youth recognize that they should seek help when stress and anxiety affect their day-to-day life.
6. **Value the Moment:** Youth reported valuing being in the moment and recognize that cannabis can dull or limit these experiences. Youth reported being motivated by messaging that explains how cannabis can impact their ability to be fully present and

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remember moments and experiences they care about or value.

7. **Receptive To Coping Messaging:** Youth responded well to messaging that showed relevant representations of stress and why cannabis use is not a healthy or long-term solution for managing stress.

PARENT/GUARDIAN RESEARCH

Parents/Guardians of Cannabis Susceptible Teens, Audience Segments*

- I. **Parents/Guardians of Tweens** (N=12): Adults (30-80 years old) who are parents or guardians of at least one youth aged 11-14.
- II. **Parents/Guardians of Teens** (N=12): Adults (30-80 years old) who are parents or guardians of at least one youth aged 15-17.

**Note: Research was conducted in both English (four focus groups) and Spanish (two focus groups) with an even split between audience segments.*

Key findings from the creative concept testing are summarized below for the parent/guardian audience group:



Parents/Guardians: Overall Cannabis-Related Insights

1. **Conversations-Age:** Parents/guardians reported adapting how they spoke with their child about cannabis depending on the age of the child. For tweens, parents/guardians focused their conversations on a general overview of cannabis. For teens, parents/guardians indicated a preference for having more explicit conversations around the risks of cannabis use, such as the physical risks or harms and social consequences, such as impairments to long-term motivation and health.
2. **Importance of Cannabis Conversations:** Parents/guardians universally

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acknowledged the importance of talking to their children about underage cannabis use. Parents/guardians associate having cannabis conversations with other pressing and challenging topics like sexual health, race, or other harmful drugs and substances.

3. **Need for Additional Guidance & Tools:** Parents/guardians acknowledged that it is challenging to know how to open a dialogue with their children about cannabis and cannabis use beyond just telling them not to use cannabis. Parents/guardians expressed a desire for more constructive guidance and tangible tools on how to break through the barriers they face when trying to speak to their children about the subject.
4. **Reality of Parenting:** Parents/guardians reported appreciating messaging that depicts the realities of parenting (e.g., teens being hard to talk to). Messaging that idealizes stereotypical family dynamics and situations (i.e., child always listening, never ignoring the parent) were not well-received by the parents/guardian participants. Parents/guardians also reported being inspired by messaging that represents and conveys the difficulties of parenting with a parent's drive to do what is necessary for their child's wellbeing.

Parents/Guardians, Spanish Speaking: Overall Cannabis-Related Insights

1. **Importance of Honesty and Trust:** Honesty and trust were highly valued concepts among the Spanish-speaking parents/guardian participants. Parent/guardians noted honesty and trust allows them to be tuned into their children's lives better and helped their children be more receptive to their parents/guardians' influence.
2. **Be Mindful of Gender Roles:** When shown images of a mother and daughter relationship in the parent/guardian creative concept, parents/guardians noted that the relationship was most relatable, but some participants also felt that the concept implied that mothers are solely responsible for and expected to educate their children. Spanish-speaking parents/guardians specifically worried that the concept may reinforce stereotypical gender roles.
3. **Cannabis Conversations Today vs. the Past:** Parents/guardians, particularly Spanish-speaking participants, shared that they grew up during a time when talking about cannabis was off-limits. Parents/guardians noted that the way they learned about cannabis risks from their parents was very misinformed and not a very good model for how they should or want to talk to their children. Parents/guardians are self-aware of their limitations and appreciate non-judgmental educational resources, on not only the harms of underage cannabis use (how it can affect the brain, academics, etc.), but also on how to have cannabis-related conversations in a positive, constructive, and effective way.