



# HOW DO I TALK WITH MY TEEN ABOUT MARIJUANA?

Talking to teenagers can be difficult. As a parent, discussing drugs and alcohol can be even harder. The tips below can help set the stage for an effective conversation about marijuana.

## **BEFORE THE TALK.**

Spend time learning about marijuana and the particular risks for young people.

## **BE PATIENT AND READY TO LISTEN.**

Find a comfortable setting rather than announcing a formal “sit-down” meeting. Teens will likely be more receptive to a more spontaneous, casual approach. Be prepared to do more listening than talking, remembering that it’s a conversation and not a lecture. It will be helpful if you can keep an open mind and show your genuine concern and interest by asking questions.

## **BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR GOALS.**

Decide ahead of time what you hope to accomplish from the conversation. You may hope to begin an ongoing conversation about marijuana, express concern, or to gain insight into the pressures your child may be facing.

## **BE POSITIVE.**

Be attentive, curious, respectful and understanding. If you approach the situation with shame, anger or scare tactics, then your conversation may not be very productive. Let your teen know that you are on their side and that you hope to make sense of all of the conflicting information about marijuana.

## **LET THEM KNOW YOUR EXPECTATIONS.**

Make sure your teen knows your rules and the consequences for breaking those rules—and, most importantly, that you really will enforce those consequences if the rules are broken. Research shows that kids are less likely to use alcohol and other drugs if their parents have a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules. Kids who are not regularly monitored by their parents are four times more likely to use drugs.

## **HELP PROVIDE THEM WITH FACTUAL INFORMATION.**

Don’t just leave your child’s anti-drug education up to their school. Ask your teen what they have learned about drugs in school and continue their education as they progress through high school. Help them to understand the vulnerable teen brain; the unpredictable nature of dependency and how it varies from person to person; the impact of drug use on maintaining a healthy lifestyle; and more positive approaches to reducing their stress and anxiety.

# ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS ABOUT MARIJUANA.



Here are some questions and comments you might get from your teen about e-cigarettes and some ideas on how you can answer them.

**“MARIJUANA IS LEGAL NOW IN CALIFORNIA, SO IT’S OKAY FOR ME TO TRY IT.”**

It’s still not legal for anyone under 21. This age limit is meant to protect adolescents from its harmful effects. Your brain is completing some very important development and using marijuana during this time can interfere with this development. Today’s marijuana is over 300% stronger than it was when I was growing up. This is a real concern for me.

**“MARIJUANA IS A NATURAL PLANT. THAT MEANS IT’S OKAY.”**

Just because it is “natural” does not mean it’s safe. Because it is still federally illegal, there are few regulations ensuring that it meets safety guidelines. The strength and potency of marijuana varies, and it often contains a large amount of pesticides, fungus and even lead. Now that it has become “big business” funded by large tobacco companies, there is not much “natural” about it.

**“IT HELPS WITH MY ANXIETY.”**

I am sorry you are feeling anxious; I know that’s a difficult feeling. While marijuana may make you feel relaxed while you are using it – it can actually make you feel worse in the long run. A chemical in marijuana, THC, mimics one of the brain’s neurotransmitters that makes you feel good – reducing the amount your body makes on its own. Once you’ve become dependent on THC, you’ll feel good when you’re using it, but you won’t have enough of your own chemical messengers to feel good when you are not using it. Can we think of some other ways to help you relax?

**“WHY IS USING MARIJUANA SO RISKY?”**

Your brain is still undergoing important development until you’re about 24, and using marijuana during this time can actually change the structure of your brain, specifically the areas dealing with memory and problem solving. In fact, regular marijuana users perform worse on tests of learning, memory and other brain functions. It’s been shown to actually lower your IQ.

**“WOULD YOU RATHER I DRINK ALCOHOL? WEED SEEMS SAFER.”**

Honestly, I don’t want you doing anything that can harm you. I’m interested in knowing why you think weed is safer than alcohol. There’s a lot of misinformation out there about marijuana and it’s important to understand that marijuana is as dangerous as alcohol on the developing brain. Teens who begin using marijuana often have difficulty with emotions, lose motivation for school and jeopardize lifelong friendships. Right now, neither option seems like a healthy choice.

**“DID YOU SMOKE MARIJUANA WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG?”**

I may have made some choices that I am hoping you won’t repeat. I did not know a lot about the impact of drugs and alcohol on the developing brain. I am hoping that we can have a more open conversation and learn about it together.