

Having the “pot talk” with your teens

Hash out the facts and weed out the myths

If you haven't already, sit down with your kids and have the “pot talk” together.

Cover these 8 topics to help guide informed choices.

1 Who is using?

Teens and youth from 15-24 use cannabis twice as much as adults. That gives teens a unique perspective.

One in four teens use cannabis each year. Most believe that it's pretty safe and easier to access than alcohol. With legalization, this increases the perception of safety.

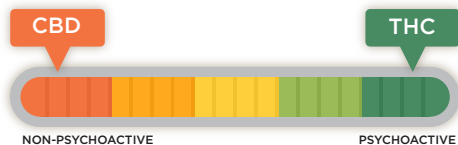


Acknowledge your teen's “lived experience” and ask questions. Try to understand their motives for using. If you use cannabis, or used it when you were younger, talk about your experience.

2 Cannabis is a complicated plant

Cannabis consists of the dried flowers, tops and leaves from the marijuana plant. It contains over 100 substances, but the active components of cannabis most well understood are THC and CBD. THC is the component that makes you feel “high” but causes some of the side effects like making you hungry, sleepy, paranoid or anxious.

CBD doesn't give the same high but can still make you feel drowsy and dizzy — more people use CBD strains if they are using cannabis as medicine.



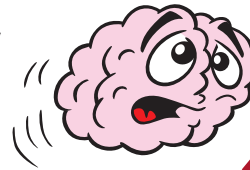
The amounts of THC and CBD can vary by strain. People who use cannabis for the “high” will be looking for higher THC strains.

Many teens look at cannabis as being just a plant — natural and harmless. Helping them to understand the components can help them understand it's complicated.

3 Cannabis and your growing brain

Your brain is developing until about 25. The earlier and more regularly you use cannabis, the more likely the chance of impairing the part of the brain that controls memory, decision making and problem solving — skills important to develop in high school and university!

If your teen uses cannabis often (daily or almost every day), these effects could be permanent. Talk to your teen about trying to limit use to only on weekends or once a week. It can also affect motivation; regular use has been linked to lower grades and dropping out of sports.



Teens may say that they only use occasionally. Validate that avoiding regular use is a GOOD thing for brain development, problem-solving skills and motivation, even if you don't want them to use at all.

4 Risks can be big

With regular cannabis use comes a higher risk of mental health issues like psychosis, with feelings of anxiety and paranoia. That risk is higher if a family member has a mental illness. If your teen or a family member has a history of substance use disorder (e.g. alcohol) this can increase the risk of cannabis use disorder — in teens the risk is almost TWICE AS HIGH as adults.



Teens may not be discussing their own history or family history with friends. Talk about it at home.

5 Stay away from synthetics

Synthetic products like K2 or Spice try to mimic the effects of THC. To create those products, synthetic cannabinoids are typically sprayed onto different plants. Their contents are unknown and untested. They have caused seizures and hallucinations and, yes, death.



Remind your teen of the dangers of using synthetics – they are similar to the risks associated with using counterfeit opioids laced with unknown quantities of dangerous drugs.

6 Don't use and drive

Cannabis can affect reaction time, which increases the risk of getting in an accident. Wait at least six hours before driving or getting into a car with someone who has been using.



Teens are using and driving, and many feel the impairment is not significant. Let them know that you are willing to help them make alternate arrangements to get somewhere.

7 Safer alternatives to smoking

Smoking (joints, bong) is harmful to the lungs. Vaping is considered safer, but we don't understand the long-term safety, effects or risks. Edibles could be safer – we're still learning. Yet they might delay your high compared to inhaling cannabis. If using edibles, start low and go slow so you don't experience a "bad high".



Remind teens that nothing is risk-free. If they have smoked in the past, stopping cannabis smoking can reverse harms to the lungs – it's never too late.

8 Cannabis doesn't mix well with alcohol, other substances and some medications

Teens often use cannabis and alcohol together. Some may be also taking medications that could interact with cannabis.



Remind your teen that cannabis alone can impair judgment and use with alcohol or other substances can compound that. There are risks of drug interactions with cannabis. If you know your teen is using, make sure that your pharmacist and doctor are aware – to help reduce the risk of a potentially harmful interactions.

Have the “pot talk” frequently. Approach it with an open perspective and respect and empathy for your teen’s experiences, values and feelings.

There are many inconsistent messages circulating about cannabis. Cover these eight topics for a balanced, informed conversation so they can make good choices. They’re counting on you.

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Useful Tools: Please share with your teens and other parents!

[Cannabis Talk Kit. Know How To Talk With Your Teen.](#)

[The Blunt Truth – Useful Tips About Safer Ways to Use Cannabis](#)

[Talking pot with youth. A Cannabis Communication Guide for Youth Allies.](#)

[Youth Specific Adverse Effects of Early Cannabis Use](#)

[Cannabis Resources \(University of Waterloo\)](#)

For more details on the 8 points to discuss with your teenager, visit pharmacists.ca/cannabis



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