

Engaging in the marijuana conversation with your child

The "marijuana debate" is a complicated one. All of us are bombarded on a regular basis with opinions and misinformation about marijuana and its effects or perceived benefits. Though there are many reasons not to use THC, and science may at some point give us specific reasons to use CBD or other forms of marijuana, we need to take a balanced approach to the conversation; especially when it comes to having the conversation with our teens. **Here are a few common conversation starters, some information regarding them and sources for finding out more information.**

- 1. Understanding Addiction:** Addiction comes in many forms, and the reality is, we never know if we will struggle or not. About 1 in 9 adults who begin using marijuana will struggle with physiological (chemical dependence) addiction to marijuana. Youth under the age of 19 who begin using marijuana regularly have a 1 in 6 chance of addiction. It's important for parents and teens to talk about addiction and the impact it can have on their lives, goals and families. (*National Institute of Drug Abuse and Hall, W.; and Degenhardt, L. Adverse health effects of non-medical cannabis use. Lancet 374: 1383-1391, 2009.*)
- 2. Marijuana and THC:** The unfortunate reality is marijuana can be dangerous, and in ways that are not always immediately apparent or the same as alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. Marijuana contains about 500 active ingredients. Most of these ingredients we do not know much about. The ones we do know quite a bit about are the Tetrahydrocannabinol or THC and cannabidiol or CBD, one of the other active chemicals found in marijuana. THC is the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana and when the ratio of THC to CBD is closer together (more 1:1) the psychoactive effects are lessened. When there is a wider gap between these two cannabinoids, there is a greater psychoactive effect. As the growing of Marijuana has expanded, the percentage of THC found in current marijuana has increased exponentially. Currently, smoking marijuana plant material can have an average of 21% THC, while concentrates average 90%. Compared to the 4% THC found in marijuana in the 60s and 70s, this is a significant increase creating drastic changes to how the substance interacts in someone's brain. (*Kevin Sabet 7 Great Myths about Marijuana*)
- 3. Marijuana and the Brain:** One of the ways marijuana interacts in your brain is to attach to cannabinoids. THC specifically attaches to cannabinoids and impacts their ability to regulate the signals in the brain. When THC attaches in the brain it does so across the whole brain and its structures at the same time. This is why it impacts everyone differently and why there is such a wide variety of effects from marijuana. The reason this matters is because THC impacts the development of white matter in the brain. This white matter is responsible for communication, learning, memory and more. We know that adolescence is a time when these skills are developing at a rapid rate. Therefore, there is more impact from marijuana on a teen brain than on a young adult brain or on the brain of someone over 25. For a clearer discussion of how this works listen to this talk from TED Health. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ted-health/id470623173?i=1000506584168>
- 4. Legalization:** Medical Marijuana became legal in Michigan in 2008, and recreational marijuana was legalized through a ballot initiative this past November. Parents may be asking themselves what that means for youth. It is still illegal for youth under the age of 21 to possess marijuana, and most schools have significant consequences for youth who choose to use marijuana. Part of the ballot measure was the ability for local municipalities to opt out of having marijuana distribution centers.

For more information go to: Arborcircle.org/OSAP or <https://talksooner.org/drug-trends/>.