

Talking to Teens About Cannabis Use

**A Youth Prevention Resource
for Parents and Caregivers**



BeCannabisSmart

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TALKING TO TEENS ABOUT CANNABIS USE



As a parent or caregiver, you can help prevent your child from using cannabis. This guide offers you tips to start the conversation. Talking to your teen helps give them tools to make healthy and responsible choices. Review the information in this guide and use what feels most helpful for you and your child.

In Maryland, adults 21 and older can legally purchase, possess, and use cannabis. Given the risks to growing bodies and brains, cannabis use should be avoided in children and teens.



TALKING TO TEENS ABOUT CANNABIS USE

How do I talk to my child about cannabis?

1. Know the facts:

Review information here and in our FAQs and Resources, as well as from sources like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This can help you stay informed on types of cannabis, its potential effects, and the laws around it in order to answer their questions correctly.

2. Start the conversation:

Choose your moments, such as on a walk or in the car. Teens respond better to having a conversation, not getting a lecture. Keep the conversation going as they get older, delivering small but regular “doses.”

3. Answer their questions.

Be honest, open, non-judgmental, and willing to listen. Make sure they know they can talk to you. You can share your own personal experiences if they are helpful to the conversation.



TALKING TO TEENS ABOUT CANNABIS USE

What questions do they have?

These are some common questions your child may have about cannabis, and some ideas on how to answer.

What's the big deal about cannabis? It's legal.

- Like alcohol and tobacco, many products are not legal until age 21 because the health risks are greater when your body and brain are still developing. And even though cannabis is legal, that doesn't mean it's legal to use anywhere, anytime – even for adults like me.

Why don't you want me to use cannabis?

- Cannabis has short-term effects on teens and adults – like making it harder to concentrate and slowing reaction time – which can be dangerous when driving and making other important decisions.
- Cannabis can have long-term effects too. Your brain isn't fully developed until around 25 years old and recent studies show it can change the way your brain develops, affecting things like how you learn, remember, and are able to pay attention. Recent studies also show more depression and mental health problems in teens who use cannabis.¹

How can it be bad for me if people use it as medicine?

- Like other prescription medications, cannabis may help with specific illnesses for some people. Cannabis as medicine must be overseen and monitored by a certified medical provider.



¹Pacheco-Colón I, Ramirez AR, Gonzalez R. Effects of Adolescent Cannabis Use on Motivation and Depression: A Systematic Review. Curr Addict Rep. 2019 Dec;6(4):532-546. doi: 10.1007/s40429-019-00274-y. Epub 2019 Aug 29. PMID: 34079688; PMCID: PMC8168938

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What questions do they have? (Continued)

If a friend offers it to me, what should I say?

- You can always just say “no thanks.” Or “I don’t like how it makes me feel,” “I have (practice, rehearsal, to study, etc.),” “I don’t want to do it since I’m driving later,” or “I’m trying to stop.” Try changing the subject or suggesting another activity. Brainstorm responses with your child that they feel comfortable with.

You used cannabis, so why shouldn’t I?

- Cannabis is much stronger now than it was 20 or 30 years ago, making it easy to use too much and have a really bad experience. Using higher potency (stronger) cannabis can lead to serious things like addiction. (NOTE: If you’ve had a bad experience with cannabis, tell your teen about it!)
- There are also intoxicating THC/hemp products (like delta-8 and delta-10) sold in places like convenience stores and gas stations that weren’t even on the market ten years ago. These products are new, so no one knows what the long-term effects may be for teens and even adults. THC products sold in these places also fall outside State regulation to verify what’s in them. (NOTE: See more under FAQs in this guide.)



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How can I prevent my child from using cannabis?

Understand why young people use cannabis.

Studies show teens use cannabis to experiment, to fit in with a group or socialize, and/or because of stress, depression, or boredom. If you think your child may use cannabis for one of these reasons, talk with them about healthier ways to socialize or manage stress, like sports/exercise, taking a dance/music/art class, or joining a new club at school.

Set clear expectations.

Be sure to clearly communicate your household expectations about cannabis use. Make sure your child understands that just because cannabis is legal for adults 21+, this doesn't mean it is "safe," especially for teens.

Present meaningful facts to them.

Rather than just saying "because I said so," discuss concerns your teen may have, such as the fear of being left out or made fun of if they decide not to use cannabis.

- Nearly 86% of Maryland high school students do not use cannabis regularly, and over 70% have never tried it – it can be helpful to share with your child that it's not as common for teens to use cannabis as it may appear to them.
- Another reason teens say they use cannabis is to reduce stress. It can also be useful to share that medical experts agree that cannabis is more likely to harm mental health than help it.

If you or another adult in the home uses cannabis, do so responsibly.

- Don't use cannabis in front of your kids or before/while driving.
- Always keep your cannabis in a safe or locked bag/box stored up, away, and out of sight. Low-cost lockable bags and safes are available online, in pharmacies, and in many dispensaries.

Keep an eye out for signs of cannabis use, which can include:

- Mood changes
- Changes in grades or sleep habits
- Poor coordination
- Loss of interest in academics or extracurricular activities
- Red eyes
- Acting intoxicated/strangely



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What if my child uses cannabis?

Stay calm.

Tell them about your concerns, listen to what they have to say, and encourage them to stop. A “just say no” rule may make them stop listening to you. Instead, make sure they know that their health and safety is the most important thing to you.

Be honest and realistic.

Don’t sensationalize. Talk about how substance use can affect their lives. Make it personal – relate to things that are important to your child (like driving, sports, other extracurricular activities, and/or performance in school).



If you suspect or know they continue to use, talk to them about lower THC products, never mixing cannabis with other substances, and never driving (or riding with anyone) under the influence. If you are concerned about their level of cannabis use, contact a healthcare provider or counselor. Additionally, you or your teen can call/text/chat 988 for free and confidential mental health or substance use support.



TALKING TO TEENS ABOUT CANNABIS USE

FAQs

What is the difference between THC? CBD? Delta-8/Delta-10? Marijuana? Hemp?

The first thing you should know is, it's all cannabis! The cannabis plant produces more than 100 different compounds, known as cannabinoids, which can affect the mind and body. Tetrahydrocannabinol, known as "THC," and cannabidiol, known as "CBD," are the most common. THC is intoxicating, which causes the feeling of being high, while CBD is non-intoxicating. CBD is sometimes advertised to help things like inflammation, pain, and anxiety; however, these products are not regulated by the FDA, and more studies are needed to confirm these benefits.

The 2018 Farm Act legalized hemp and defined it as a cannabis plant that contains 0.3 percent or less delta-9 THC (typically a non-intoxicating level), while marijuana refers to a cannabis plant that contains more than 0.3 percent delta-9 THC (typically intoxicating levels). Since the 2018 Farm Act, new uses for hemp have been developed, including chemically converting the naturally low levels of THC in hemp into intoxicating forms, which include delta-8 and delta-10 THC.

There is a lot of confusion out there about these delta-8 and delta-10 THC and related products that can be found in gas and convenience stores, smoke/vape shops, and online in Maryland and across the U.S. These products are intoxicating and often come in colorful packages attractive to children/youth. Products sold by unlicensed retailers (gas stations, convenience stores, etc.) are not regulated by the State, nor evaluated by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA). When some products from these locations were purchased and tested, actual THC content was found to be sometimes higher and sometimes lower than what was printed on the package label.

What forms does cannabis come in?

Common forms include:



Joints, blunts, pre-rolls



Vape pens



Concentrate (also called wax, shatter, butter/budder, dab), which is heated then inhaled



Edibles, including gummies, chews, chocolates, brownies, and drinks/drink mixes

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FAQs (Continued)

Where is cannabis sold in Maryland?

Licensed dispensaries are permitted to sell regulated cannabis products to adults 21 and older and to certified medical patients. Customers must show a valid ID to enter the business and again during purchase. Packaging for regulated products must be child-resistant and not appeal to youth. Regulated products can be identified with the red Maryland THC triangle symbol.



Intoxicating hemp products are sold in Maryland and across the country at places like gas stations, convenience stores, and smoke shops. In Maryland it is not legal to sell intoxicating hemp products to anyone under the age of 21, however, younger people have reported buying products at these locations. Neither the State nor the federal government regulates/tests products sold at these places or the packaging. To report about underage sales, complete the online form at <https://atcc.maryland.gov/tips/>.

How do teens get cannabis?

Common sources are from friends or other teens, as well as family members, online, or at gas stations, smoke shops, and convenience stores.

What's legal?

- In Maryland, adults 21+ can legally purchase, possess, and use cannabis. However, there are purchase limits as well as restrictions on smoking cannabis in public spaces.
- It is illegal to use cannabis while driving and to drive under the influence of cannabis.
- Youth under 21 may not purchase, possess, or use cannabis. Possession of 2.5 ounces or less may result in a fine, drug education programming, and/or treatment for substance misuse. Possession of more than 2.5 ounces may result in criminal charges.



Resources

More information is available at:

[Cannabis | National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\) \(nih.gov\)](https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/cannabis-marijuana)

<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/cannabis-marijuana>

[Cannabis and Teens | Cannabis and Public Health | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/cannabis/health-effects/cannabis-and-teens.html)

<https://www.cdc.gov/cannabis/health-effects/cannabis-and-teens.html>



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