



## ADVICE ON TALKING TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT CANNABIS

Times have changed, and so has cannabis. Some plants now have incredibly concentrated levels of THC —the psychoactive chemical that alters the mind —and new, varied methods of consumption (like vaping, taking dabs, or edibles) have become popular. Below, you will find advice, examples, and resources about how to speak with your children about cannabis.

- 1. Get them talking.** Pick a comfortable time and place where you can talk without distractions. Start with an open-ended question (that can't be answered with just yes or no). A good example would be "Tell me what you know about cannabis."
- 2. Share facts.** Give your children facts, not just a lecture. "Just Say No," and other strategies like it, have shown

to be ineffective and might actually increase the likelihood that a child might experiment with substances. After listening to them, ask if they have any questions and share age-appropriate facts.

- 3. Develop a plan.** Let your kids know what your expectations are. Talk openly about your family rules and values. Let them know how to get help if they are having a hard time meeting these expectations —and how to get back on track.
- 4. Follow up.** Review the resources and information portals with them ([www.cannabisdecoded.org](http://www.cannabisdecoded.org)) so when they have doubts or questions, they can find information for themselves. Remember, you will most likely have this conversation over and over - and it's important to stay informed to share new facts. For example, you can tell them "There's a lot of information about cannabis, and it can be hard to know what is true. If you have any questions, you can always come to me and I'll tell you the truth."

## ADVICE ON HOW TO GET THEM TALKING

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- 1. How to talk with tweens:** Listen and affirm what they already know. For example, if they say that they saw a sign that said cannabis is good for them, you can respond with: *"You're right—there have been a lot of people talking about how cannabis might be used as a medicine. We still have a lot to learn about the effects, though, both positive and negative. What do you think you should do if you aren't sure if something might be good or bad for you?"*
- 2. How to talk with teens:** Ask questions that show you respect them. Don't rush to correct their perspective or manners. It's important now that you offer them new information so they can formulate and share their own conclusions about cannabis. For example, you can ask about the new law: *"What do you think about cannabis being legalized in California? What do you know about the new law?"* Listen to their answer and continue with: *"It seems you already know about the law—that's good."* Continue the conversation by offering additional factual information. *"Basically, there are three ages we should remember: 18, 21, and 25. To buy cannabis, you need to be 18 or over and have a medical prescription. To use, buy, transport, or grow recreational cannabis in California, you have to be at least 21. And although it's legal from 21 onward, did you know that the brain continues to develop until you're 25—and that using cannabis can seriously affect the development of your brain?"*
- 3. How to talk with a young adult:** It's important to recognize that the use of cannabis is legal for adults - but your children should still have the necessary facts to make an informed, adult decision. You can start this conversation by mentioning that you learned something new and interesting, and then give them the opportunity to share their thoughts. For example, you can ask: *"Did you know that the illegal production of cannabis can cause serious damage to the environment? It can poison forest mammals, dry up streams and watersheds, and even contribute to human trafficking and other forms of violence?"*

### Developmental Stages

#### Tweens (10-13 years old):

In this cognitive developmental stage, it's likely that they respond better to a clear, straightforward presentation of facts and your family expectations.

#### Teens (14-17 years old):

In this stage, teens are ready to have conversations that explore pros and cons, use facts to form opinions, and weigh evidence to draw their own conclusions.

#### Young Adults (18-24 years old):

In this developmental stage, young adults are starting to be more aware of the world around them and outside of just themselves. Ethics, personal values, issues of justice, and future consequences are becoming more important to them. Talk to young adults in much the same way that you might talk to a peer about cannabis.

## FACTS YOU CAN SHARE

Below are a series of facts about cannabis that you can share with your kids, depending on their developmental stage.

	TWEENS	TEENS	YOUNG ADULTS
Cannabis affects your brain and your memory. It's a plant that people use to change the way they feel. It can cause difficulty in school and with activities like sports - and it can interfere with how you react to situations and how you experience time and space.	✓	✓	✓
Cannabis can be made into candies or other food items. These are called "edibles." With edibles, it's easy to eat too much, which can make you feel sick, anxious, or afraid.	✓	✓	✓
Edibles have much higher concentrations of THC, the chemical in cannabis that alters the mind. Because edibles take longer to kick in, if you have too many at once, you run a higher risk of serious intoxication or other health consequences.		✓	✓
Doing "dabs" means using cannabis in a highly concentrated, vaporized form. This can have secondary effects like a rapid heartbeat, blackouts, the feeling of something crawling under your skin, loss of consciousness, and psychotic symptoms like paranoia and hallucinations.		✓	✓
Driving under the influence of cannabis hugely increases the risk of getting into an accident. Because cannabis affects your reaction times and coordination, it affects how you drive. Also, you can get a DUI for driving under the influence of cannabis.		✓	✓
Even though you're old enough, you can't consume, smoke, eat, or vape cannabis in public places. Also, landlords can ban the use or possession of cannabis on their properties.			✓
Because it's still illegal federally, it's illegal to transport cannabis across state lines. Don't try to take cannabis on an airplane, even if the plane isn't leaving California.			✓

## WHAT DO I DO IF I FIND OUT THAT MY CHILD IS ALREADY USING CANNABIS?

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**First:** Finding out that your kid is using cannabis can be alarming or upsetting. Remember that you don't have to deal with the behavior on-the-spot or immediately. It can be helpful to take a break first to reduce your stress, consult with a co-parent or trusted friend, and think through what you want to accomplish when you do confront the behavior. This will make it much more likely that you'll have an effective conversation.

Try: "We need to talk about this, but first I need to take some time to (calm down / think about what's important to say / etc.). How about we continue our conversation after school, OK?"

**Second:** Just as your child is growing up into a teenager or a young adult, you're also growing as a parent. You still want to love them, guide them, and take care of them, but how you do it will be different. Now, it's time to be a resource for your kids. It's time to be someone who provides them with information, support, and help in a crisis—not just an enforcer of expectations, rules, and routines.

Try: "What was it about cannabis that made you want to try it?"

**Third:** Without judgment, try to understand why your child wanted to use cannabis. If we understand our kids' needs, we can better help them change their behaviors. Many teens use cannabis to deal with unpleasant feelings or mental health challenges. Try to use this conversation to help your child to learn healthier ways of relieving these feelings—as well as how to think about and talk about what they're going through.

Try: "I get it. I understand what it's like to feel stressed and just want to check out. When I've had a really hard week at work, I just want to zone out for a few hours, eat, and watch TV. Unfortunately, that isn't a very healthy choice. Something I've been practicing lately is taking the dog for a walk when I'm stressed - or listening to music if I can. What are some things that help you?"

## RESOURCES

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For more information on how to talk to your kids, visit [www.cannabisdecoded.org](http://www.cannabisdecoded.org). To get more information about the [Cannabis] Decoded campaign and more fact-based, informative materials about cannabis, visit our website [www.cannabisdecoded.org](http://www.cannabisdecoded.org) and follow us on social media.

For information on substance use treatment services, call the Behavioral Health and Recovery Services Access Line (24/7) at 1-888-818-1115 or visit [www.MarinHHS.org/BHRS](http://www.MarinHHS.org/BHRS) and <http://marinpreventionnetwork.org>.



*Cannabis Decoded is a Youth Marijuana Education Initiative from the County of San Mateo. This initiative was launched in partnership with the San Mateo County Youth Commission to educate youth and young adults about the facts on cannabis use. This campaign aims to provide reliable, factual information so that young people have the tools they need to make informed decisions that impact their health and futures.* [cannabisdecoded.org/about](http://cannabisdecoded.org/about)