

**PARENTS.**  
THE ANTI-DRUG.

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**Keeping Your Teens Drug-Free**  
A Family Guide

Office of National Drug Control Policy | National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign

### **You Matter**

This booklet provides ideas and examples of the skills busy parents can use to keep their teens away from marijuana and other illicit drugs. There are opportunities every day to turn ordinary times like driving your child to school or to the mall, or watching TV together into teachable moments to let your teen know what's important to you. Many parents put off talking to their kids about drugs or alcohol because of time constraints, but just a little of your time once in a while can make a lifetime of difference. Teens who learn about the risks of drug use from their parents or caregivers are less likely to use drugs than those who don't. Parents are the most important influence in their kids' lives. Many parents don't realize that they play a crucial role in their teen's decision not to use drugs. Two-thirds of youth ages 13 to 17 say losing their parents' respect and pride is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs.

### **Teens, Marijuana and Other Drugs**

While no one wants to think negatively about their children, it's likely your teen will be exposed to illicit drugs. Nearly a third of 12- to 17-year-olds in the U.S. have used an illicit drug in their lifetime. Teens today are using drugs at younger and younger ages, when their brains and bodies are still developing. Of all of the illicit drugs, marijuana is the most widely used. If your child is exposed to drugs, he or she will most likely be offered marijuana.

### **Marijuana Causes Problems**

- Some frequent, long-term marijuana users show signs of a lack of motivation (amotivational syndrome). Their problems include not caring about what happens in their lives and a lack of concern about how they look. As a result of these symptoms, some users tend to perform poorly in school or at work.
- Heavy or daily use of marijuana affects the parts of the brain that control memory, attention and learning, and can make it more difficult to learn and perform tasks that call for more than one or two steps.



### **Calling on Your Community**

You and your family are not alone. You can call on your neighbors to join forces with you. Many parents have organized networking groups in their neighborhoods for talking about how to handle problems. Other parents organize alcohol- and drug-free neighborhood events and parties. Your teen's school has people who can help — guidance counselors, teachers, coaches and other adults. Many parents also find help in their faith communities, and many belong to other community groups. When parents and teens take the time to talk to each other, their lives can be healthier and more enjoyable, and in the process, you'll be doing your part in helping your teens to grow up drug-free.



### **Your Child Says, "Everyone Is Doing It."**

You say, "I'm not interested in what other kids are doing. I know I don't want you using marijuana or other drugs."

### **Your Teen's Friend or Parent Tried Drugs**

You can say, "I don't want you hanging out with kids who smoke marijuana or drink alcohol. You know that when you're around people who use drugs, I'm afraid they'll try to pressure you to use drugs."

### **If Your Teen Asks, "Did You Ever Do Drugs?"**

It's important to be honest, but you don't need to include too many details. If you did use drugs, you can say, "When I was young I smoked marijuana because some of my friends did. I thought I needed to in order to fit in. If I'd known then about the consequences, I never would have tried marijuana, and I'll do everything I can to help keep you away from it."

If you suspect your teen is using drugs, take action. Ask your child directly. Let your teen know you want him or her to be honest with you. If you need help, contact your child's school counselor, pediatrician or family physician or call the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 1-800-788-2800 for drug abuse prevention information and a listing of the treatment centers closest to you. You may also visit the Web site at [www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov). For more parenting information, go to [www.TheAntiDrug.com](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com).



- Smoking marijuana causes some changes in the brain that are like those caused by cocaine, heroin and alcohol. Scientists are still learning about the many ways that marijuana can affect the brain.
- One joint can deliver four times as much cancer-causing tar as one tobacco cigarette.
- In a study conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, a moderate dose of marijuana alone was shown to impair driving performance; the effects of a low dose of marijuana combined with alcohol were markedly greater than for either substance alone.
- While not everyone who uses marijuana becomes addicted, when a user begins to seek out and take the drug compulsively, that person is said to be dependent on the drug or addicted to it. In 2002, more than 280,000 people entering drug treatment programs reported marijuana as their primary drug of abuse, showing they needed help to stop using the drug. Some heavy users of marijuana show signs of withdrawal when they stop using the drug. They develop symptoms such as restlessness, loss of appetite, trouble sleeping, weight loss and shaky hands.
- The marijuana that teens use today has more than twice the concentration of THC, the chemical that affects the brain, than the marijuana of 20 years ago.
- Young people who use marijuana weekly have double the risk of depression later in life, and teens who smoke marijuana weekly are three times more likely than non-users to have suicidal thoughts. Marijuana use in some teens has been linked to increased risk for schizophrenia in later years.

### **Other Substances**

- Underage drinking can cause many problems for young bodies and brains. Alcohol use during the teen years can interfere with important developmental processes and can cause problems with thinking and learning.
- MDMA (ecstasy, XTC, X, Adam, hug, beans, love drug) is a drug that creates feelings of emotional warmth, mental stimulation, enhanced sensory perception and increased physical energy. MDMA can be dangerous to health, however, and on rare occasions, lethal. People who abuse MDMA can experience increases in heart rate and blood pressure and other

symptoms such as muscle tension, involuntary teeth-clenching, nausea, blurred vision, faintness and chills or sweating. In high doses, MDMA can interfere with the body's ability to regulate temperature. This can lead to a sharp increase in body temperature (hyperthermia), resulting in liver, kidney and cardiovascular system failure.

- Methamphetamine (meth, speed, chalk, ice, crystal, glass) is a very toxic stimulant associated with serious health conditions, including potential heart and neurological damage, psychotic behavior, memory loss and aggression. It also contributes to increased transmission of infectious diseases, especially hepatitis and HIV/AIDS.
- Dangerous substances abused by children and teens may be found in the home. These toxic substances are collectively referred to as inhalants — breathable chemical vapors that produce mind-altering effects. A variety of common products contain substances that can be inhaled. Many people do not know or understand that products such as spray paints, nail polish remover, hair spray, glues and cleaning fluids present any risk of abuse, because their intoxicating effects are so totally unconnected to their intended uses. Yet, young children and adolescents are among those most likely to abuse them, and do seek them out for this purpose. Chronic use can lead to brain or nerve damage, damage to the heart, lungs, liver and kidneys. Inhalants can cause death, even the very first time they are used.
- Prescription and over-the-counter drugs misused by teens today include pain killers and cold medicines with dextromethorphan (DXM). Misusing these medications can cause respiratory distress, cardiac stress, seizures, dependence and serious withdrawal symptoms. Misuse of DXM can cause nausea, vomiting, seizures, hallucinations and even death.
- Anabolic (muscle-building) steroid abuse is associated with increased risk for heart attacks, strokes and severe liver problems. People who inject anabolic steroids put themselves at risk for contracting dangerous infections, such as HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B and C and bacterial endocarditis. Anabolic steroids can also cause undesirable body changes. Men may develop enlarged breasts, and women's bodies may become masculinized. Both sexes can develop acne and hair loss.



### Catching Your Child With Drugs

If you've caught your child using drugs or "holding" them for a friend, wait until you are calm to talk to your teen. Then tell your teen it's okay to be honest with you, that you want to know the truth. The following phrases can get good communication going:

*"I'm really disappointed. You know I don't approve of drug use.  
I don't approve of your using marijuana, alcohol or other drugs."*

### Your Child Admits to Having Tried Drugs

The idea is to reinforce the rules about marijuana and other drug use while keeping the lines of communication open.

*"I'm glad you told me, but let me remind you that drugs get in the way  
of your being healthy and happy. You can lose your driver's license. You can get  
kicked off the team. You can fail at school."*

If your child has admitted to using drugs recently, you might want to ask your doctor or counselor for help.



### **Stay Involved in Your Teen's Life**

Experts say that to create an environment that helps keep your kids away from marijuana and other drugs, you should:

- Get involved in your kids' lives.
- Know what your children are doing — their activities and how they spend their time.
- Know who your teen's friends are.
- Check in with the parents who are hosting the party your teen will be attending.
- Praise and reward good behavior.

Research shows that kids who are not regularly monitored by their parents are four times more likely to use drugs. Before going out, have them tell you WHO they are going to be spending time with, WHAT they will be doing, WHEN or what time they will be at their expected destination and finally, exactly WHERE they are going to be. Every once in a while, check on your teens to see if they're where they said they would be. It's not pestering, it's parenting.

Lots of teens get in trouble with marijuana, other illicit drugs, or alcohol right after school, from 3 to 6 p.m. Try to be with your teens then, but if you can't, make sure your child is doing something positive with a trusted adult around: sports, jobs, clubs, after-school programs or faith-based groups. If your teens have to be at home, make sure they are doing homework or chores and not hanging out unsupervised with friends. Remember how important you are in keeping your teens away from marijuana and other drugs.

### **Signs and Symptoms of Drug Use**

It's not always easy to tell when teens are using drugs, because many signs or symptoms are common for youth this age. While there is no single warning sign for drug or alcohol use, some signs to look for include:

- Skipping classes or not doing well in school
- Unusual odors on their clothes or in their room
- Hostility or lack of cooperation
- Physical changes (red eyes, runny nose)
- Borrowing money often, or suddenly having extra cash
- Lack of interest in activities
- Significant mood changes
- Loss of interest in personal appearance
- Change in friends
- Heightened secrecy about actions or possessions



### **Tell Your Teen What You Expect**

It's important that your teen knows what you expect. Make it clear that you do not want any marijuana or any illicit drug use in your house. Tell your teen that there will be consequences for using drugs. As your teen enters middle school and then high school, your child will be at greater risk of using marijuana and alcohol if you have not made your expectations clear. Teens need to know where you stand. Here are some clear ways you can tell your teens what you expect:

*"I've been thinking lately that I've never actually told you this:  
I don't want you using marijuana, alcohol, tobacco or any drug."*

*"The rule in our house is that nobody uses drugs."*

### **Set Rules**

Even though your teens are getting older and spending more time without you, it's more important than ever to set rules and expectations. Setting a firm rule of no marijuana or other drug use will help your teen resist pressures to use drugs.

### **When Your Teen Breaks the Rules**

Parents need to enforce rules consistently and fairly. When rules are broken, some possible consequences could include: restricting Internet use and television, suspending outside activities, such as going to the mall or movies, or disallowing telephone calls.

### **Risky Situations**

Let your teens know that you do not want them in risky situations. Tell them:

*"I don't want you riding in a car with a driver who's been using marijuana or who's been drinking."*

*"It's my job as a parent to keep you safe, so I'm going to ask you questions  
about who you're with and what you are doing."*

### **Giving Advice on Avoiding Risky Situations**

Here are some lines you can give your teens to help them stay away from risky situations:

*"I like you, but I don't like drugs."*

*"My dad (or mom, grandmother, etc.) would ground me if he (or she)  
knew I was around marijuana."*

*"No, thanks. It's not for me."*

*"I don't do drugs. I could get kicked off the team if anyone found out."*

### **Beware of Messages That Encourage Drug Use**

Many parents are concerned about messages on television, in movies and music that encourage or trivialize drug use and that fail to show the harm of using drugs. You can set rules about what your teens watch on television, in the movies they see or the songs they listen to. If you have a computer at home connected to the Internet, you should let your children know that you are in charge of their time online. Teens cannot only find Web sites that promote drugs, but they can actually buy drugs over the Internet.

