

Jodi Dworkin, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Family Social Science and University of Minnesota Extension

What is my teenager going to encounter?

Second to alcohol, marijuana is the most commonly used drug. Marijuana, also called pot, reefer, grass, weed, dope, ganja, mary jane, and sinsemilla, looks like dried parsley with stems and/or seeds. It can be smoked or eaten. Paraphernalia includes rolling papers and pipes. Pot increases the heart rate, causes bloodshot eyes, dry mouth and throat, increases the appetite, reduces short term memory, alters one's sense of time, and reduces one's concentration, coordination, and motivation.

My child would never try pot!

Many parents are unaware of what their child is doing. Recent studies show that over 40 percent of teens have tried pot, even though only 18 percent of parents think it is possible their child might have tried it. Sixty-two percent of teens say they have friends who use pot, even though only 21 percent of parents think their son or daughter might have friends who smoke pot. Although one-third of parents believe their teen thinks pot is harmful, less than 20 percent of teens actually do.

Why would my child want to try it?

Teenagers use substances for the same reasons as adults do, to relieve stress, relax, have fun, because everybody else is doing it, and because being high often feels good. Teens often say, "I would like to try pot just once to see what it is like," "Everyone tries drugs sometimes," and "Smoking marijuana is okay sometimes." Teens are most likely to smoke pot on the weekends, with friends, and at parties.



But it's illegal...

Even though drugs are illegal, about 40 percent of 8th graders and 70 percent of 10th graders say pot is fairly easy or very easy to find. While use of most drugs among teens has decreased slightly, it is still a problem.

What can I do to help my teen?

Recognize that your child is being exposed to drugs. Five times as many parents believe child drug use is a national problem than believe drug use is a problem in their child's school. Drug use is lower among kids who learn about the risks at home. The number one risk kids associate with drug use is "My parents would feel really bad if they found out I was using drugs."

Tips for talking with your teenager about drugs:

- Establish a clear family position on drug use.
- Be prepared; teens may have a lot of incorrect information they got from other kids and from the media.
- It is okay to say you don't know, but be sure to find the answer.
- Listen carefully to her concerns and feelings, and respect her views.

- Let him know it is okay to act independently from the group.
- Be aware of how you use and talk about drugs in front of your kids. Kids learn by watching you.
- Discuss the difference between prescription and illegal drugs.
- If you suspect a severe problem, seek outside help.

“Just say no” isn’t good enough!

Telling your teenager to just say no isn’t going to be enough to prevent him from trying pot at a party when all his friends are getting high. Practice how to say no in different situations with your teen. Give your teenager options for saying no and let him choose which he feels the most comfortable using.

Alternatives to “just say no:”

- It is okay to say, “I just don’t want to.”
- Suggest another activity like basketball, shopping, eating, or change the subject.
- It is okay to avoid situations where there might be drugs or to hang out with friends who don’t use drugs.
- Encourage your child to use you as an excuse. Tell them it is okay to say things like “My mom won’t let me go” or “My dad would kill me if he ever caught me smoking pot.”
- It is okay to be at a party and not try pot, even if it seems like everybody else is doing it.

How can I tell if my teen has a problem?

Here are some of the warning signs:

- Getting high on a regular basis or avoiding others to get high.
- Lying.
- Giving up activities they used to enjoy such as sports or hanging out with friends.
- Wearing clothes with drugs pictured on them or reading magazines on drugs.
- Getting into trouble with the law.

Adapted from University of Illinois Extension fact sheets written by the author.

- Feeling run-down, depressed, or suicidal.
- Missing school, poor school performance, or suspension from school for a drug-related incident.

Where to go for help:

If you suspect your teen has a problem with drugs, you can contact your physician, school counselor, an independent drug counselor, or the resources listed below to get help for your teen and your family.

Where you can go for more information:

Families with Teens – University of Minnesota Extension
www.extension.umn.edu/familieswithteens/

Children, Youth & Family Consortium – University of Minnesota
www.cyfc.umn.edu

The Facts About Marijuana
www.marijuana-info.org

Marijuana Anonymous
www.marijuana-anonymous.org or 1-800-766-6779

National Institute on Drug Abuse
www.nida.nih.gov

Partnerships for a Drug-Free America
www.drugfree.org

You may also want to look at:

Schaefer, C. E., & DiGeronimo, T. F. (1999). *How to talk to teens about really important things: Specific questions and answers and useful things to say*. San Francisco: Wiley.

Steinberg, L. (2011). *You and your adolescent: The essential guide for ages 10-25*. New York: Simon and Schuster.