

## HANDOUT FOR PARENTS ON CANNABIS:

These are very challenging times to be raising a child, in light of increasing legalization of cannabis and its rapidly increasing potency. Our children/teens/young adult children perceive it as being “natural,” “medicine,” “not harmful.”

Q: Should I be concerned?

A: Yes. THC is the part of cannabis that gets you “high.” The potency of THC in cannabis in the 1980’s was 2-3%. It’s currently 20%. Wax/Shatter/Dabs are THC extracts that are 85-90% pure and referred to as the crack cocaine of cannabis.

Q: What’s the effect of cannabis on the developing teenage brain?

A: Regular use in teenage years impairs learning, interferes with attention, memory, processing speed. Studies have shown a potential drop in IQ of up to 8 points, which are irretrievable with abstinence. Also associated with regular teen cannabis use is failure to complete school, increased unemployment, lower life satisfaction.

Q: What’s the effect of cannabis on mental health?

A: There’s an increased risk of psychosis among regular cannabis users, worse if started under 21 y/o, greatest among individuals who are genetically predisposed (family history of psychosis, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder). This psychosis may be permanent. Regular teen cannabis use makes ADHD symptoms up to 25 times worse, since it worsens executive functioning and decreases activity in the pre-frontal cortex.

Some studies show that regular teen cannabis use increases anxiety and depression and suicidality.

Q: What if my child only smokes marijuana socially?...only once or twice a week?

A: The U.S. Surgeon General states that, “THERE IS NO AMOUNT OF MARIJUANA THAT IS SAFE FOR THE TEENAGE BRAIN.”

Q: How and when do I talk to my child/teen about marijuana?

A: Begin the conversation before the age of 11 or 12. Open ended questions, like “has anyone offered you drugs/marijuana?” and “do you know anyone who uses drugs?” Be curious.

Q: How can I prevent my child from developing a Cannabis Use Disorder or other substance use disorder?

A: Share with your child/teen/young adult CLEAR PARENTAL EXPECTATION OF NON-USE...your opinion greatly matters to your children and you have a huge amount of leverage and influence...it is your responsibility to use it in order to protect their developing brain.

TREAT UNDERLYING ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, CONDUCT DISORDER/SELF CONTROL ISSUES.

TREAT ADHD WITH STIMULANTS AND BEGIN BEFORE THE AGE OF 9 AND FOR 6 YEARS OR LONGER.

CHILDREN WITH STRONG BONDS WITH PARENTS/SCHOOL/CHURCH LESS LIKELY TO DEVELOP ADDICTIONS.

IF YOU, AS THE PARENT, HAVE A SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER, GET TREATMENT FOR YOURSELF...do not use cannabis...this undermines your credibility with your children. Same if you have a drinking problem.

CLOSE PARENTAL MONITORING is effective.

Q: How do I know my child has a Cannabis Use Disorder?

A: He exhibits at least 2 of the following symptoms: personality change, deteriorating school performance, increasing irritability/aggression/defiance, giving up hobbies he used to enjoy, using more frequently, unable to stop despite consequences, increasing anxiety/depression, experiencing drug craving.

Q: How do I approach him if he's diagnosed with a Cannabis Use Disorder?

A: With an open-mind, compassion, curiosity.

“What does it do for you?”

“What would life feel like if you tried to stop? How hard would this be?”

Relay your concern:

“I'm worried about you.”

“I know that cannabis hurts the developing brain and it's harmful to teenagers.”

“How can we help you find other ways to deal with difficult feelings/stress and have fun without using?”

BE CLEAR: “I love you too much to do nothing and enable you to continue to hurt your brain with drugs.”

“We need to get some help and I'll stand by you every step of the way...we'll deal with this together...”

Q: How do we treat Cannabis Use Disorder?

A: There are medications that maybe helpful for Cannabis Withdrawal, which involves insomnia, irritability, anxiety, and drug craving.

The best form of therapy is Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) with Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET), PLUS Contingency Management (CM). A trained expert does the CBT and MET, and you are directly involved in the CM, which involves rewarding your teen with incentive vouchers to reward decreasing urine drug levels or abstinence.

It's very helpful if you can attend Naranon/Alanon meetings and individual counselling with an addiction family expert, for parental support surrounding boundary setting and dealing with the pain of having a child with an addiction problem.

CBT with a trained addiction expert will help him learn how to cope with cravings and feelings, stress management, drug refusal skills, non-drug ways to have fun.

Where can parents go to get help/support and coaching?

[www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org) offers the following:

Whether you are a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling or other caregiver — their helpline is here for you and anyone else playing a supportive role in the life of someone struggling with substance use.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach and each family is unique. Their specialists will

propose a personalized course of action, offering the best tools and resources to help you help your child, yourself and your family.

<https://drugfree.org/article/get-one-on-one-help/>

This page provides information on how someone can connect via text: Text CONNECT to 55753 to contact a specialist; email and the link to schedule a call.

<https://www.facebook.com/help/CrisisSupport>

They can also be found as an option via facebook messenger.

#### PARENT COACHING

<https://drugfree.org/article/parent-coaching/>

Here is information regarding their parent coaching service... it includes a video about the service. If someone is interested they begin by connecting with a helpline specialist via phone.

#### PARENT SUPPORT ZOOM GROUPS

Specially trained peer parent coaches host these free, live online meetings to teach evidence-based skills and techniques and provide support for helping teen and adult children. <https://helphope.net/3gaFQ1P>

#### THEIR HISTORY

<https://drugfree.org/article/our-history/>

If you want to learn about their mission and how they came to be

Also, Hazelden-Betty Ford offers a FREE, virtual family program (one day format where they talk about the disease model, boundaries/communication, recovery management...in both English and Spanish).

Hazelden-Betty Ford also offers Professional Coaching ongoing sessions for cost (6 sessions, 3 months, 12 months).