

Cannabis Conversation Guide

HOW TO TALK WITH YOUR TEEN ABOUT WEED

BE READY WITH ANSWERS FOR ALL THE HARD QUESTIONS—OR COMEBACKS—THAT GET THROWN YOUR WAY

"But it's natural."

"That doesn't mean it's safe for you right now. Even though it's from a plant, cannabis contains the chemical THC. Because your brain is growing, the effects of THC are stronger and can impact how your brain functions, even causing long-term damage.¹

"There are worse things I could be doing, like tobacco or other drugs."

"Every substance is harmful in different ways, and using cannabis underage can come with risks. While your brain is growing, it's making new connections. Many substances, including weed, can interrupt that growth process and cause harm.¹

"I heard it's good for mental health."

"Science is always evolving, and today we know a lot more about how weed affects kids. When you're a teen and growing, THC can throw your body's natural chemical production out of balance, making feelings of stress and anxiety worse instead of better.²

"If it's so bad, why is it legal?"

"Good question. Cannabis is only legal for adults over 21. Your brain doesn't finish growing until you're in your mid-20s. If you use weed before then, THC can harm your hippocampus, cerebellum, and amygdala—putting your memory, attention span, coordination, and mental health at risk.¹

"But so many successful people use it."

"That's a good point, but everyone is different, and what you see on social media isn't always the full picture. Avoiding underage cannabis use is the best way to let your brain grow to its full potential.¹

"Didn't you use weed when you were young?"

"I did, but back then we didn't know it could harm teen brains, and weed wasn't as strong. Cannabis today contains much higher amounts of THC than even 10 years ago. Any amount of THC is harmful to your brain, but the higher concentrations in modern weed come with big impacts too.^{3,4}

TIPS TO KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING



Start early

Normalize talking about cannabis before kids consider experimenting. It could be as young as 10 years old or when they first start asking questions.



Stick to the facts

Exaggerations may result in eye rolls. Base your conversation on science, like how underage use can impact brain growth and mental health.



Keep it two-way

Instead of talking at teens, talk with them. Actively listening to their thoughts without judgment and encouraging questions helps show that you care.



Keep it casual

Family meetings and lectures can be intimidating for kids. Find casual moments, like in the car or on the way to school, to chat about cannabis.

DON'T SAY:

"Sit down. We need to talk."
"Because I said so."
"Everyone gets stressed, just deal with it."

DO SAY:

"Got a minute? I want to know what you think."
"Because I want the best for you and science is starting to show risks for teens that use."
"I care about your mental health and weed may actually make stress harder to handle."

A simple conversation can help your teen make informed decisions about weed. Talk with kids about the risks of underage cannabis use.

1. Office of the Surgeon General. (2019). U.S. Surgeon General's advisory: Marijuana use and the developing brain. <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/addiction-and-substance-misuse/advisory-on-marijuana-use-and-developing-brain/index.html>
2. Ramikie, T. S., Rita Nyilas, R., Rebecca J Bluett, R. J., Joyonna C Gamble-George, J. C., Hartley, N. D., Mackie, K., Watanabe, M., Katona, I., & Patel, S. (2014). Multiple mechanistically distinct modes of endocannabinoid mobilization at central amygdala glutamatergic synapses. *Neuron*, 81(5), 1111–1125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2014.01.012>
3. ElSohly, M. A., Mehmedic, Z., Foster, S., Gon, C., Chandra, S., & Church, J. C. (2016). Changes in cannabis potency over the last 2 decades (1995–2014): Analysis of current data in the United States. *Biological Psychiatry*, 79(7), 613–619. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsych.2016.01.004>
4. Chandra, S., Radwan, M. M., Majumdar, C. G., Church, J. C., Freeman, T. P., & ElSohly, M. A. (2019). New trends in cannabis potency in USA and Europe during the last decade (2008–2017). *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, 269(1), 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00406-019-00983-5>