



Conversation Guide

Section 1

Your Role

It's medicinal

It helps
with stress

IT CAUSES
ANXIETY

IT FRIES YOUR
BRAIN



If you're not talking with your teen about cannabis, they might be getting mixed messages

Teens are getting all kinds of mixed messages about cannabis—from friends, social media, and beyond. It can be hard for them to sort out what's real. That's where you come in. The truth is, when teens use cannabis, it can interfere with how their brain develops. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the active chemical in cannabis, affects the system that manages memory, focus, stress, and more.

You have an important role to play in preventing teen cannabis use

Being there for the youth in your life—and giving them real, science-based facts about cannabis—is the first step in helping them make more informed choices about using cannabis.

It might be hard to believe at times, but you are the number one influence on a child's behavior. Research shows that kids are less likely to try cannabis and illegal drugs when adults talk with them about the risks and harms of early use.^{1,2,3}

Section 2

Talk Guide

What's the best way to talk about cannabis?

No matter how awkward the talk may be, teens really are listening



Use these tips to start the conversation:



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 casual: Formal 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.



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.



Clear up the myths: Teens hear stuff like “everyone smokes cannabis” or “it’s natural, so it’s safe.” Help them sort fact from fiction without sounding preachy—just lay out the truth.



Stay calm: If you think they’re using, take a breath. Impulsive or dramatic reactions can backfire. Try to understand what’s going on for them, and talk through it. Offer healthier alternatives for coping with stress or pressure, and give real reasons why stopping might be worth it.



Help them say no: Practice ways to pass, like “I’m good, I don’t use cannabis” or “Not tonight, I’ve got a game.” Make sure they know it’s okay to say no and that you’ve got their back.

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 who use.”

“I care about your mental health, and cannabis may actually make stress harder to handle.”

Be ready with answers to all the hard questions—or comebacks—that may 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.”⁴

“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 cannabis, can interrupt that growth process and cause harm.”⁴

“I heard it’s good for mental health.”

“Science is always evolving, and today we know a lot more about how cannabis 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 in some states for adults over 21. Your brain doesn’t finish growing until you’re in your 20s. If you use cannabis before then, THC can harm your hippocampus, cerebellum, and amygdala—putting your memory, attention span, coordination, and mental health at risk.”⁴

“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.”⁴

“Didn’t you use cannabis when you were young?”

“I did, but back then we didn’t know it could harm teen brains, and cannabis 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 cannabis come with big impacts too.”^{5,6}

Section 3

Resources

Where can you get more information?

Use these helpful links to learn even more about underage cannabis use

- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**
Provides information on the risks of cannabis use - samhsa.gov/marijuana
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
Provides data, information, and FAQs on cannabis - cdc.gov/cannabis/about
- **Local Resources**
RecoveryNetworkOfOregon.org
LinesForLife.org

Sources

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5. 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>
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