

Teens, Marijuana & Mental Health When to Act

A practical guide for recognizing risk, responding early, and navigating next steps with clarity.

This checklist is designed to help parents and caregivers better understand the realities of today's marijuana use among adolescents—and how to recognize when something may require more attention. It reflects key insights from our conversation with John Lieberman and is intended as a practical guide for navigating uncertainty with clarity and care.

Know What is Different Today

- Today's cannabis is far higher potency (often 20–90% THC) than prior generations
- Vaping and concentrates increase speed, intensity, and psychosis risk
- Teen brains are still developing until about age 25, making them more vulnerable to mental health effects

Normalization does not equal safety.

Independent Guidance for Complex Situations

Watch for Warning Signs You Should Not Ignore

- Sudden paranoia, extreme anxiety, or irrational fears
- Hearing voices, seeing things, or intense suspiciousness
- Drastic personality or mood changes
- Withdrawal from friends, family, or activities
- Declining grades or school refusal
- Disrupted sleep patterns
- Increased secrecy paired with defensiveness
- Statements like:
 - "Something feels wrong in my head"
 - "I don't feel like myself anymore"

These symptoms may signal cannabis-induced psychosis or emerging mental health concerns, especially in adolescents.

Understand Mental Health Risks of Early Marijuana Use

- Teens who use marijuana have a significantly higher risk of psychosis and mood disorders
- Adolescent cannabis use has been linked to increased risk of psychotic and bipolar disorders
- Continued use after early symptoms can worsen long-term outcomes

Many teens improve with early intervention and abstinence—but delay increases risk.

Know When to Seek Help

Seek a comprehensive assessment if:

- There are hallucinations, delusions, or paranoia
- Substance use continues despite consequences
- Mental health symptoms are escalating or impairing daily life
- There is a family history of bipolar disorder or schizophrenia
- Safety concerns exist (self-harm or suicidal thoughts)

Outpatient Therapy May Be Appropriate if:

- Symptoms are mild and improving
- No psychosis is present
- Teen remains engaged in school and relationships
- Parents can provide structure, monitoring, and follow-through

Assessment provides clarity—not labels. In more complex situations, independent guidance can help determine the appropriate level of care and next steps.

How to Talk to Your Teen Without Shame

Say:

- “I’m not here to punish—I want to understand.”
- “Something seems off, and I care about you.”
- “We’ll figure this out together.”
- “You’re supported.”

Avoid:

- Lecturing or interrogating
- Labels (“addict,” “lazy”)
- Minimizing feelings
- Threats before understanding

Shame increases secrecy; curiosity increases honesty

Remember: Healing Is a Family Process

- Teen struggles often reflect broader system stress
- Family involvement improves outcomes
- Parents don't need to fix everything—just stay engaged
- Calm, consistent leadership builds safety

Family-centered treatment is associated with stronger and longer-lasting recovery

Hold Onto Hope

- Many teens recover fully with timely help
- Early intervention can change life trajectories
- Asking for help early is an act of strength
- You are not alone

“When it comes to teen mental health and substance use, early clarity is far kinder than late crisis.”

If you're unsure what to do next, Feinberg Consulting provides independent guidance to help families and professionals determine appropriate care and move forward with clarity.