

# Negative Effects of Marijuana

## What's the Big Deal About Marijuana?

"But it's only marijuana" or "it's only alcohol," you say. "It's a rite of passage." "Teens are expected to experiment." Not any more. The world has changed, and so have the drugs. In fact, the marijuana of today is stronger than ever before. Drug and alcohol use can lead to many negative consequences, including bad grades, broken friendships, family problems, trouble with the law, etc.



Most important, teens' brains and bodies are still developing, and substance use can interfere with their emerging independence and efforts to establish their own identity. Drug and alcohol use can change the direction of a young person's life – physically, emotionally, and behaviorally. It can weaken the ability to concentrate and retain information during a teen's peak learning years, and impair judgment leading to risky decision making that could involve sex or getting into a car with someone under the influence of drugs. "Experimentation," even with marijuana, can also lead to addiction. Not everyone progresses from use to abuse to addiction, but it is a dangerous road and there is no way to know who will become addicted and who won't.

## Scientific Research About Risks of "Experimentation"

Drug and alcohol abuse by teens is not something to be taken lightly.

- More teens are in treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than for all other illegal drugs combined.<sup>1</sup>

- Research also shows that many adolescents start to drink at very young ages. In 2003, the average age of first use of alcohol was about 14, compared to about 17 1/2 in 1965.<sup>2</sup>
- A 1998 study by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism says if a 15-year-old starts to drink, he or she has a 40% chance of alcoholism or dependence as an adult.<sup>3</sup>
- Kids are using marijuana at an earlier age. In the late 1960s fewer than half of those using marijuana for the first time were under 18. In 2006, about 64 percent of marijuana users were younger than 18.<sup>4</sup>
- Marijuana affects alertness, concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time, many of the skills required for safe driving and other tasks. These effects can last up to 24 hours after smoking marijuana. Marijuana use can also make it difficult to judge distances and react to signals and sounds on the road.<sup>5</sup>
- Smoking marijuana leads to changes in the brain that are similar to those caused by cocaine, heroin, or alcohol.<sup>6</sup>

## Parents Are the Most Important Influence in a Child's Life

There is a growing body of research that shows that parents are central to preventing adolescent substance abuse. In fact, kids themselves say that losing their parents' trust and respect are the most important reasons not to use drugs.



As a parent, your actions do matter. When you suspect, or know, that your child has used drugs, take action to stop it as soon as you can. It may be the most important step you ever take.

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1. *TEDS, SAMHSA, October 2001*
  2. *Newes-Adeyi, G.; Chen, C.M.; Williams, G.D.; and Faden, V.B. NIAAA Surveillance Report No. 74: Trends in Underage Drinking in the United States, 1991–2003. Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2005.*
  3. *Grant, B.F., and Dawson, D.A. Age of onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM–IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. Journal of Substance Abuse 9:103–110, 1997.*
  4. *Trends in Initiation of Substance Use. Based on the 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. SAMHSA, 2006.*
  5. *Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know, Revised, NIDA, November 1998*
  6. *Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know, Revised, NIDA, November 1998*

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