



St. Lawrence County Public Health Department

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Press Release

Date: 7/7/23
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Marijuana Use and the Developing Brain

Marijuana use is increasingly viewed as harmless, due to its growing acceptance. However, research shows the brain is still developing until about age 25. This means using cannabis before the age of 25 can change the way the brain develops, making it especially harmful to teens and young adults. The negative effects of teen marijuana use can include difficulty thinking and problem-solving, problems with memory, learning, reduced coordination, difficulty maintaining attention, as well as problems with school and social life. Many people assume cannabis use provides short-term relief from anxiety, but in the long run studies have linked marijuana use to various mental health problems including depression and anxiety. Additionally, people who use marijuana, especially those who start at an early age, are more likely to develop temporary psychosis (not knowing what is real, paranoia, and hallucinations) along with long-lasting mental disorders such as schizophrenia. It is estimated that approximately 3 in 10 people who use marijuana have marijuana use disorder. Some signs and symptoms of marijuana use disorder include trying but failing to quit using marijuana or giving up important activities with friends and family in favor of using marijuana. The risk of developing a marijuana addiction is higher in people who start using marijuana during adolescence.

Tips for Talking to the Young Adults in Your Life

- Start the conversation early (whenever they first start asking questions) and before they consider using.
- Plan to have more than one conversation- many short talks work best. Keep the conversation casual instead of having a formal family meeting.
- Look for natural ways to bring up the subject, such as driving past the dispensary or seeing a reference to cannabis on TV.
- Focus on the facts and how cannabis can influence the developing brain.
- Talk with your children about having an “exit plan” if they’re offered cannabis. Peer pressure can be powerful and having a plan to avoid it can help them make healthier choices. Talk with your children about what they would do if faced with a decision about using drugs or alcohol, such as texting a code word to a family member.
- Be aware of your own attitudes and behaviors, embrace the fact that this conversation may feel awkward for both of you. Remember they are more likely to use cannabis if you do. Set your expectations and communicate them clearly.

- Encourage questions, be non-judgemental, and listen to them.
- Keep calm and let them know you are there for them. Make sure they know they can always come to you, or another trusted person if they're in need of an adult.

What to do if Your Child is Using Cannabis

- Stay calm - overreacting may lead youth to rebel, feel resentful, or take greater risks.
- Talk about your concerns and give the facts and positive reasons for wanting them to stop using cannabis with a focus on the impact cannabis can have on the developing brain.
- If they have their driver's and/or boating license, remind them not to use cannabis and drive/boat. Cannabis slows your reaction time and motor coordination and it can be incredibly dangerous to drive under the influence. It is illegal and they could get a DUI/DWAI/BUI/BWAI and get in legal trouble.

For further information:

[MARIJUANA USE AND TEENS \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/parenting/parenting-101/marijuana-use-and-teens)

[what-parents-mentors-and-trusted-adults-need-to-know-about-cannabis-fact-sheet.pdf \(ny.gov\)](https://www.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2018/08/16/what-parents-mentors-and-trusted-adults-need-to-know-about-cannabis-fact-sheet.pdf)

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