

Adolescents and Marijuana

As young people enter middle school/junior high, their perception that marijuana is harmful drops dramatically. At the same time, marijuana's availability increases. Parents need to be particularly concerned because young people are using marijuana at much earlier ages. The younger the user, the greater the risk of physical and psychological damage.

MARIJUANA CAN AFFECT THINKING

Marijuana can affect short-term memory and the brain's ability to understand and store information. Heavy or daily use of marijuana can make it harder to pay attention, learn, and remember.

MARIJUANA CAN AFFECT JUDGMENT

Young people who are "high" on marijuana are more likely to be involved in car wrecks, become victims of violence, or be exposed to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

MARIJUANA CAN DAMAGE HEALTH

Those who use marijuana regularly may have the same respiratory problems that tobacco smokers have—coughing, wheezing, chronic bronchitis, and chest colds. Long-term use can damage lung tissue.

MARIJUANA SLOWS COORDINATION AND REACTION TIME

This effect can last four to six hours after smoking, making marijuana users dangerous drivers.

MARIJUANA CAN AFFECT REPRODUCTION

THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, affects hormonal systems and can impair sexual and reproductive abilities. In males, it can delay the onset of puberty and lower sperm count. In females, it can disrupt the menstrual cycle and prevent ovulation.

MARIJUANA USE IS ILLEGAL

Young people who use, buy, hold, or sell marijuana can be arrested, suspended, or expelled from school. Adults can be jailed.

As a parent of an adolescent, you can play a major role in preventing him or her from using drugs, but the time to begin is now.