



Mixed Messages About Marijuana

Summary

Why Mixed Messages About Marijuana?

Children/Teens receive numerous mixed messages about marijuana consumption and its place in their lives and in their communities. They may see marijuana used in movies, referenced in songs, and normalized on Youtube. They may encounter adults using marijuana at events or concerts. These outside messages, though they have an impact, are not as critical as the messages that you and your immediate family and friends send to your child/teen through your actions about marijuana.

Step 1. Get Your Child/Teen Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- *“What have you noticed about our family’s decisions about marijuana?”*
- *“What are some things you have learned about how marijuana affects your body?”*
- *“What are some things your friends say about marijuana?”*

Tip Your child/teen may have different impressions about your attitudes and values toward marijuana based on what they’ve observed. Listen carefully to their understanding of the role of marijuana in your family’s life and how they perceive your values. Their impressions may surprise you!

Trap Don’t get caught up in feeling defensive about your own practices. Keep focused on the fact that your child/teen is just at the start of understanding marijuana. It’s a brand new chance to offer essential guidance. Focus on the impacts you can have today and in the future.

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Learn together! Though your child/teen has likely heard of marijuana, you may or may not have had a specific conversation about the role of marijuana.
- Examine family messages around the role of marijuana and think about what they’re teaching your child/teen.
- Talk about your family history with alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs.

- Create empathy and compassion through understanding.
- Tell the truth about your past and current marijuana use.
- Explain why you want your child/teen to abstain from drinking and marijuana use.
- Invite your child/teen to ask questions.
- Be clear about your expectations about alcohol and marijuana use.
- Talk about why people may use marijuana to manage stress.
- Become a strong parent advocate.
- Take the learning further because your child/teen will need to find new ways to deal with the stress and social pressures they face.
- Discuss values.
- Set goals that demonstrate your values.
- Create a family ritual of expressing gratitude in your lives.
- Set goals to demonstrate values.
- Discover together some opportunities to serve in your local community.

Tip Did you know that giving anyone under age 21 sips of alcohol sends a clear message to children/teens that authority figures feel drinking is acceptable for them. These children/teens are more likely to experiment with alcohol or drugs at a younger age and more frequently with friends than those whose families did not permit sipping. Researchers advise not allowing any drinking, even on special occasions, for those under 21.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Take the first small step. Find specific ways you and your child/teen can take small steps to work on the goals you've set.
- Tell stories of your own or your child's/teen's ability to empathize and be kind to others.
- Encourage leadership. After all, in every group, a leader emerges. And, they are typically the individuals who pressure others to go along with what they want to do.

Tip When your child/teen comes to you with a peer pressure challenge, reflect back their feelings. Ask open-ended questions to prompt their thinking. Show your trust and support that they can solve their own problems with reflection.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child's/Teen's Development and Success

- Ask key questions to support their skills: *"Are there times when your friends or other classmates want you to do something you don't want to do?" "How would you respond if your friends asked you to try marijuana?"*
- Reflect on outcomes.
- Stay engaged. Be ready to talk when your child/teen is eager.
- Use any opportunity to talk about the mixed messages regarding marijuana in society, in the media, or at home.
- Engage in further practice. Talk about times when you don't want to go with the crowd.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize and call out when it is going well. Times when your child/teen chooses something different than what the crowd is doing are times to recognize.
- Recognize small steps along the way. Don't wait for the big accomplishments in order to recognize.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Consider a hug when the routine is accomplished.

Tip Be specific. "Good job" seems not to carry much meaning. However, a specific compliment about a pointed behavior -- *"I notice you really reflected on whether or not to go with James to that party considering all of the potential risks. That's really taking responsibility and thinking through consequences!"* -- can promote more of the same.

Tip Your child/teen is trying to define their identity as an independent person. Comments that point out how they are acting in ways that are self-sufficient will help them see how their decision making is defining who they are and what they value.

Trap Avoid bribes. A bribe is a promise for a behavior, while praise is special attention after the behavior. While bribes may work in the short term, praise grows lasting motivation for good behavior and effort. For example, instead of saying, *"If you talk with your friend about not going to the party, I will let you have additional screen time after dinner"* (which is a bribe), try recognizing the behavior after. *"You shared your concerns about the party with your friend. Love seeing that!"*

Celebrate yourself for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your child's success today and in their future!

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