



Mixed Messages About Marijuana

Summary

Why Mixed Messages About Marijuana?

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 teen through your actions about marijuana.

Step 1. Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input

- *“What have you noticed about our family’s decisions about marijuana?”*
- *“What are some of the mixed messages you hear about marijuana?”*
- *“What are some mixed messages you receive about marijuana in our family?”*

Tip Your 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 teen is still only beginning to understand marijuana. Consider that you still hold significant influence on their decisions while they are living in your household, but in a few short years they may be living on their own. 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! Examine family messages around the role of marijuana and think about what they’re teaching your 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 teen to abstain from drinking and marijuana use.
- Invite your teen to ask questions.
- Be clear about your expectations about alcohol and marijuana use.
- Talk about why people may use marijuana to manage stress.
- Talk about the feelings someone might have who wants to escape their lives.
- Take the learning further because your teen will need to find new ways to deal with the stress and social pressures they face.
- Discuss 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 teens and young adults that authority figures feel drinking is acceptable for them. These teens and young adults 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 teen can take small steps to work on the goals you've set.
- Practice empathy.
- When your teen comes to you with a peer pressure challenge, reflect back their feelings.
- Tell stories of your own or your 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 teen comes to you with an interpersonal problem, whether it's with a friend or a teacher, reflect back feelings. Ask what choices your teen might have in communicating with this other person. Perhaps, offer supportive language that will help them broach the topic. Then, show your confidence that they can manage their own communications and work through their own problems.

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

- Ask key questions to support their skills: *"How do you feel about your friends? Do they treat you well? Do they pressure you?"*
- Reflect on outcomes.
- Stay engaged. Be ready to talk when your 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 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 your friend's teasing of a classmate and walked away instead of joining in. That's really taking responsibility and showing empathy for others!"* -- can promote more of the same.

Tip Your 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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