



Mixed Messages About Marijuana

Summary

Why Mixed Messages About Marijuana?

Children receive 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 through your actions about marijuana.

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

- *“What do you know about marijuana?”*
- *“When do you see it and how is it used?”*
- *“Do you have any ideas on why marijuana might only be appropriate for adults?”*

Tip Your child 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 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 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.
- 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.
- Become a strong parent advocate.
- Take the learning further because your child will need to find new ways to deal with the stress and social pressures they face.
- Discuss values.
- Set goals to demonstrate values.
- Create a family ritual of expressing gratitude in your lives.

Tip For 10-year-olds (or younger if your family encounters relatives who drink too much or use substances excessively), talk about why an adult might want to lose some of their control and numb their thinking. Often it relates to their level of stress or even hard times in which they are attempting to cope. Digging a bit into the reasons behind marijuana use and misuse can begin to stir empathy in yourself and in your child. This does not mean supporting the unhealthy behaviors but rather realizing that they have an illness they must treat, just as you might view a family member dealing with diabetes, asthma, or another debilitating chronic disease. This is a family value worth communicating!

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

- Take the first small step. Find specific ways you and your child can take small steps to work on the goals you've set.
- When your child comes to you with an interpersonal problem whether it's with a friend or a teacher, reflect back feelings.
- Practice empathy.
- Tell stories of your own or your child's ability to empathize and be kind to others.
- Encourage leadership.

Tip When your child 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 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?"*
- Reflect on outcomes.
- Stay engaged. Be ready to talk when your child is eager.
- 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 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 -- “*You were able to set a healthy boundary with your friend -- love seeing that!*” -- can promote more of the same.

Tip Your child 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 make a healthy snack choice, I will let you pick out a treat later*” (which is a bribe), try recognizing the behavior after. “*You picked a healthy snack choice. 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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