

It's Time to Talk to Your Kids, and Your Schools, About Marijuana

By Susan Fisher

Susan is the Assistant Director of the School Mental Health Resource and Training Center at the Mental Health Association in NYS. She is an Associate Director at Nassau Region PTA, Resolutions Coordinator for New York State PTA, where she sits on the NYS PTA Mental Health Task Force, and sits on the Legislation Committee at National PTA. She has planned regional and statewide legislative conferences bringing together members, education stakeholders, and legislators to discuss school, youth, and education issues. She is a former educator and taught Biology, Chemistry, and Earth Science. Susan is the proud mom of two boys, a Junior in high school and a 7th grader.

It seems intuitive that substance misuse, particularly in adolescents and children, will have negative impacts. These adolescent years are a time of growth, exploration, and some risk-taking. There is significant research showing that adolescents who begin to use marijuana regularly can have long-term memory impairment, a drop in IQ, poor academic performance, and are at risk of depression and social anxiety later in adulthood. Additionally, using marijuana in adolescence can increase impulsiveness, anxiety, paranoia, and apathy. People who use marijuana are at higher risk of developing long-lasting mental health disorders.

These negative impacts are amplified in adolescents because the human brain is still developing. During this time, teens can have difficulty thinking and problem-solving, develop problems with learning and memory, suffer from reduced coordination, have difficulty paying attention in school, and encounter problems with their social life at school and at home. Marijuana use has been linked to the onset of a range of mental health problems. People who use marijuana can even develop temporary psychosis.

Research has shown an association between frequent marijuana use at an early age and the development of schizophrenia. Adolescents are also at risk of potential addiction (marijuana or cannabis use disorder) and withdrawal when attempting to stop use. The earlier that an individual begins using marijuana and the more frequently they use it, the higher their risk of becoming addicted. What's more, the National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that 44% of 12–17-year-olds who used marijuana had a marijuana use disorder.

So, the bad news about adolescent marijuana use is something that has been known for a while now. Marijuana use can worsen depression and lead to more serious mental health disorders, such as schizophrenia, anxiety, and even suicide. But there is good news. Adolescents who stop using marijuana can undo the harm they have done to their developing brains. They can reduce their risk of depression and anxiety, improve their sleep, and their cognition can improve as well.

What can parents, families, educators, and school administrators do? Our youth need to be educated about the risks and harms that they can experience if they begin to use marijuana. This

information should be shared throughout the entire school community, including educators, administration, parents/guardians, families, and community partners.

Parents should talk with their children about the risks of using marijuana while their brains are still developing. It's important that our children and youth have accurate information from trustworthy sources, that we listen carefully to them, and stay positive when we talk to them. Parents and other influential adults need to let them know that we are open to talking to them so that they can come to you with questions, and this will help them make good choices.

Our educators and school leaders can engage with substance use prevention community-based coalitions and implement evidence-based programs. It's important to develop and share educational materials with our students and their families. Initiatives aiming to educate teenagers on the risks associated with using marijuana and teaching them the necessary skills to resist peer pressure are crucial as a part of prevention programs and interventions aimed at educating children and adolescents, educators, parents, and families.

As a parent, you can make a difference in your child's school. Go to PTA, school board, and other school meetings and suggest that trustworthy curriculum and materials are readily available and used in their classrooms, counseling offices, sports, and disciplinary guidelines today. [Click here for prevention resource examples for your school.](#)

Other resources for drug prevention education for schools:

<https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep21-06-01-001.pdf>

https://www.lifeskillstraining.com/?gad_source=1&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI2ouTwq_7ggMViy3UAR0V2AaBEAMYASAAEqLIdvD_BwE

<https://pttcnetwork.org/centers/new-england-pttc/product/microlearning-toolkit-cannabis-prevention-101>