

• *Communicate*

• *Role Model*

• *Become Involved*

Marijuana: How Harmful is it?

There has been much debate about how harmful marijuana really is. We have politicians who claim marijuana is harmless; there is discussion about decriminalizing marijuana; there is the medical marijuana debate; and then we have the baby boomers who tried marijuana when they were young and say "it's no big deal". This can be very confusing especially to young people who look to adults for the facts.

The first thing to clarify is that the marijuana of today is more potent than the marijuana of 25 years ago and the effects can be more intense. According to the RCMP, the potency of marijuana in BC has increased 200-300% over the last 25 years. What does this mean? – higher rates of addiction, and an increase in mental health problems.

There has been a lot of research into the effects of marijuana on our bodies and the research is clear. It is not the harmless drug that some people claim it to be. Here are just some of the effects of marijuana:

- Marijuana hinders the user's short-term memory. This makes it hard for the user to recall recent events such as something that happened a few minutes ago. A working short-term memory is required for learning and performing tasks that call for more than one or two steps.
- Because of the drug's effects on perceptions and reaction time, users could be involved in motor vehicle crashes.
- Marijuana users may have many of the same respiratory problems that tobacco smokers have, such as chronic cough and more frequent chest colds.
- One joint can deliver 4 times the amount of cancer-causing tar as 1 cigarette.
- Weekly marijuana use can increase the risk for mental health problems, such as depression, suicidal thoughts, and schizophrenia.

Still think it's harmless?

Did You Know ...

Each year, more youth enter treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than for all other drugs.

"The child supplies the power but the parents have to do the steering."

~ Benjamin Spock

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TIPS FOR PARENTS

Here are some tips on what to do if you suspect your child may be experimenting with alcohol or other drugs:

Get Educated: Learn as much as you can about drug use and their effects as well as the **signs and symptoms** of drug use.

Have The Talk - Let Them Know You Know: Sit down and talk with your child and be sure to have the conversation when you are calm and have plenty of time.

Be Specific About Your Concerns: Tell your child what you see and how you feel about it. Be specific about the things you have observed that cause concern.

Don't Make Excuses: You're not helping your child if you make excuses when he/she misses school or family functions when you suspect something else is at play.

Try to Remain Calm and Connect With Him/Her: Have this discussion without getting mad or accusing your child of being stupid or bad or an embarrassment to the family. Be firm but loving with your tone and try not to get hooked into an argument.

Be Prepared. Practice What You'll Say: Be prepared for your teen to deny using drugs. Don't expect him/her to admit he/she has a problem. Your child will probably get angry and might try to change the subject.

Act Now: You can begin to more closely monitor your child's activities. Have a few conversations. Ask: Who? What? Where? When? Reflect with your child on why he/she is using drugs and try to understand the reasons why so that you can help solve the problem. When you get a better idea of the situation, then you can decide the next step.

Source: Parent the Anti-drug

To learn about popular drug lingo: [Click here](#)

If your community has a substance abuse prevention event or activity you'd like to share with our readers, please contact Cathy Mah at cathymah@ades.bc.ca © 2007

ASK AN EXPERT

Is driving under the influence of marijuana as dangerous as drinking and driving?

Driving under the influence of any substance is dangerous. Marijuana is no exception. Marijuana is a popular drug in youth culture which has led to a harmful myth that marijuana is harmless and safe. This is blatantly inaccurate, especially when applied to the context of driving motor vehicles.

A drug is normally defined as a substance that we ingest that alters our thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the world around us. The effects of smoked marijuana can be felt within minutes and may last up to 3 or 4 hours. THC, the chemical in marijuana that is responsible for the psychoactive effects, has become increasingly stronger over the past 20 years. These facts have some serious implications for drivers who choose to operate a vehicle while high:

- Marijuana slows reaction time: This effect may have devastating consequences in a busy fast-paced street environment where drivers are called upon to make instant decisions to safely operate their vehicle.
- Marijuana increases distractibility: A common effect of marijuana is an over-focusing on certain narrow aspects of the environment that may be inappropriate at the time. For example, a colleague worked with one youth who was so absorbed in changing the car radio station that they forgot to look up for over 10 seconds and consequently crashed into a parked car!
- Marijuana leads to an overconfidence: Because the marijuana high is more subtle than alcohol, youth often minimize the

effects of marijuana on their ability to drive. They mistakenly assume they have full control of their cognitive and perceptual faculties, even when they don't.

- Marijuana promotes time distortion: Perceptual distortions occur when people are high on marijuana. Time is experienced differently. What may seem like a few seconds may in fact be a much longer period of time.

Clearly, it can be hazardous to operate a motor vehicle while under the influence of marijuana. Youth should not only avoid driving while high, they should avoid accepting a ride from anyone who is under the influence.

Geordie Colvin
Youth Addictions Clinician
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To enjoy all the benefits of an Alcohol-Drug Education Service membership [click here](#) or contact our office.

RESOURCES

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, revised 1998, **Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know** [Click here](#) for PDF
2. Parents. The Anti-Drug, **Wake up to the Risks of Marijuana: A Guide for Parents** [Click here](#) for PDF

COMMUNITY CORNER

“The Birthday Party”

Like many communities throughout BC, Campbell River youth are taking part in underage drinking parties - many of them sanctioned and chaperoned by parents. The Community Alcohol and Drug Action Committee (CADAC) of Campbell River has recognized this as a problem and have set out to address it with the community.

CADAC offers a workshop to community members on underage drinking parties. They call it “The Birthday Party”. It is a participant, interactive story that challenges and explores attitudes and beliefs about underage drinking and parties. The two hour workshop, facilitated by an RCMP officer, is not meant to convince people one way or another of what they should do, it's really a discussion, says CADAC member Denise Krivokuca.

Youth make poor decisions when under the influence of alcohol, possibly leading to sexual assault and other behaviour they will later regret. Some people seem to think that as long as they're not driving, they're drinking responsibly. That's just not true, says the workshop facilitator, Cpl. Gus Papagiannis, pointing out that alcohol impairs judgment. Another problem identified by CADAC is that youth don't recognize the signs of alcohol poisoning. Instead of getting their friends to the hospital, they lay them down to rest on a bed where they could potentially die from alcohol poisoning. These are some of the topics addressed in the “Birthday Party” workshop.

For more information on this workshop contact:
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RCMP Drugs and Organized Crime Awareness Service at:
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Available Resources & Workshops

Making Decisions Series

A leading education initiative to combat drug and alcohol abuse and encourage social responsibility.

Grades 4, 6, 7, 8 & 9 [more info](#)

Parents as Preventors™

Workshops designed for parents, emphasizing the central role parents play in influencing their children to make healthy choices regarding alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. [more info](#)

drugfacts.ca

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For more information
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