

## **Don't Underestimate Marijuana**

Don't be confused by efforts to "medicalize" marijuana. Your kids need to know how risky marijuana use can be. "Young marijuana users face serious risks", says Surgeon General Richard Carmona, M.D. "Marijuana can harm the brain, lungs and mental health. Research also shows that marijuana is addictive." Here's the truth about marijuana today:

- Marijuana is much stronger and more addictive than it was 30 years ago. Average THC levels have risen from less than 1% in the late 1970's to 7% in 2001.
- Marijuana use is three times more likely to lead to dependence among adolescents than among adults. More teens enter drug treatment each year for marijuana than for all other illicit drugs combined.
- Getting high impairs judgment, leading to risky decision-making on issues like sex, criminal activity or riding with someone who is driving while high. Kids ages 12-17 who use marijuana weekly are five times more likely to steal and nearly four times more likely to engage in violent acts than those who don't. A roadside check of reckless drivers (not impaired by alcohol) showed that 45 % tested positive for marijuana.
- Twice as many 8<sup>th</sup> graders today have tried marijuana than 10 years ago (10.2 percent in 1991 to 20.4 percent in 2001)
- Young people with an average grade of "D" or below were more than four times as likely to have used marijuana in the last year than those with an average grade of "A."
- There are no clinical studies demonstrating the appropriate medical use of marijuana. The medical marijuana initiative has given some teens the misperception that marijuana is harmless or may have health benefits.

The good news is that parents are the most powerful influence on their kids when it comes to marijuana. Two-thirds of youth ages 13-17 say losing their parents' respect is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs. Parents can help keep their kids drug-free by asking questions and staying involved in their childrens' lives. More information about the effects of marijuana use, its signs and symptoms, and advice for parents can be found at [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com), which provided the facts for this article.

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