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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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Know! The Impact of Marijuana on Adolescents

“We are the New Americana, getting high on legal marijuana,” are the lyrics to a popular new song by 21-year-old singer/songwriter ‘Halsey.’ Her song reflects the unfortunate reality of the world students are growing up in, as marijuana becomes not only legal, but socially acceptable in more and more states. It would be only natural for young people to assume that if all these adults have fought for or are fighting for marijuana to be legalized, then the drug itself must be pretty harmless.

This assumption is incorrect and dangerous. While marijuana use is risky for people of all ages, it is especially hazardous for youth. Here’s why:

Marijuana impacts the developing adolescent brain:

- Studies show that chronic (and sometimes casual) marijuana use during adolescence can actually change the physical shape, volume and density of a person’s brain, negatively impacting learning and memory. The severity of such brain abnormalities is shown to increase as frequency of use increases.
- Heavy use of marijuana during adolescence may also reduce a person’s IQ by as much as 8 points. A loss of 8 points could drop a person of average intelligence into the lowest third of the intelligence range.

Marijuana impacts school performance:

- Research consistently shows that marijuana users earn lower grades, are more likely to skip classes, have higher incidences of school suspension/expulsion and higher dropout rates, and are subsequently more likely in adulthood to experience unemployment, social welfare dependence and dissatisfaction in quality of life.

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Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.



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Marijuana impacts health and safety:

- Marijuana use has the potential to increase heart rate, cause lung and breathing problems, and is linked to anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts among youth.
- Marijuana affects a person's coordination, balance, reaction time, alertness and ability to concentrate – increasing one's risk for accidental injury and death.
- Because the adolescent brain has not yet matured, many young people have a tendency to act on impulse, without regard for risk. Adding marijuana to the mix only increases the likelihood of poor decision-making, including engaging in risky sexual behaviors, getting into a car with an impaired driver, or taking part in a criminal act.

If the risks of marijuana continue to be downplayed by adults, there is a greater likelihood of more youth giving this drug a try. Young people must be made aware that marijuana is not harmless; that use of this drug causes people to think and behave differently; that marijuana negatively impacts brain function, intelligence, school performance and health and safety; and that marijuana use not only threatens success in the present, but jeopardizes a hopeful future.

For more information, visit Drug Free Action Alliance's [Marijuana Resource](https://www.drugfreeactionalliance.org/marijuana_resource) page at https://www.drugfreeactionalliance.org/marijuana_resources.

Sources: Meier et al. (2012). Persistent cannabis users show neuropsychological decline from childhood to midlife. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Neurology Advisor: Marijuana-Related Emergency Department Visits on the Rise, December 17, 2014. National Institute on Drug Abuse: Marijuana – Selected Effects on the Brain, Body & Behavior. Rocky Mountain HIDTA Report: Volume 2, 2014.

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