

# Mixed Messages About Cannabis

## Age 17 Summary

### Why Mixed Messages About Cannabis?

Teens receive numerous mixed messages about cannabis consumption and its place in their lives and communities. They may see cannabis used in movies, referenced in songs, and normalized on YouTube. They may encounter adults using cannabis at events or concerts. These outside messages have an impact on your teen, but as a parent or those in a parenting role, what you model and the messages you send related to cannabis will be the most significant influence on your teen.



#### Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input

- *“What have you noticed about our family’s decisions about cannabis?”*
- *“What are some of the mixed messages you hear about cannabis?”*
- *“What are some mixed messages you receive about cannabis in our family?”*

**Trap** Don’t feel defensive about your practices. Keep focused on the fact that your teen is still beginning to understand cannabis. Consider that you still significantly influence their decisions while living in your household, but in a few short years, they may be living independently. It’s an opportunity to offer essential guidance. Focus on the impacts you can have today and in the future.



#### Teach New Skills

- Learn together! Examine family messages regarding the role of cannabis and think about what they’re teaching your teen.
- Talk about your family history with alcohol, cannabis, and other drugs.
- Create empathy and compassion through understanding.
- If your teen asks, tell the truth about your past and current cannabis use. While you shouldn’t glorify your behaviors as a teen or young adult, you don’t want to lie or avoid the topic.
- Explain why you want your teen to abstain from alcohol and cannabis use.
- Invite your teen to ask questions.

- Be clear about your expectations about alcohol and cannabis use.
- Take the learning further because your teen will need to find new ways to deal with the stress and social pressures they face.
- Since peer pressure is a part of teen life, have your teen practice refusal skills so they know how to react if they are offered alcohol, cannabis, or other substances.
- Discuss values.
- Create a family ritual of expressing gratitude in your lives.
- Set goals to demonstrate values.
- Discover together some opportunities to serve in your local community.
- Talk about the feelings someone might have that would cause them to resort to unhealthy means of coping. Ask your teen if they have ever felt that way. Reassure your teen that it's normal to feel overwhelmed by your problems at times, and yet using alcohol, cannabis, and other substances does not solve the issue and can instead lead to medical problems.



### Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Find specific ways you and your teen can take small steps to work on the goals you've set.
- Practice empathy.
- When your teen comes to you with a peer pressure challenge, reflect back their feelings.
- Tell stories of your or your teen's ability to empathize and be kind to others.
- Encourage leadership. After all, in every group, a leader emerges. And they are typically the individuals who pressure others to do what they want.

**Tip:** When your teen comes to you with an interpersonal problem, whether with a friend or a teacher, reflect back feelings. Ask what choices your teen might have in communicating with this other person. Offer supportive language that will help them broach the topic. Then, show your confidence as they manage their communications and solve their problems.



### Support Your Teen's Development and Success

- Ask key questions to support their skills: *"How do you feel about your friends? Do they treat you well? Do they pressure you?"*
- Reflect on outcomes.
- Stay engaged. Be ready to talk when your teen is eager.
- Use any opportunity to talk about the mixed messages regarding cannabis in society, in the media, or at home.
- Engage in further practice. Talk about times when you don't want to go with the crowd.

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## Recognize Efforts

- No matter how old your teen is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- There are many ways you can reinforce your teen's efforts. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three distinct parenting behaviors have different impacts on your teen's behavior.
  - **Recognize** even small successes to promote positive behaviors and expand confidence: *"You shared your concerns about the party with your friend. Love seeing that!"* Recognition can include nonverbal acknowledgment such as a smile, high five, or hug.
  - **Rewards** can be helpful in certain situations by providing a concrete, timely, and positive incentive for doing a good job. A reward is determined ahead of time so that the teen knows what to expect, like: *"If you invite a few friends to come hang out here instead of going to the party, I will provide the pizza, and you can rent a movie."* (if you XX, then I'll XX) The goal should be to help your teen progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. If used too often, rewards can decrease a teen's intrinsic motivation.
  - Unlike a reward, **bribes** aren't planned ahead of time and generally happen when a parent or those in a parenting role are in a crisis (like a teen arguing and refusing to leave a social gathering). To avoid disaster, a parent or those in a parenting role offers to stop for ice cream on the way home if the teen stops arguing and leaves the event). While bribes can be helpful in the short term to manage stressful situations, they will not grow lasting motivation or behavior change and should be avoided.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Teens constantly seek new adventures and the thrill of trying something new. Keep this in mind when considering celebrations.

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