

Mixed Messages About Cannabis

Age 8 Summary

Why Mixed Messages About Cannabis?

Children receive 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 child. Still, as a parent or those in a parenting role, what you model and the messages you send related to cannabis in your child's early years will be the most significant influence.

STEP

1



Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- *"What do you know about cannabis?"*
- *"When do you see it, and how is it used?"*
- *"Do you have any ideas on why cannabis might only be appropriate for adults?"*

Trap Don't feel defensive about your practices. Keep focused on the fact that your child is just at the start of understanding cannabis. It's a brand new chance to offer essential guidance. Focus on the impacts you can have today and in the future.

STEP

2



Teach New Skills

- Learn together. Though your child has likely heard of cannabis, you may not have had a specific conversation about the role of cannabis.
- Examine family messages regarding the role of cannabis and think about what they're teaching your child.
- Talk about your family history with alcohol, cannabis, and other drugs.
- Become a strong advocate.
- If your child 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.

**STEP
3****Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits**

- Find specific ways you and your child can take small steps to work on the goals you've set.
- Reflect back feelings when your child comes to you with an interpersonal problem, whether with a friend or a teacher.
- Practice empathy.
- Tell stories of your own or your child's ability to empathize and be kind to others.
- Encourage leadership.

Tip: When your child comes to you with a peer pressure challenge, reflect on their feelings. Ask open-ended questions to prompt their thinking. Show your trust and support as they solve their problems.

**STEP
4****Support Your Child's Development and Success**

- Ask key questions to support their skills: *"When do your friends or other classmates want you to do something you don't want to do?"*
- Reflect on outcomes.
- Stay engaged. Be ready to talk when your child is eager.
- Engage in further practice. Talk about times when you don't want to go with the crowd.

**STEP
5****Recognize Efforts**

- No matter how old your child is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- There are many ways you can reinforce your child'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 child's behavior.
 - **Recognize** even small successes to promote positive behaviors and expand confidence: *"You were able to set a healthy boundary with a friend- I 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 child knows what to expect, like *"If you make a healthy choice for your after-school snack, we will go for a bike ride together."* (if you XX, then I'll XX) The goal should be to help your child progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. If used too often, rewards can decrease a child's internal motivation.

- Unlike a reward, **bribes** aren't planned ahead of time and generally happen when a parent or those in a parenting role is in the middle of a crisis (like in the grocery store checkout line and a child is having a tantrum. To avoid disaster, a parent or those in a parenting role offers to buy a sucker if the child will stop the tantrum). 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. For example, if your child works hard at a physical activity, make a healthy smoothie to enjoy together.

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