

Changing the Conversation About Marijuana: PARENT GUIDE

Information for a New Generation
of Youth and Young Adults



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www.marijuana-education.com

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My Story

I'm a lucky parent. I have two intelligent, healthy, loving sons who were generally easy to raise. When they were teenagers and it came time to have the "drug" talk, the conversation went something like this: "If you're ever in a situation where you or your friends have had too much to drink and need a ride home, call me, no matter what time, and I will come and get you, no questions asked. You also need to keep in mind that you have a family history of addiction, so be aware of that. Oh, and don't become a pothead because you'll end up going nowhere." That was the extent of the conversation and I don't remember ever revisiting it. I knew they were not partiers, and neither were their circle of friends, so I checked that conversation off my list of what I thought a good parent should do.

It wasn't until several months ago that I came upon information that made me realize that if I could go back in time, the timing and content of the conversation with my kids about marijuana would have been very different. If I had known then what I know now about how marijuana affects the adolescent's brain (up until the age of about 25), I would have:

- begun talking to them about it before middle school
- given them very different advice, based on current research on brain development
- made sure it was an ongoing conversation well into their twenties

New Conversations for Changing Times

My experience of talking to my kids about marijuana took place approximately 10 years before it became legal in the state of Colorado. Legalization brings with it a whole new set of issues for parents that further complicate the decisions they have to make about how and when to talk to their kids about marijuana. Parents, adolescents and marijuana have a relationship unlike any other drug at this moment in history. In the very recent past, kids were told to "Just Say No" and were exposed to scare tactics with programs like DARE. Today, things are far more complicated. Marijuana is legal for medical and/or recreational use in 28 states and likely to become legal in more.



For many parents, talking to their kids about marijuana is a virtual minefield. Kids are given mixed messages from the media, their peers, teachers, and families. They may have many questions and feel confused. For the adults in their lives, no longer are there simple answers.

Today, over half of marijuana users are parents. Still more have at least tried marijuana or smoked occasionally when they were teenagers. Many of the facts about marijuana as we knew them have

turned out to be myths. Well meaning, caring and responsible parents may not be aware of new research about how marijuana use can affect brain development from adolescence through young adulthood. In addition, many of these parents do not realize that the marijuana of today is not the same as it was when they were young. Over the past few decades, the amount of THC, which is the major psychoactive constituent of cannabis, has been increasing steadily. According to an analysis presented at the 2015 Meeting of the American Chemical Society, the amount of THC in samples from marijuana sold legally are reaching 30 percent. Concentrates, commonly known as shatter, wax or hash oil, can contain more than 80 percent THC! In contrast, marijuana in 1966 had THC levels of about 3 to 6 percent. There are also new ways of consuming marijuana, such as edibles, which can be more potent and have varying levels of THC. They can take several hours to take effect and are longer lasting.

Today, parents and youth must take their awareness to whole different level and we need to learn new ways of talking to today's youth about marijuana. Thanks to the internet, we have unprecedented access to information about drugs, both accurate and inaccurate. Young people need help sorting through all the information in order to make informed decisions. Although kids may claim to believe otherwise, parents' voices remain most powerful for them. Parental influence should not be underestimated! Though it may seem that their friends are the only people whose opinion and advice they care about as they begin to establish their independence, their parents' words and actions continue to have a strong influence on the decisions they make. Parents who are informed about the facts surrounding marijuana and its effects, as well as effective techniques to talk to their children, are best equipped to change the conversation about drug use with the youth and young adults of today.



Find more stories like mine at the end of this guide but first, here are some tools to support your conversation with your kids.

Accurate Information, Ongoing Communication

Most experts agree that education about issues like alcohol and drug use is most effective if it begins at least two years before the child is likely to be exposed to the behavior in a peer setting. Let's face it, 10-year-old kids already have unprecedented access to information, so it's critical that parents start these important conversations early to help children navigate this complex subject. Having these conversations with youth and providing them with facts and science-based information are the most impactful ways to help them understand the importance of putting off marijuana use until their brain is fully developed. If you have an older teen and you have not yet discussed adolescent marijuana use with him or her, it's never too late to start.

Here are some important tips to keep in mind:

1. Shifting from YOUR reality to THEIRS: As parents, sometimes we don't know with certainty what our children are hearing, seeing, or thinking in regard to adolescent marijuana use, but it is important to understand that their reality and perception are likely different from ours. In 2015 and 2016, school

resource officers (SROs) and school counselors participated in surveys concerning marijuana in schools that asked them to comment on and share their in-school experiences. Below are some of their comments that shed light on youth mind-sets and experiences regarding marijuana.

In June 2016, 103 school resource officers (SRO) participated in a survey concerning marijuana in schools. Below are comments from the SROs:

- Middle School Users: "On several occasions students have shown up to school obviously high on marijuana. When asked where they obtained the drug it's 50/50 parents or friends. I have seen this at the 6th grade level, but mostly 8th grade level. It's hard telling kids that marijuana usage at an early age is detrimental to brain growth, but some tell me that my mom and dad say it's ok."
- Getting High and Skipping Class: "The amount of marijuana use/sales has climbed since it became legal for legal users. One of the primary problems I see is the strength (potency) of the marijuana. Students use on a break/lunch and cannot return to class, therefore the truancy rates are high."
- In August 2015, 188 school counselors participated in a survey concerning the legalization of marijuana in schools. Below are comments from school counselors:
 - "3 or 4 times in the last school year, students have come to school under the influence after meeting at homes where parents were absent, sharing marijuana off campus and then bringing it on campus. 7th and 8th grade students have been involved, and most often their reaction when caught is, *it's legal!*"
 - "I met with at least 5 students last year alone that have been showing significant signs of drug use or were caught and they all said they will not stop using weed on a daily basis. Their justification was it's fine because it's legal. If it's legal it's not as bad as what adults say about the risks."

2. Changing the dialogue: The comments and experiences above provide insight into youth perceptions and experiences with marijuana. These stories also detail why the dialogue around adolescent marijuana use must be changed. Marijuana laws and views are changing; therefore, so must the conversation. Most parents grew up during a time when marijuana was illegal, and many of us are products of the D.A.R.E. program (Drug Abuse Resistance Program). In recent years numerous studies have reported the ineffectiveness of "Just Say No" programs. According to a 2011 article in Scientific American, statisticians conducted a meta-analysis and concluded that teens enrolled in the D.A.R.E. program were just as likely to use drugs as were those who received no intervention at all. More and more schools are moving away from "Just Say No" approaches in favor of reality-based education. It is important that parents have these same reality-based conversations with their children.

3. Starting the Conversation: Dispel the myths around adolescent marijuana use. Provide solid, research-based information about the effects of marijuana use on the still developing adolescent brain. Because of the legalization of marijuana in many parts of the country, there has been a significant reduction in adolescent perception of harm regarding the dangers of adolescent marijuana use. Ask your child what their beliefs are about the effects of prolonged marijuana use, and take that opportunity to share the facts with them. In this packet you will find a Parent and Teen True/False Activity to get the conversation started.

4. Lock It Up: As previously mentioned, laws and views of marijuana are changing. More and more states are legalizing marijuana for medicinal or recreational use, or both. If you keep marijuana in your home, it is important that you keep your product locked up just as you would your prescription medications. Make sure your marijuana is stored safely to prevent experimentation or accidental ingestion. Numerous discrete, locking and odor-absorbing boxes can be purchased online. For more information on such products please visit www.marijuana-education.com/parents for more resources.

Talking To Your Teen About Adolescent Marijuana Use: The Dos and Dont's

DON'T avoid the conversation: We know and it has been stated over and over through different research that parents have the greatest influence in a child's life. Many believe this powerful influence supersedes that of peers, teachers and even social media. This powerful natural influence combined with ongoing conversations can drastically reduce the use of drugs and alcohol in your teen.

DO get comfortable with discomfort: Many of the conversations that we have with our children, specifically adolescents are uncomfortable for us. Identifying what our own discomfort is and finding ways to accept and navigate that discomfort will allow us the opportunity to more easily take the steps forward to engage in these important conversations. The more we engage in these conversations the easier it is, the less we engage, the harder those needed conversations will be.

DO utilize the 3C's concept: Our children need us to have boundaries and expectations and often flourish within our boundaries even when they are pushing back on them. These boundaries and expectations need to be Clear, Concise and Consistent. We often spend too much time stressing our point and falling into the parent lecture trap, which ultimately decreases the effectiveness of communication. Instead, implement the 3C's concept which provides clarity for everyone and gives you an opportunity to talk with and listen to your teen while being clear about your boundaries.

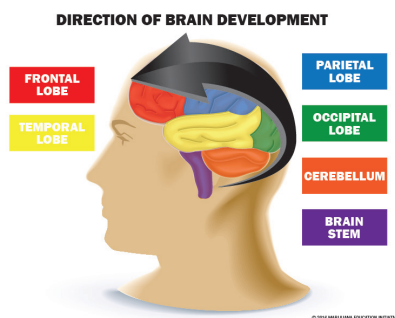
DON'T Let things go unnoticed: It is a parent's job to use love and experience to correct mistakes and poor choices. We can correct our children's behavior and build their self confidence in making smart choices by using both praise and constructive criticism. However, this only can happen when you commit to not letting things go unnoticed. Do not let it go unnoticed if your child is experiencing: declining school work and grades, abrupt changes in friends, poor self care and change in sleeping habits, deteriorating relationships with family and a general decrease in openness and honesty.

DO dispel the myths around adolescent marijuana use. Provide solid research based information about the effects of marijuana use on the adolescent brain. Because of the legalization of marijuana in many parts of the country, there has been a significant reduction in adolescent perception of harm regarding the dangers of adolescent marijuana use. Ask your child what their beliefs are about the effects of prolonged marijuana use and take that opportunity to share the facts with them.

Facts About the Effects of Youth Marijuana Use

Next, you will find a Parent and Youth True/False Activity to get the conversation started. Have your kid complete the True/False questionnaire. The Parent Sheet follows the activity and has the answer key as well as talking points about each subject.

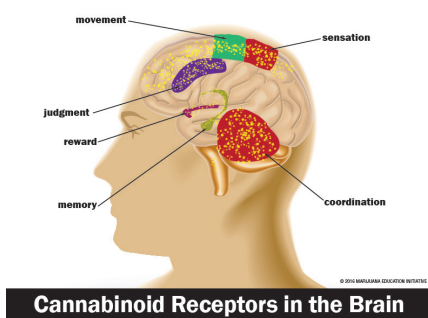
True or False



#1 Brain Development

The prefrontal cortex of your brain is not fully developed until the age of 25, thus making your brain more vulnerable to the effects of marijuana use?

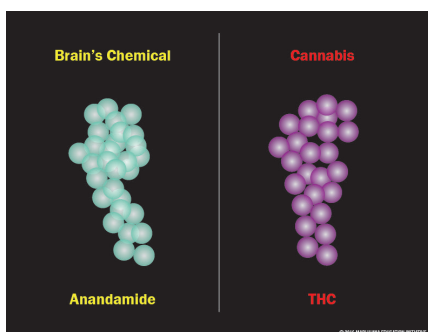
- ☐ True
- ☐ False



#2 Receptors

Your brain has a system of receptors designed to receive the neurotransmitter, anandamide, which your body naturally produces?

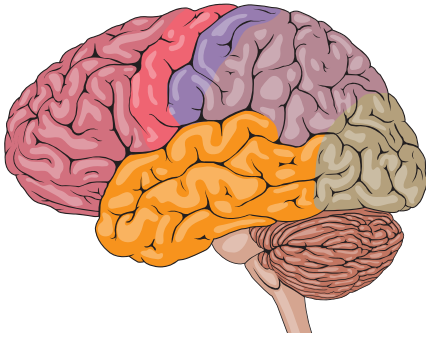
- ☐ True
- ☐ False



#3 Anandamide vs. THC

When marijuana is introduced into the body, THC produces its effects by mimicking anandamide and "locking in" to the receptors in the brain designed for anandamide.

- ☐ True
- ☐ False



#4 Impact on Brain

When a person regularly consumes marijuana during adolescence his or her brain is completely unaffected.

- ☐ True
☐ False



#5 Mental Health Implications

Daily consumption of marijuana during adolescence can significantly increase the chances of a mental illness diagnosis in early adulthood such as schizophrenia.

- ☐ True
☐ False



#6 Legal and Educational Consequences

Legal charges related to marijuana have no impact on eligibility for federal financial aid for college or military enlistment if marijuana is legal in your state.

- ☐ True
☐ False

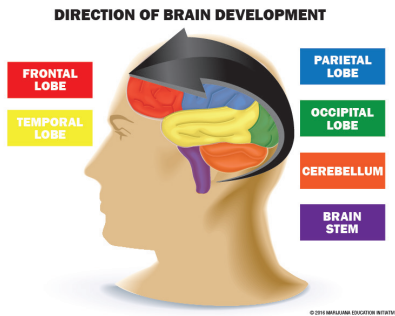


#7 Concentrates/Dabbing

Using concentrated marijuana products such as dab, wax or shatter can produce a much stronger high with the potential for hallucinations and can be more addictive for the adolescent users.

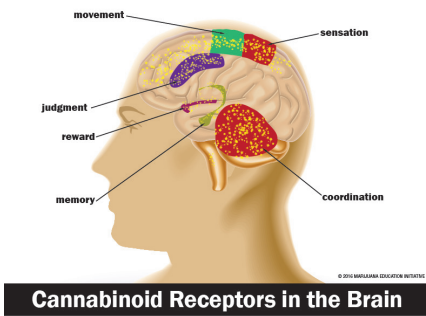
- ☐ True
☐ False

Answer Key & Talking Points



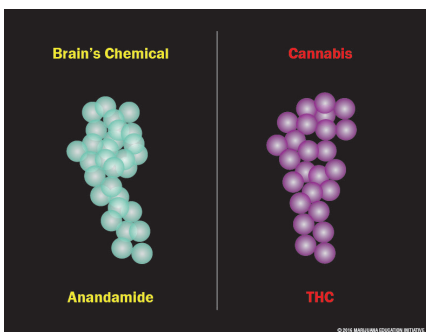
#1 Brain Development-TRUE

- The brain develops from the back (the brain stem) to the front (the prefrontal cortex) and takes two decades to complete its development.
- The prefrontal cortex is in charge of all executive functions, such as working memory, reasoning, impulse control, flexibility, problem solving, and planning.
- During adolescence, and until the age of 25, the prefrontal cortex is undergoing rapid change. Due to the important development that is occurring during this time, the developing teenage brain is particularly vulnerable to adverse effects of marijuana use.
- Because the still-developing adolescent brain differs from that of a fully developed adult brain the effects of marijuana on the adolescent brain differ as well.



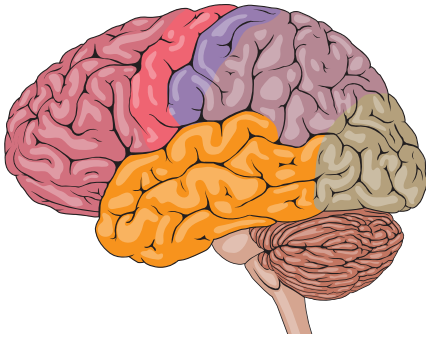
#2 Receptors-TRUE

- Your brain has a system of receptors designed to receive the neurotransmitter, anandamide, which your brain naturally produces.
- Anandamide is called the “bliss” neurotransmitter because it plays a role in alleviating pain and depression, regulating appetite, and stress inducing healthy sleep cycles, and influencing memory.
- There are a large amount of these receptors in the prefrontal cortex which is undergoing rapid development in adolescence



#3 Anandamide vs. THC-TRUE

- The compound THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), found in cannabis, has a molecular structure that is very similar to that of anandamide. Because of the similarity in structure, THC mimics anandamide allowing it to alter normal brain communication; thus affecting thinking and behavior..
- When marijuana is introduced into the body, the THC produces its effects by mimicking anandamide, “locking in” to the receptors in the brain designed for anandamide, and altering normal brain function.



#4 Impact on Brain-FALSE

- When a person regularly consumes marijuana during adolescence oxygen levels in the brain can be effected and he or she may be doing long-term damage to the still developing prefrontal cortex of the brain.
- The prefrontal cortex is responsible for a person's executive functioning, which controls how a person manages life in adulthood.
- Adolescent marijuana consumption can affect a person's future mental and cognitive health. Marijuana consumption after the brain is fully developed, at the age of 25 years or older, has a less dramatic impact on the brain than use during adolescence.



#5 Mental Health Implications-TRUE

- A predisposition or family history of schizophrenia can make young marijuana users particularly vulnerable to a future diagnosis of schizophrenia.
- Kids who use marijuana regularly in their early- to mid-teenage years are at a roughly threefold higher risk for a psychotic related mental illness in adulthood.
- Replacing anandamide with THC can create a dependence on the THC for the "feel good" feelings that anandamide naturally produces. This can cause one to become dependent on the THC to feel happy and calm.



#6 Legal and Educational Consequences-FALSE

- Marijuana possession and consumption when you are younger than age 21 are illegal unless you have a medical card.
- Fines, probation, community service and diversion are all possible consequences if a student is caught with marijuana.
- Legal charges related to marijuana use can cause a student to lose eligibility for federal financial aid for college or can make it harder to get into the military. Depending on the laws in your state, even a first-time conviction for misdemeanor-level marijuana possession can affect financial aid or military eligibility.



#7 Concentrates/Dabbing-TRUE

- Concentrated marijuana products can have up to 90% THC.
- Concentrates marijuana products include THC oil (used in vaporizers and edibles), wax, and shatter (dabs).
- The physical and mental impacts of dabbing marijuana concentrates are significant and not yet fully researched.
- Dabbing concentrates such as wax or shatter can produce a much stronger high with the potential for hallucinations and can be much more addictive for the user.

Kimberly's Story

Kimberly is a devoted mother to two daughters, Madison age 11 and Emily, 13. After her divorce, Kimberly moved from the city to a small town. She wanted to protect her daughters and get away from the high crime and drug infested neighborhood they were living in. She works as an administrative assistant at a small manufacturing company. The girls go to a public elementary and middle school, respectively. Kimberly drinks a glass of wine on special occasions, maybe 4 or 5 times a year, but she doesn't, and never has, used any other drugs. She feels it isn't necessary to talk with her girls about marijuana yet, since they are still so innocent. They enjoy sleep overs with their friends, dance lessons, and shopping at the local stores, so the thought of them using or being exposed to marijuana or other drugs is not even on Kimberly's radar at this point in their lives. Kimberly knows all the girls' friends' parents, and they all seem very "normal". She assumes that her girls are safe from exposure to marijuana now and plans to have that conversation when they start high school, or if she notices they are starting to hang out with the "wrong" crowd.

What Kimberly doesn't know is that a 5th grade student at Madison's elementary school had offered marijuana to another student on the playground during recess just last week. Madison heard rumors about it, but she didn't want her mom to worry since she knows her mom is already stressed out being a single parent, so she didn't tell her. She now feels scared and unsafe at school.

That same week while visiting a friend, Emily saw a pipe in her friend's parents' bedroom when they were helping to look for a missing cell phone. Her friend saw the confused look on Emily's face, so she quickly explained that her mom smokes pot to ease her anxiety and that it's OK because she has a prescription for it. She said her mother had explained to her that it's no different than taking a pill, but it is safer because it's not addictive and it's natural. After all, it's just a plant. Emily is shocked and a little frightened, but she doesn't dare tell her mom for fear she won't be able to go over to Jasmine's house anymore and she also doesn't want her mom to think badly of Jasmine's parents. Emily leaves Jasmine's house feeling very confused and conflicted. She doesn't feel like there is anyone she can talk to about it. Both girls have a lot of questions. What if someone offers me marijuana? How will it look to the other kids if I refuse? What would my mother think if she knew Jasmine's mother smoked pot? Jasmine's mom is a really nice person and I feel very safe at their house. Should I be worried about going over there now?

Jose and Maria's Story

Jose and Maria live in the suburbs and have twin daughters, aged 15. They have both worked hard to give their daughters a good education and a strong moral foundation. They have saved money for the girls' education and have set high expectations for their academic achievement. They have also required them to participate in sports, student government, and community service activities in their church. They have already begun looking into possible college scholarships. Both Jose and Maria

smoked pot when they were teenagers, which they have shared openly with their daughters. They explained that what they did was morally wrong, especially since they had broken the law and lied to their parents. They both expressed deep regret and shame about what they had done. As soon as the girls started middle school, their parents made it clear that if they were ever caught doing drugs, they would be severely punished.

As they got older and entered high school, a close family friend's eighteen-year old son was charged for possession of marijuana. They never would have dreamed Jason, whom they had known since he was a toddler, would use drugs, much less get into trouble with the law! Jose and Maria were broken hearted for the boy's parents and shared their anger and disappointment at what the boy had done. They were also terrified for their girls! They decided that the best thing to do was to lay down the law. They were going to make sure that their kids wouldn't dream of disobeying them. They told their girls that if that had been their kid, they would kick him out of the house, no discussion, no second chances. The girls listened silently as their parents' angry rant went on and on. Then they left the girls alone and went to their friends' house in order to give them support. The girls were left dumbfounded and frightened by their parent's reaction. They were also terribly worried about their friend, but they knew better than to try to contact him.

What Jose and Maria don't know is that both of their girls had known Jason was smoking pot for years and he takes pot from his parents hidden stash regularly. In fact, one of the girls has smoked with him. She resents her parents' "holier than thou" attitude about marijuana. They had experimented with it and turned out just fine, so why shouldn't she? Marijuana was legal now, so it must not be as dangerous as her parents think it is. They're just controlling and self righteous. Jason has always been a good friend to them and in fact, was kind and generous to everyone. Just because he smokes a little pot does not make him immoral or a bad person. She is furious at her parents for being so judgmental, and is determined to find someone she can trust to help Jason, which is obviously not her parents or his. There's no way her parents are going to scare her into stopping smoking pot. They're just uptight, they don't even understand her at all and what she is going through. She can't believe how cruel these adults are being to Jason when his only mistake was getting caught.

Carolyn and David's Story

Carolyn and David live in a large metropolitan city. They both have advanced degrees and professional jobs. They had traveled extensively throughout Europe before they had kids, and consider themselves cultured and progressive people. They are now parents to Dylan, 17, and Portia, 19. Dylan is in his senior year at a private performing arts high school and Portia is a sophomore at an Ivy league college.

Carolyn and David generally consider most Americans pretty uptight when it comes to sex and drugs, especially marijuana. They smoke pot occasionally in front of their kids, and have talked openly with them about it starting when they were in elementary school. They have always told their kids that smoking marijuana is no different than drinking alcohol, and now, since it's become legal, it's a shame that there is still such a stigma attached to its use. They have allowed their kids to have half a glass of wine with dinner since they were in their mid teens and none of them think twice about it. Carolyn and

David know that both of the kids have tried marijuana with their friends and they see no harm in them using it once in a while. They even smoked with their daughter once when she was home for summer break. After all, they have always been open and honest with them about the dangers of addiction, driving under the influence, and the legal consequences of possessing and selling drugs. In addition, they have strongly advised them to only use in private settings with people they know and trust.

They pride themselves in their close, trusting relationship with their kids and the fact that they have been honest and responsible role models. They feel that both of their kids are exceptionally mature for their age and are confident that they will make good choices. Most importantly, they know that if Dylan or Portia have any problems or questions, they have the kind of relationship that their kids will always feel comfortable talking to them about anything.

What Carolyn and David don't know is that Portia is in real trouble. She went from smoking pot occasionally in high school to almost daily throughout her freshman year and continuing up until now. Her parents don't know it yet, but she has already withdrawn from two of her classes because she has missed so many days. She just can't seem to get motivated to get up and get dressed. She is also finding it hard to concentrate during lectures, so when she does make it to class, she has no idea what the professor is talking about and can't keep up with her assignments. She is wondering what is wrong with her and why she feels so down all the time. She worries more everyday about telling her parents that she has withdrawn from her classes. It doesn't occur to her that marijuana could be the problem. Her parents have smoked pot for as long as she can remember and they are happy, healthy, and highly successful people. She feels like she's lazy and irresponsible and doesn't have what it takes to make it in college. She is ashamed to tell her parents because they have always had so much faith and trust in her.

Richard's Story

Richard is a fun loving, adventurous divorced father of three boys, whom he adores. They live in an apartment in a working class neighborhood. He and his ex wife share joint custody and have a friendly relationship. The kids alternate weeks with each parent. Richard's ex has been remarried for several years, and their co-parenting is working well.

When it is his off week, Richard spends most of his free time with his girlfriend. They have an active social life, and occasionally enjoy drinking alcohol and smoking pot. When he has his kids, it's a whole different story. He is diligent about making sure he has hidden all of his pot and paraphernalia and is never high around his kids. He and his girlfriend still drink beer while the kid are at his house, but never to excess. Richard considers himself a responsible, attentive, and doting father.

One day, however, after his kids returned from their week with their mother, his oldest son, Donavan, aged 12, shared with him that he found a bag of pot in his mother's kitchen. He told his dad that he was very worried about his mom and wondered if it was safe to go over there anymore. Richard was caught off guard and didn't know what to say at first, but he quickly gathered his thoughts and explained that marijuana is legal so his mom wasn't doing anything wrong. He also assured him that

it was completely safe to be around his mom, and that smoking marijuana in no way makes you a bad parent. His son seemed to be reassured somewhat, but Richard could tell that he was still uneasy about the whole situation.

As soon as Richard was alone with his girlfriend, he shared with her the conversation he had just had with Donovan. He was beside himself with worry and guilt. He had no idea what to do. He wondered whether he should tell his kids about his own marijuana use, but the idea of that felt completely overwhelming! How would he even begin the conversation? Richard ultimately decided that he would tell them at some point, but now was not the right time. After all, they were really too young to understand. Instead, he immediately went out and bought a box to lock up his pot and paraphernalia to ensure the kids wouldn't accidentally find it, and that was that.

What Richard doesn't know is that Donovan is not reassured at all. Although he believes what his dad has told him, he senses that his dad is worried and scared, but he is not sure why. He still feels uneasy about going back to his mom's house, but does not want to ask any more questions about it because he doesn't want to upset his dad, and he definitely won't talk to his mom, since he no longer trusts her.

He is also angry and disappointed with his mom for doing drugs. The kids at school who smoke pot are losers and he avoids them at all costs. His best friend's parents go to church every Sunday and don't even drink alcohol, much less use drugs! He wishes he had parents like that. He begins to ask to spend most weekends at his friends' house because he feels more comfortable there.

We hope this guide has provided a solid foundation from which parents can begin to change the conversation about marijuana with today's youth and young adults. It is imperative that we empower the next generation with reality based information and guidance they need in order to make informed decisions in today's post legalization reality.

Parents, schools and communities can find more information and courses on the MEI website at www.marijuana-education.com