



Strategies for Success: Talking to Your Teen about Marijuana

1. Set the stage for successful conversation. Taking the time to set a mutually convenient time to talk with your teen can make all the difference. We encourage you to allow your teen to set the time and place for the conversation. It is important to discuss this issue in private, and not in front of other children, as it shows that you respect your teen's privacy. If your son/daughter cannot give a time, ask why this is such a problem. Listen to the answer and then state that you understand and that this is difficult for both of you but that it is important. Suggest some alternate options again and have them think about it and get back to you with their decision.

- a. Ex. "There's something I'd like to talk with you about. It's important. When can you make some time?" or "I'll let you decide when it would be a good time to talk and you can get back to me tonight before dinner time, let me know."

2. Use a caring and nonjudgmental tone of voice. It can really help to use a neutral, nonjudgmental tone of voice when talking to your teen. This is often easier said than done - especially when you're worried. However, teens are very sensitive to tone and any perceived disapproval or judgment. You can convey disapproval through your tone of voice, facial expressions, or body language - even if the words you're using aren't judgmental. Teens often avoid conversations about marijuana use because they fear being punished, judged, blamed, or misunderstood. Using a caring tone can encourage them to be more honest with you.

Maintaining a neutral and inquiring tone takes work - it means that you have to keep your own feelings in check throughout the conversation. Try not to show anger, disapproval, resentment, disappointment, or contempt.

- a. Ex. "I've noticed that your grades have been dropping lately and I'm concerned that things aren't going as well for you these days." OR "I've noticed that we don't talk as much as we used to lately and that you're spending more time with kids from another school. What's going on?"

- 3. If you are nervous or uncomfortable, it is okay to share this with your teen.** If you're finding that starting the conversation is difficult, remember that it's probably equally as uncomfortable and difficult for your teen. Admitting that you're feeling nervous and that this is a sensitive topic can help diffuse the tension and can set a positive tone - making the conversation easier for both of you. If the two of you have had difficult, but important conversations in the past, remind your teen of those experiences.
- Ex. "I guess there are some things that happen in families from time to time that aren't easy to talk about, for the parents or for the kids. I want to talk to you about something important and I would like to get it right. I know we've had a hard time talking about difficult things in the past, but I love and care about you so much. I hope you'll give me a chance to talk and hear me out."
- 4. Talk about the feelings that YOU are having.** When expressing your concerns, it may be helpful to use "I-Statements". These allow you to talk to the other person in a way that doesn't blame them for the way you're feeling. I-Statements are helpful because they keep the focus on you and make it less likely that the conversation will turn into an argument. 9 out of 10 times, making a You-Statement (assumptions about how your teen is feeling, thinking, or doing) results in a disagreement with your teen where you both feel stuck.
- Ex. "I'm feeling worried about your marijuana use. I'm concerned about the risks you may be facing and I wanted to let you know that." OR "I'm feeling worried about your marijuana use. We hardly spend time together anymore and I miss spending time with you. I'm not sure what marijuana has to do with this, but I'm worried by what's been happening to our relationship."
- 5. Share the positives with your teen.** It's important to remind your teen that you love them and admire their strengths and potential. Receiving criticism or concern is difficult for anyone and communicating your appreciation and respect for your teen can make them more ready to listen. If you're concerned about your teen's marijuana use, remember to let them know that marijuana use is only one aspect of them as a person. Focusing on their strengths and successes will let them know that you care. Find examples of things that you like about your teen and share with them. Most of us, when having a difficult conversation, need to know that our positive qualities shine through.
- Ex. "I know that it's hard for you to talk to me about marijuana use, but I would really like to talk more with you because I've been concerned. This is so important to me because I really care about you. And, I really admire how hard you've been working at school and with your photography."