

FOR EVERY HIGH THERE'S A LOW.
BE DRUG WISE.

Straight Talk About Marijuana



“OUR MISSION..”

IS TO HELP THE PEOPLE OF CANADA MAINTAIN
AND IMPROVE THEIR HEALTH.”

— Health Canada

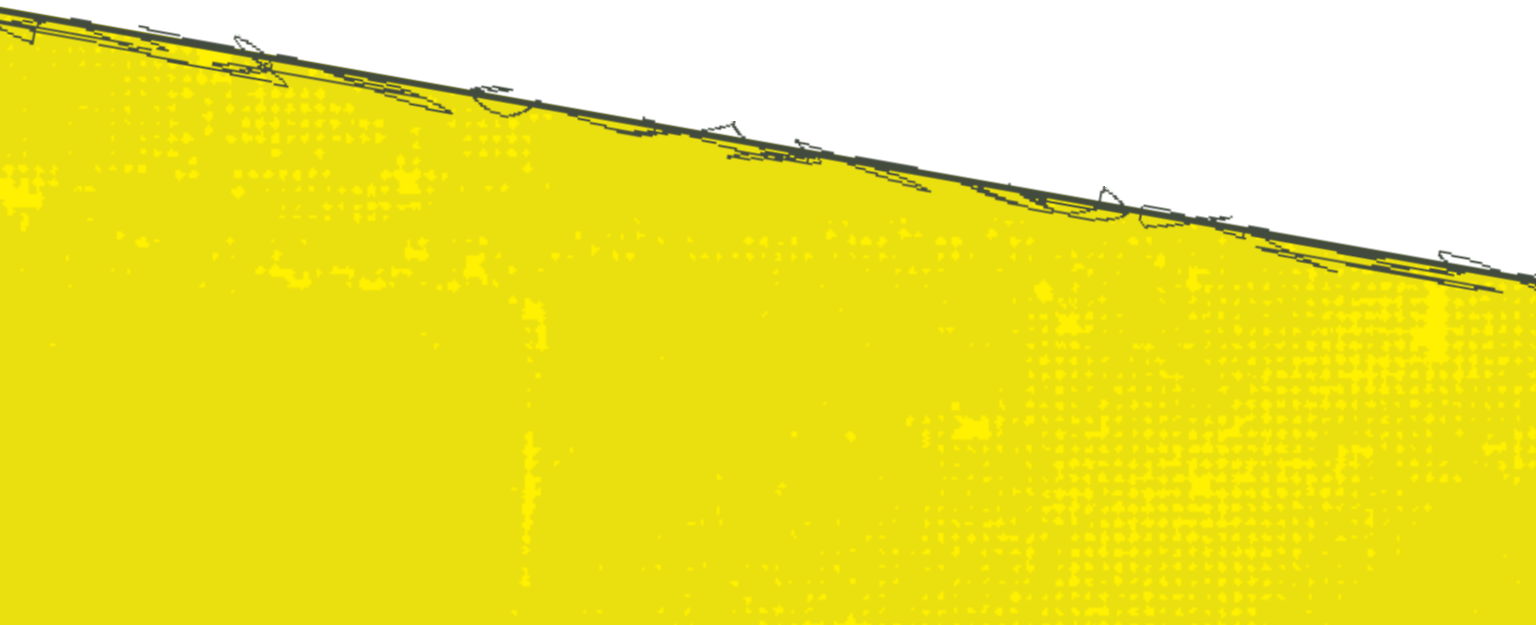


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01.

FOR PARENTS

There are two main sections: one for parents and one for youth. There is also a centre section—Straight Talk About Marijuana—to help young people and their parents discuss this subject openly.

MARIJUANA – GET THE FACTS

In 2003, the Government of Canada announced the renewal of Canada's Drug Strategy. The objective of this Strategy is to address the problems associated with substance use and abuse, and to reduce the demand for, and supply of, drugs. As part of this Strategy, the Government of Canada is developing a public education campaign aimed at discouraging first use and regular use of marijuana and other substances. This booklet has been designed to help parents and youth talk about marijuana and its effects, and to encourage informed and healthy decision-making.

THE CHALLENGE

Today's youth are faced with many choices and challenges as they make their way to adulthood. Their world is complex and the day-to-day decisions they must make are significant. Marijuana is the most commonly-used illegal substance in Canada. It is also popular among a large number of youth and, for many of them, it's as socially acceptable as tobacco and alcohol. Many will be tempted to try it.

AT WHAT AGE DO YOUNG PEOPLE GET EXPOSED TO MARIJUANA?

Health Canada's research indicates that most youth who try marijuana do so in their early teens, so that making choices about using marijuana starts at that time. This information is entirely consistent with an early teen's maturation process, since adolescence is a time of emotional, intellectual, social and sexual evolution. In this swirl of psychological and physical transformation, youth seek new experiences in an effort to define their own identity; rules may be challenged, and limits tested. Yet, at the same time that they are asserting their individuality, self-esteem and self-confidence often remain fragile. Parents may find themselves squarely in the middle of these changes.

SO WHAT CAN I DO?

Parenting a teenager is a balancing act. You are there to help your child make the right choices but you may rightfully feel that the influence of peers is stronger than yours. Yet, even at a time when your teen is rebellious, argumentative and critical of you personally, they still need you to discuss issues and choices with them since, for most youth, parents remain one of the most powerful influences in their life. In a recent poll by Health Canada,* 87% of young people said they would trust their parents for information on marijuana.

* Health Canada—Youth and Marijuana Quantitative Research. Final Report. December 2003.



PREPARE YOURSELF

If you want to talk to your son or daughter about marijuana, a basic understanding of the substance and its effects can help you assist them in making wise choices. You should also keep in mind your own relationship with psychoactive substances, past and present, and show a readiness to make healthy choices. Balance, consistency, respect and open-mindedness will help promote your discussion. Anger, panic or other negative reactions may end it. For example, there are various degrees of marijuana use, from one-time experimentation to problematic use, and acknowledging that fact is not the same as condoning it. You can still express your preferences to your children, but your views will have more impact if you are able to speak to them rationally and without judging them.

SO WHAT IS MARIJUANA?

Marijuana, pot, grass, weed, smoke...they are all the same. They come from the cannabis plant. Hash and hash oil also come from this plant. This plant grows all over the world, including Canada.

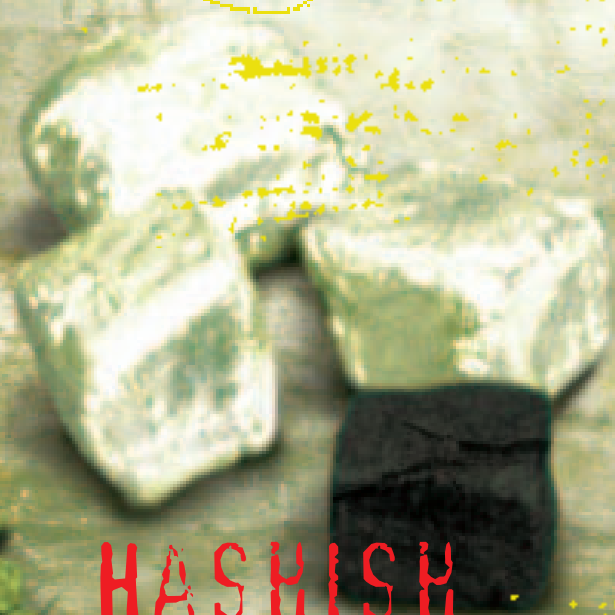
- **MARIJUANA** IS A GREENISH OR BROWNISH MATERIAL CONSISTING OF THE DRIED FLOWERING-TOPS AND LEAVES OF THE PLANT. IT HAS A DISTINCTIVE, PUNGENT ODOUR WHEN IT'S SMOKED. THE POTENCY CAN VARY SIGNIFICANTLY FROM ONE PLANT TO ANOTHER ALTHOUGH THE RUMOURS OF EXTREMELY POWERFUL "SUPERWEED" ARE LARGELY UNTRUE.
- **HASHISH** OR CANNABIS RESIN IS THE RESINOUS SECRETION OF THE FLOWERING TOPS OF THE CANNABIS PLANT. IT IS SOLD IN SOLID PIECES THAT VARY IN TEXTURE FROM HARD AND DRY TO SOFT AND GUMMY. IT IS GENERALLY MORE POTENT THAN MARIJUANA.
- **HASH OIL** IS A THICK GREENISH-BLACK OR REDDISH-BROWN OIL MADE BY CONCENTRATING HASHISH WITH ALCOHOL OR SOME OTHER ORGANIC SOLVENT. IT IS MORE POTENT THAN MARIJUANA OR HASHISH.

Marijuana smoke contains more than 400 chemicals, including some of the same cancer-causing substances found in tobacco smoke.

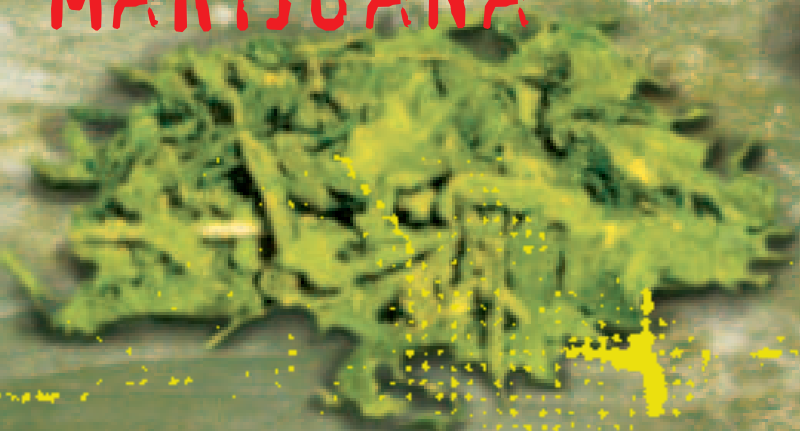


HASH OIL

MARIJUANA



HASHISH



WHAT MAKES YOU HIGH?

Marijuana has psychoactive effects. That is, marijuana works on the brain. The main psychoactive ingredient is called tetrahydrocannabinol or THC, and it affects those parts of the brain that are linked to pain sensations, emotion and movement.

HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

Most people describe a sense of euphoria and they become very relaxed. Often they giggle and laugh a lot and get cravings for certain types of food. Their mouth gets dry and, after a while, they become drowsy. Since sensations are heightened, people often perceive colours as brighter and music as more distinct. Often marijuana will distort the user's sense of time and space. Impaired coordination and balance, a rapid heartbeat, red eyes and dilated pupils may also be immediate effects. These are all indications that marijuana is working on the brain.

Each time a person tries marijuana the effects may be different, depending on the amount, the potency, the mood a person is in when they use it and the environment in which it is consumed. Also a person can never be sure how long the effects will last.



WHETHER A PERSON EATS, SMOKES OR DRINKS MARIJUANA,
EACH METHOD HAS ITS RISKS.

SOME THINGS TO LOOK FOR IF YOU THINK YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER MAY BE USING MARIJUANA...

RUB'N SNIFF FOR A WHIFF...

- You can smell it on their clothes or in their hair
- Their eyes are red or glazed over
- Their pupils are dilated

... and over the longer term

- Their grades are going down at school
- They display secretive behaviour
- He/she has a different group of friends



CAN YOU HAVE A BAD TRIP ON MARIJUANA?

Sometimes people become withdrawn, fearful, anxious or depressed. A small percentage experience more severe effects such as panic or terror especially if the amount they have taken is larger or more potent than what they are used to.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

MANY PEOPLE MAINTAIN THAT, BECAUSE MARIJUANA IS A PLANT, IT MUST BE HARMLESS. THAT'S NOT THE CASE. THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH MARIJUANA USE FALL INTO FOUR CATEGORIES: PHYSICAL HEALTH, PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH, SAFETY AND LEGAL ASPECTS.



PHYSICAL HEALTH RISKS.

RESPIRATORY SYSTEM

Smoking marijuana releases tar into the lungs in the same way that smoking tobacco does. There are more than 400 chemicals in marijuana smoke, some of which can affect the lungs, throat and esophagus.



DAILY OR REGULAR USE OF MARIJUANA
MAY CAUSE RESPIRATORY PROBLEMS SUCH
AS CHRONIC COUGH AND CHRONIC OR
RECURRING BRONCHITIS.

THE USE OF MARIJUANA WITH ALCOHOL
IS FAR MORE DANGEROUS THAN THE TWO USED
SEPARATELY. THE INTOXICATING EFFECTS
OF BOTH DRUGS USED AT THE SAME TIME
INCREASE IMPAIRMENT. IN THIS CASE 1 + 1
DOES NOT EQUAL 2, BUT MORE LIKE 3 OR 4.

MARIJUANA SMOKE HAS SOME OF THE SAME CANCER-CAUSING AGENTS AS TOBACCO SMOKE

Marijuana and cigarette smoke contain some of the same cancer-causing substances. The concentration of one cancer-producing agent, benzopyrene, in marijuana smoke may be even higher than in tobacco smoke.

COORDINATION AND BALANCE

Marijuana lessens coordination and balance, and impairs motor skills so that activities such as driving a car or riding a bike may become dangerous. If marijuana and alcohol are used together, reflexes and motor skills become even more impaired.

REPRODUCTION AND PREGNANCY

Marijuana can lower inhibitions and impair judgment. Lowered inhibitions have been known to result in unprotected sex, increased possibilities of sexually transmitted diseases, and potential unwanted pregnancies.

Marijuana may interfere with human reproduction. Some research shows a decline in sex hormones in young boys and possible disturbances of the menstrual cycle in girls. In the critical early stages of pregnancy, smoking may be harmful to the baby.



PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH RISKS.

- Cognitive effects** Regular use of marijuana interferes with the ability to concentrate and impairs learning and some aspects of memory. This can affect a person's studies and the quality of their work in school or on the job.
- Mental health** In people that are at high risk for schizophrenia, such as those with a family history of the disorder, marijuana use may trigger psychotic episodes. Some research has shown that frequent marijuana use is a risk factor for later depression and anxiety.
- Problematic use** Regular high-amount users of marijuana may become dependent, meaning that they do not feel that they can function without marijuana and will, therefore, continue to use it despite its negative impact on their lives. Some marijuana withdrawal symptoms such as cramping and insomnia have been observed.

Research indicates that the age of first use is inversely related to high consumption rates and problem use later in life. That means if a young person starts using marijuana at an early age, he or she is more likely to develop problems with substances in the future than a person who first uses marijuana later in life.

Youth don't have to smoke marijuana daily for it to be considered a problem. For instance, if their use is interfering with obligations at home, school or work, if they are using it alone or in the morning, or if they are initiating use under 14 years of age, their consumption may be problematic. If these signs of problematic use exist, they may also be indications that issues or problems beyond their marijuana use need to be resolved.

IF USING MARIJUANA IS INTERFERING WITH A YOUTH'S OBLIGATIONS AT HOME, WORK OR SCHOOL, IT MAY BE AN INDICATION THAT HE OR SHE IS EXPERIENCING PROBLEMATIC USE OF MARIJUANA.



WEATHERS RISKS.

Being high impairs an individual's judgment, mental and physical ability to perform tasks.

Any activity requiring concentration, good judgment, eyesight, coordination, timing or fast reactions may be dangerous for those who are high on marijuana.

Marijuana intoxication can pose serious safety risks while riding a bicycle, operating machinery, driving a car or even crossing a busy street.



DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF MARIJUANA

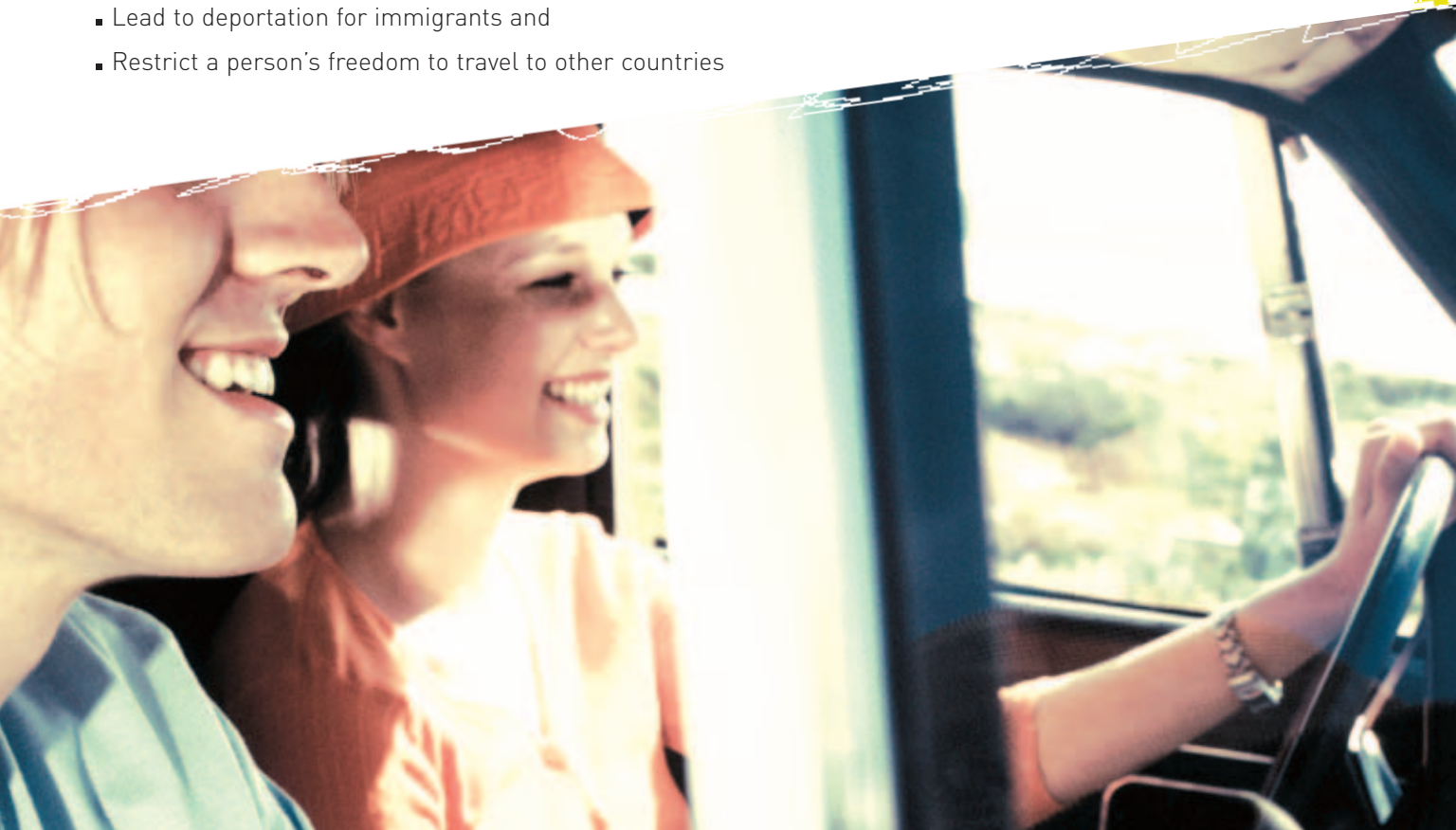
- Driving under the influence of any substance, including marijuana, is considered a serious criminal offence. Police are being trained to spot people driving while under the influence of marijuana and other psychoactive substances.
- The combined use of marijuana and alcohol, even in low amounts, has been shown to produce severe driving impairment and increase the risk of accidents. In fact, driving while under the influence of any substance is a bad idea.

LEGAL RISKS.

Marijuana is a controlled substance in Canada under the **Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA)**. It is a criminal offence to import, export, grow, possess, sell, give or otherwise traffic marijuana, or to possess marijuana for the purpose of trafficking. It is also an offence to simply possess marijuana. Such offences could result in a criminal conviction and carry with them a criminal punishment.

Convictions for any of these offences may result in a fine and/or imprisonment. A conviction can

- Ruin a person's credibility when they are trying to find a job
- Prevent them from entering certain professions
- Lead to deportation for immigrants and
- Restrict a person's freedom to travel to other countries

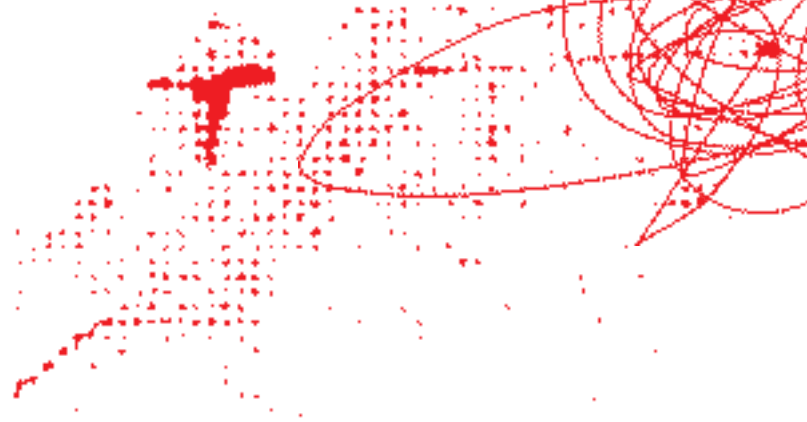


BUT I THOUGHT THE GOVERNMENT LEGALIZED MARIJUANA.



WRONG.

MARIJUANA IS, AND WILL REMAIN, ILLEGAL.



Recently, there has been a lot of confusion about the legal status of marijuana in Canada due in large part to media coverage concerning public debates about changing the offences and penalties related to illegal possession and cultivation of marijuana. Let's settle the issue then: marijuana is, and will remain, illegal. There's only one exception and it's a very clear one: when marijuana is used for medical purposes as authorized under the **Marihuana Medical Access Regulations** (MMAR).

MARIJUANA FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES

Marijuana is not approved as a therapeutic drug in Canada or any country in the world. At present, current scientific evidence has not clearly established the safety and efficacy of marijuana when used for medical purposes.

The **Marihuana Medical Access Regulations** (MMAR) provide a framework to allow, under certain circumstances, individuals with serious medical conditions to possess or cultivate marijuana for medical purposes.

Under the MMAR, the support of a doctor is necessary as part of the application process for an authorization to possess marijuana for medical purposes. The MMAR deal exclusively with the medical use of marijuana. Without authorization under the MMAR, persons using marijuana for medical purposes in Canada are breaking the law.

MARIJUANA LAWS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Each country has its own laws regarding drugs—some of them are much more severe than in Canada. Being Canadian doesn't exempt you from those local laws. If you break the law in another country, you are subject to that country's judicial system. If you possess marijuana while travelling, you could end up paying a stiff fine, spending time in jail or possibly even facing the death penalty. Thousands of Canadians are in jail abroad—many of them for drug-related offences. If you use or possess marijuana or other drugs when you travel, then you should familiarize yourself with the laws of foreign countries before you go. To learn more, visit http://www.voyage.gc.ca/main/drugs_menu-en.asp.



WHY

DO YOUNG PEOPLE USE
MARIJUANA?




YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE TOLD HEALTH CANADA* THEY CHOOSE TO USE MARIJUANA TO

- HAVE A GOOD TIME
- EXPERIMENT
- RELAX
- RELIEVE BOREDOM
- COPE WITH PROBLEMS
- STIMULATE CREATIVITY
- BE ONE OF THE CROWD
- BE DIFFERENT

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE TOLD HEALTH CANADA THEY CHOOSE NOT TO USE MARIJUANA BECAUSE

- OF THE HEALTH RISKS
- IT'S ILLEGAL
- OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS
- OF THE SAFETY RISKS
- IT'S A WASTE OF MONEY
- IT CAN HAVE A BAD EFFECT ON SCHOOL OR THEIR FUTURE CAREER CHOICES
- IT'S USED TO ESCAPE PROBLEMS INSTEAD OF DEALING WITH THEM
- IT MAY UPSET THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILY



HERE'S WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT MARIJUANA

THE RESULTS OF A 2003 HEALTH CANADA POLL* ON SUBSTANCE USE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE 12 - 19 YEARS FOUND THAT

- One third of all teens aged 12 -19 have tried smoking marijuana more than once, with use being reported more frequently by the older teens.
- Around 8% of all teens report smoking marijuana at least once a week.
- Less than 3% of all teens reported "using" daily.
- 19% of those who have smoked marijuana say they do it out of curiosity; another 19% do it because their friends do it.
- 39% of teens who use marijuana say they smoke it at a friend's house, 19% say they do it at parties; 16% at a neighbourhood park and 7% say they smoke marijuana at school.
- 88% of teens think it is very dangerous to be in a car if the driver has been smoking marijuana.
- 90% of teens say that taking illegal drugs is dangerous or very dangerous.
- 79% of youth say that prolonged use of marijuana will result in worse grades in school.

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH...

The rates of use highlighted above are consistent with other recent survey results available at the time of printing. For example, the **Canadian Addiction Survey (2004)** of Canadians 15 years of age and older indicates an increasing trend in marijuana use among youth.

Although some of these figures are encouraging, we know that thousands of young people will be trying marijuana for the first time this year. What can you do to help your sons and daughters with these tough decisions?

In the process of physical and psychological growth, teens may seek out new experiences and test limits. They may also become brazen and confrontational, sullen and withdrawn, and everything in between. And it may all be perfectly normal. For most youth, marijuana use isn't an isolated act, it's something that fits into this range of behaviour.

Maintaining a communicative relationship, however difficult it may be at times, is important. Respect for youth as individuals, anticipation and your own willingness to adjust are key elements in this communication. On the other hand, youth still need clear and consistent expectations, routines and values. A firm line by parents in asserting their authority needs to be balanced with restraint and tolerance of their teen's development and lifestyle. Here are some guidelines—some of which are a balancing act in themselves—to help you achieve the goal of communication and relative harmony:

- Convey your concerns without being judgmental. Strive to express yourself in clear and well-founded opinions and observations, not condemnation. Whenever possible, look for constructive and positive solutions.

- Stay interested in your teen's activities without appearing to intrude into their lives.
- Remain conscious of teen sensibilities. Their self-esteem may still be very fragile so that teasing and jokes that appear innocuous to adults may seem very different to youth. Help them build their self-confidence rather than taking it away from them.
- Set clear, firm and rational expectations. In spite of their protestations, they will know what to expect from you as well as knowing your expectations of them.
- Make your love for them clear and unconditional. Reiterate your support for them regardless of what issues might arise.

In following these guidelines, we hope that you will talk to your teens and help them make an informed choice about marijuana—and other issues. Keep in mind that, while extremes of behaviour may be normal among adolescents, continued or worsening negative patterns may be signs that something more serious is at stake. It might be problematic substance use rather than experimentation or it might be linked to other issues such as depression. You therefore shouldn't hesitate to use outside resources such as those listed in this booklet if you feel that you need this extra assistance. As a start, you can check out the following Web sites:

Health Canada <http://www.drugwise.gc.ca/>

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

<http://www.ccsa.ca/>

Canadian Health Network

<http://www.canadian-health-network.ca/>