

Preventing youth from using marijuana: Information for educators, school administrators and other youth-serving professionals



One in five Oregon 11th graders and nearly one in ten eighth graders in 2015 reported using marijuana in the past month.(1) Now that marijuana is legal for people over age 21 in Oregon, youth may have even more access to it. Positive relationships with adults can play a large role in supporting youth to make healthy and safe choices. This document provides a quick look at marijuana legalization and recommends steps adults in schools can take to prevent youth marijuana use.



Marijuana legalization

On July 1, 2015, marijuana use and possession in Oregon by those over the age of 21 became legal. To learn more about what is legal in Oregon related to marijuana, visit www.whatslegaloregon.com/.

Marijuana and youth brain development

Brain development is not complete until people are in their mid-20s. Youth should not use marijuana to get high while this process is occurring. Marijuana may cause difficulty in learning, memory issues and lower math and reading scores. In short, the more often youth get high, the harder it may be for them to learn. Also, adolescents' and young adults' marijuana use — even occasional use — is associated with high-risk use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs when they are adults.(2)

Preventing student marijuana use

- **Keep channels of communication open**
Listen carefully to students and stay positive. Keep the conversation open so they can come to you with questions. Knowing they can ask you questions helps students make good decisions for their future. Tailor your conversations to the age and developmental stage of your students.

Marijuana can get in the way of students' goals. Ask about their dreams and help them connect with what they need to achieve their goals. Be honest, and explain how avoiding marijuana use can help them reach their goals.

Remind students that marijuana use can have other negative consequences:

- » Breaking school or after school activity rules: Youth could lose the ability to participate in extracurricular activities, be suspended or expelled.
 - » Breaking Oregon laws: Youth may be cited for Minor in Possession, which can lead to fines, public service labor and loss of a driver's license.
 - » Breaking federal laws: Since marijuana is still illegal at the federal level, youth with marijuana charges may find it hard to get financial aid for college.
- **Have clear, effective and equitably enforced policies**
Ensure your district's policies that prohibit alcohol and other drugs on campus are clearly visible to all students. Policies should include the following components:
 - » Ban possession and use of all marijuana products, including marijuana-related clothing.
 - » Define smoking in your policy to also include inhalant delivery systems (vaping products and e-cigarettes).

Remind students of their responsibility to uphold these policies and assure that staff and administrators enforce the policies equitably.

- **Promote alternatives to suspension and expulsion**

Promote alternatives to suspension that improve educational outcomes, like restorative justice approaches. More information about restorative justice can be found at www.dignityinschools.org.

- **Connect students to help when needed**

At the beginning of each school year, remind students, parents and staff about the school's substance use policy and consequences. Let everyone know how to get help for problems with alcohol or other drug use. The Lines for Life Helpline provides confidential crisis intervention and referral 24/7 at 1-800-923-HELP (800-923-4357).

- **Use evidence-based health education curricula and tools**

- » Adapt existing evidence-based curricula to reflect marijuana legalization for those over 21. Many students will likely see trusted adults using marijuana. Youth need to be engaged in thinking about their futures and making their own health choices. The following messages resonate with youth:

- ◆ When you get high, you may have difficulty learning, memory issues and lower math and reading scores. The more you get high, the harder it may be to learn.
- ◆ Brain development is not complete until your 20s. For the best chance to reach your full potential, you should not use marijuana to get high while you are young.

- » Use evidence-based and research-based marijuana prevention materials, or adopt additional curricula that contain marijuana prevention information and activities. Examples of curricula that meet this standard include*:

- ◆ Good Behavior Game
- ◆ Guiding Good Choices
- ◆ Incredible Years

- ◆ Keepin' It Real
- ◆ Life Skills Training – Middle School
- ◆ Lions Quest Skills for Adolescence
- ◆ Project Northland
- ◆ Project Star (Midwestern Prevention Project)
- ◆ Mentoring for Students (Across Ages, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Career Beginnings Sponsor-a-Scholar)
- ◆ Strengthening Families Program: For Parents and Youth 10–14

- **Support students to help one another**

Mentor students to organize clubs promoting healthy and fun activities and peer-led health promotion messages. In general, students may believe that most



youth use marijuana. Changing beliefs is difficult, but supporting youth to look at youth health risk and behavior data (Oregon Healthy Teens Survey or Student Wellness Survey) can generate conversations about real and perceived social norms. Messages should reinforce that making healthy choices now will help them succeed in school and achieve their dreams.

- **Positive school climate supports achievement and healthy development**

Be aware of how marijuana is discussed among staff and administrators. A positive school climate supports healthy and open dialogue among youth and adults on a range of issues, including the risks of substance use. Attention to school climate initiatives supports student achievement and healthy development. Find more information about school climate at <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/scirp/about>.

* The evidence base on effective marijuana prevention curricula in a 21-and-older legalized marijuana environment is evolving. These examples were gathered from analysis done by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Washington Department of Health. Check www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ when selecting youth marijuana interventions.

Citations

- 1 Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division. Oregon healthy teens survey, 2015 [cited 2016 July 27]. Available from: <https://public.health.oregon.gov/BirthDeathCertificates/Surveys/OregonHealthyTeens/Pages/index.aspx>.
- 2 Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division Retail Marijuana Scientific Advisory Committee. Effect of adolescent marijuana use on health and other outcomes — approved statements 2016 May 17 [cited 2016 July 27]. Available from: <https://public.health.oregon.gov/PreventionWellness/marijuana/Documents/rmsac/rmsac-statements-adolescent-mj-use.pdf>.



For more information and ideas, visit:

- Healthoregon.org/marijuana
- www.staytrueto you.org
- www.AboveTheInfluence.com
- www.TooSmartToStart.samhsa.gov



The marijuana universal symbol means a product contains marijuana and should be kept in its original packaging, out of the reach of children.

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