

Talking to Kids About Recreational Cannabis

As of October 17, 2018 recreational cannabis will be legal for people aged 19 and over. This presents a new challenge for parents: how do you talk to kids about a drug that was once illegal and is now becoming more socially and legally accepted? Although it is still illegal for kids to use recreational cannabis, many will be very curious about it, and some will use it. It is important for parents to try to understand this reality and invite conversations about cannabis. You might consider approaching this conversation similar to how you would discuss alcohol and tobacco.

This resource provides information about some of the health risks associated with recreational cannabis use and offers considerations to guide a conversation for parents/guardians/caregivers who wish to talk to kids about recreational cannabis.

Ontario's doctors believe that recreational cannabis is an inherently harmful substance and the health risks caused by recreational cannabis can best be avoided by abstaining from use. There is strong evidence that demonstrates that recreational cannabis impacts brain development through early adulthood. For that reason, Ontario's doctors advocate that those under 25 years of age abstain from recreational cannabis. More research on cannabis is required to inform broader clinical evidence.

It is important to keep in mind that this resource is intended for discussions about recreational cannabis. This document is not intended to inform discussions about medicinal cannabis used for therapeutic purposes. Further, health impacts from recreational cannabis use can vary depending on a number of factors including, but not limited to: age of user, THC levels, consumption method and frequency of use.

Cannabis 101

What is cannabis?

Cannabis is a product derived from the *Cannabis sativa* plant.

Cannabis contains hundreds of chemical substances known as cannabinoids. Each plant has tiny, clear hairs that stick out from the plant's leaves and flowers, these hairs are called trichomes. Cannabinoids are stored in the plant's trichomes and can change how cells act and talk to each other.

Terpenes give cannabis its distinct smell. Terpenes are chemicals that are produced and stored in the trichomes with cannabinoids.

What is the endocannabinoid system?

The endocannabinoid system has been linked with the following processes: neural development, immune function, inflammation, appetite, metabolism and energy balance, cardiovascular function, digestion, bone development and density, learning and memory, pain, reproduction, psychiatric disease, motor skills, wake/sleep cycles, and the regulation of stress and emotions.

What is THC?

Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the cannabinoid responsible for how the body reacts to cannabis, including intoxication.

What is CBD?

Cannabidiol (CBD) is a cannabinoid that does not intoxicate users or produce a high, but it does affect ion channels, receptors and enzymes. There is some evidence that CBD can block or decrease the effects of THC. Common effects of CBD and reasons for use include: anti-inflammatory, anti-nausea, anti-psychotic, anti-ischemic, anti-anxiety, as well as pain management, to improve sleep or to reduce seizures.



Other names for cannabis

Commonly used terms include 'recreational cannabis' and 'adult use cannabis' for cannabis that is used outside of a therapeutic setting.

There are several other terms for cannabis. Language and terminology may vary depending on social groups, age, culture and communities.

The Government of Canada lists the following as additional names for cannabis:

- Marijuana
- Pot
- Bud
- Dope
- Weed
- Boom
- Skunk
- Shatter
- Budder
- Erll
- Wax
- Herb
- Honeycomb
- Trees
- Gangster
- Keef
- Rosin
- Ganja
- Mary Jane (MJ)
- Purp
- Dank or dank krippy

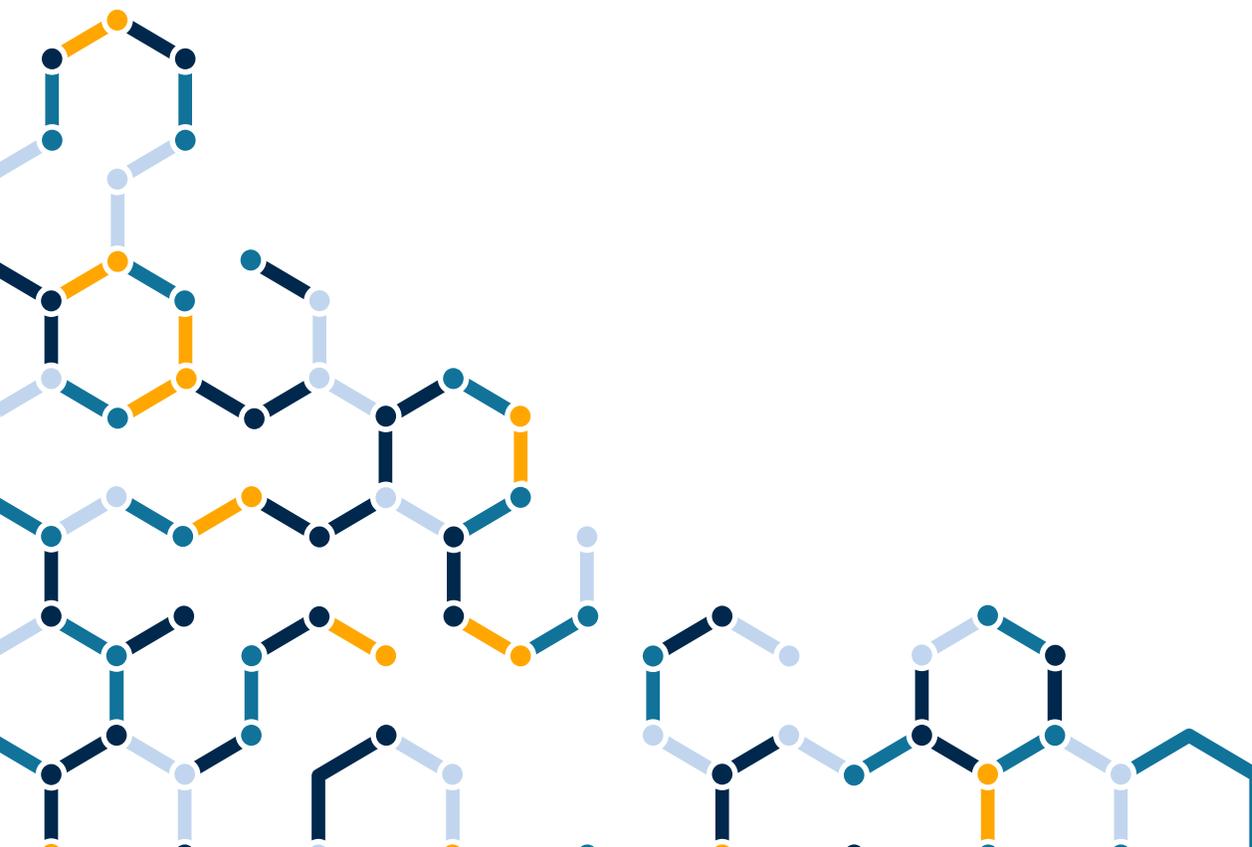
A prepared amount of cannabis that is made for smoking may be called:

- Joint
- Spliff
- Doobie



Consumption Methods

Consumption Method	What is it?	How long until user feels effect?
Smoking	Dried flower from the cannabis plant is rolled to make a joint, or used in a pipe or bong	Felt within seconds of inhalation
Vaping	Vaporizers heat rather than combust cannabis plant matter or its oil, cannabis vapour is inhaled rather than smoked	Felt within seconds of inhalation
Cannabis Oil	Highly concentrated cannabis extract where a solvent has been used to separate essential oils of the cannabis plant	Felt within 15 minutes to 1 hour
Edibles	Cannabis that is ingested through food or drinks Effects can be dependent on users metabolism and if cannabis has been ingested with other food or on an empty stomach	Felt within 15 minutes to two hours of ingestion
Tinctures	Small amount of this alcohol-based cannabis extract is incorporated into food or drink, or placed under tongue	Felt within 20-30 minutes
Dabbing or Shattering	Concentrated doses of cannabis made from extracting cannabinoids, users heat the concentrate on a hot surface and inhale	Felt immediately after inhalation



Health Effects of Recreational Cannabis

Addiction and Problematic Use

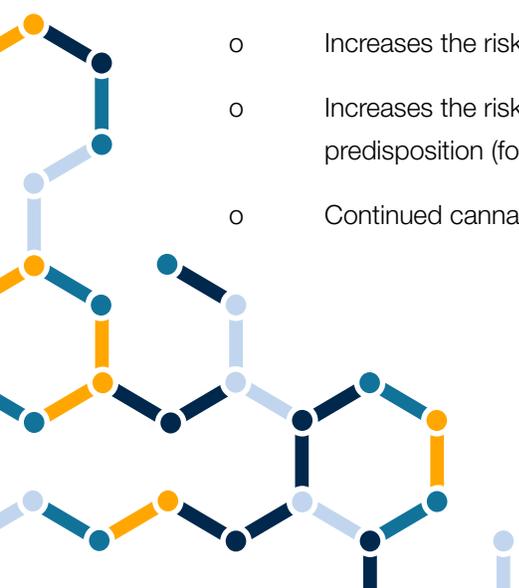
- Recreational cannabis can be addictive. The addiction risk is 1 in 6 for those who start using as a teen.
- Cannabis withdrawal includes: irritability, anger or aggression, anxiety, depressed mood, restlessness, difficulty sleeping, decreased appetite, and weight loss.
- Adolescence is the most common time for onset.

Cannabis smoke & second-hand smoke

- Exposure to cannabis smoke can trigger acute and chronic health issues that include: cardiovascular events, asthma, cancers, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and a range of respiratory and circulatory conditions.
- Cannabis smokers tend to inhale more deeply and hold their breath for longer, which can push cancer-causing agents to travel further into the lungs.
- Exposure to second hand cannabis smoke contains many of the same toxins found in cannabis smoke that is directly inhaled, including carcinogens.

Cannabis and mental health

- Recreational cannabis use can trigger or heighten symptoms of anxiety and or depression.
- Recreational cannabis use in teenage years is linked to the development of mood and anxiety disorders and an increased likelihood of developing psychiatric disorders later in life.
- Cannabis use and schizophrenia:
 - o Increases the risk of developing schizophrenia in youth
 - o Increases the risk of triggering an early onset of schizophrenia for an individual that has a genetic predisposition (for example, family history)
 - o Continued cannabis use for an individual with schizophrenia can heighten psychotic symptoms



Cognitive effects

Recreational cannabis use is known to have negative effects on cognition in both the short and long term. The immediate effects normally lessen within about six hours of use, although cognitive impacts have been seen for up to 3 weeks after cessation.

More evidence-based research on the cognitive impacts of cannabis is required. Below is a list of known acute and long-term effects that can be caused by cannabis use. While these effects are general, the severity may be impacted by THC levels, age of the person using, and frequency of use.

Acute cognitive effects

- Inattentiveness
- Impaired judgement
- Impaired decision making
- Challenges in processing and retaining information
- Impaired motor coordination and reaction time

Long-term cognitive effects for regular users

- Challenges with problem solving and learning
- Challenges with inattentiveness
- Challenges with memory
- Challenges with processing complex information

What to Look for if You're Concerned Your Kid is Using Recreational Cannabis

What to look for at home

If you are concerned that your kid is using recreational cannabis, there are several items that you can look out for aside from the actual drug. These items include:

- Rolling papers
- Bongs
- Cigars
- Pipes
- Vaporizers
- Small plastic bags
- Lighters





What are the signs my kid may be using recreational cannabis or have a problem with recreational cannabis use?

Recreational cannabis use can sometimes be hard to spot, many of the warning signs of use or a problem can look like typical behaviour for teens. Signs to watch out for include:

- Challenges at school and decline in work and grades
- Losing interest in activities that used to be fun and important
- Challenges with responsibilities
- Change in health, sleep habits, and appetite
- Challenges with relationships and family members
- Change in mood
- Acting secretive, less open or honest
- Using recreational cannabis more frequently
- Borrowing money
- Unable to control recreational cannabis use

Considerations to Guide a Conversation

Be informed

Before you talk with your kid about recreational cannabis, it is important to be informed on what recreational cannabis is, the different consumption methods and the health effects of recreational cannabis.

Encourage honesty and communication

It is important that your kid feels comfortable talking about recreational cannabis. Approach discussions openly and create an environment that encourages ongoing communication.

There are no stereotypes

Recreational cannabis crosses all ages, cultures, genders, and socioeconomic groups.

Give the facts

Recreational cannabis could interact with other medications. The most significant interactions are between cannabis and other central nervous system drugs (sedative-hypnotics or alcohol).

Give the facts

Try to be objective when discussing recreational cannabis and give the facts about how using it can impact health. Recreational cannabis can have negative health impacts that include: harmful effects on mental health and addiction, cognitive effects, respiratory and circulatory diseases and impairment.

This is not one conversation

This should be an ongoing dialogue, not something you talk about once.

Opportunities to start the conversation and questions to start the dialogue:

- The following present some possible opportunities to spark a conversation about recreational cannabis:
 - o When you're driving past a dispensary
 - o If it comes up on the news
 - o If a character on television or in a movie is using recreational cannabis.
- Once you've found the right opportunity to spark the initial conversation about recreational cannabis, here is a list of questions that might help start the dialogue:
 - o "What do you know about recreational cannabis?"
 - o "What do you think about recreational cannabis being legalized?"
 - o "Do you have any questions about recreational cannabis?"
 - o "Do you know how recreational cannabis can effect your health?"
 - o "Have you or any of your friends tried recreational cannabis?"
 - o "Do you think that recreational cannabis is safe to use?"
 - o "Are your friends talking about recreational cannabis?"

Try to make it informal

Look for opportunities to have informal conversations about recreational cannabis. Formal conversations, like family meetings can make people nervous and shut down.

Talk about family history

Family history of addiction and or mental illness is an important part of an ongoing dialogue about recreational cannabis. Either of these factors could mean that your kid has a genetic predisposition to addiction or harmful effects of recreational cannabis use on mental health.

Listen

Be an active listener and make time for conversations. Try to be present and not distracted.

Stay in touch

Let your kid know that they can come to you to discuss or ask questions about recreational cannabis.

Be clear about expectations

Kids often thrive in environments with clear boundaries. Discuss boundaries that work for your family.

Let your kids know they can get in touch with you

It is important that your kid feels comfortable calling if they are in trouble. Let them know that it is okay to call you if they are in a situation where they feel unsafe.

Additional Considerations for Talking to Kids About Recreational Cannabis

Unique health risks for kids

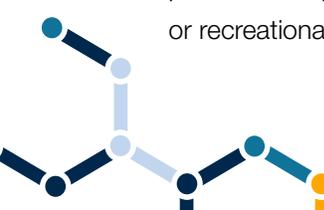
The health risks of using recreational cannabis are higher for those who start using in their teens. These health risks include addiction, increased risk for developing mental illness, and impacts on cognitive development. There is strong evidence that demonstrates that recreational cannabis impacts brain development through early adulthood. Ontario's doctors continue to recommend that individuals under 25 should abstain from recreational cannabis.

Reasons for using

A young person's desire to use or try recreational cannabis may be similar or different from adults'. There can be a number of factors that motivate trying and using recreational cannabis, including: peer pressure; to experiment; to party or socialize; to cope with stress; to alter their perspective. Consider having a conversation with teens that is similar to the conversation you have about alcohol.

Be aware of your own behaviour

As a parent you model behaviour. If you use controlled substances like alcohol or tobacco to relieve stress, it is possible that you are sending the message that substance use is an appropriate way to cope like alcohol, tobacco or recreational cannabis.



Commonly Asked Questions About Recreational Cannabis

How does recreational cannabis make you feel?

Recreational cannabis can make a user feel relaxed and happy, but it can also make the user feel drowsy or panicked as well as cause confusion, forgetfulness and cause the user to have delusions and altered perceptions.

Is one consumption method safer than the rest?

There is no safe way to consume recreational cannabis as it is an inherently harmful substance and the health risks caused by recreational cannabis use can best be avoided by abstaining from use.

Cannabis smoke can trigger acute and chronic health issues, including a range of respiratory conditions, cardiovascular events, asthma, cancers, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Is it safe to use recreational cannabis and drive?

It is not safe to drive when impaired by the use of recreational cannabis, as it negatively affects reaction times and concentration.

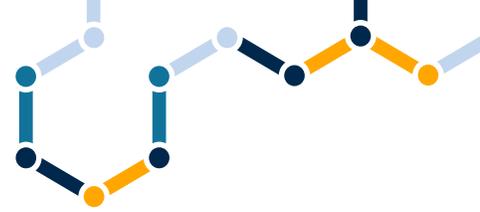
If you think that your kid is using recreational cannabis, consider talking to them about impaired driving and remind them that it is not safe to get in a car with anybody that is impaired.

How long should you wait to drive after consuming recreational cannabis?

Individuals who consume cannabis should wait at least six hours before driving. This wait time may need to be longer, depending on the user and the product consumed.

It is illegal to drive impaired in Canada. It remains the individual's responsibility to ensure they are not impaired when driving.





What can impact impairment levels from recreational cannabis?

What can cause levels of impairment from recreational cannabis to vary?

- THC levels in the cannabis product consumed
- delivery method (smoked, ingested)
- personal use patterns
- individual metabolism of THC

Does all recreational cannabis have the same potency?

No, different strains have different levels of THC (the cannabinoid responsible for how the body reacts to cannabis, including intoxication). If you think your kid is using recreational cannabis, open a dialogue about the negative health effects of using recreational cannabis. You can also consider talking to them about the different levels of THC in different strains.