



Everywhere you turn today, it seems somebody is talking about **cannabis**.



**Some of the information we hear about cannabis is conflicting, making it hard to understand the ways it may affect our children. Is it addictive? Does it cause psychosis? What will happen if my child uses it? What should I tell—or not tell—my child about it?**

**We are not drug experts at school, we are educators. Our goal is to offer you information on cannabis so you can make better decisions and help to protect your child in the context of your family.**

### What is it?

Cannabis has changed a lot over the last 20 years. The most common form is a strong herbal preparation often called 'skunk' or 'hydro'. Skunk is different from resin and from normal bush or commercial weed in that it has lots of one cannabis chemical – THC (about 8-14%) – and very little of another calming and relaxing cannabis chemical called CBD. Resin or normal weed has a balance of both chemicals and lower levels (about 2-4% each).

Skunk is the form used by over 80% of UK users and, as well as being the commonest form, is also the most expensive. And while it seems to be preferred by most people to other types like hash or resin (the usually black/brown waxy/squidgy form of the drug), it also causes more memory loss, dependence and paranoia.

### The side-effects of cannabis

Cannabis makes many people feel relaxed and high but others can get anxious, panicky and worried about what other people are thinking about them. Mixed with alcohol, cannabis can make you feel sick. Some people become dependent on cannabis – yes, really – about one in 10, who often smoke every day and can smoke very large amounts of cannabis without getting very stoned. They spend a lot of money (skunk costs about £10 per gram, or £250-300 per ounce).

'People who start taking cannabis at a young age have a much higher risk of becoming dependent'. They find they can't stop and when they try, they can't sleep, they get irritable, miserable and sometimes, angry. People who start taking cannabis at a young age have a much higher risk of becoming dependent.

Most people who use cannabis in the UK mix it with tobacco and smoke it in a joint. Smoking cannabis is bad for your lungs in a similar way to tobacco (and can lead to cancer, chronic bronchitis and emphysema). Trying to stop both cannabis and tobacco is harder than trying to quit if you use just one of these drugs. Eating the drug can reduce some risks but can also lead to people's getting very, very stoned and feeling frightened because the effect comes on slowly but lasts a long time. (It can take up to two hours for users to feel any effect after eating cannabis but this can then last for eight to 12 hours.)

### What teenagers should know about cannabis

The younger you start, the more likely you are to develop dependence and experience mental health difficulties and problems at school. Using cannabis before the age of 18 and, especially, before the age of 16, is particularly risky and seems to make people less smart (yep, it could drop your IQ a few points).

'The young brain is still developing and that seems to make it more vulnerable to drugs'

This is because the young brain is still developing and that seems to make it more vulnerable to drugs. So the best advice is that before you expand your brain, you should let it stop growing.

Now, it's also true that many young people who run into problems have other difficulties – at home, at school and with their mental health. Cannabis may not be the biggest problem but, for many of them, cannabis can make it harder to sort out those other issues.

Other risk factors include having someone in the family with a serious mental illness, like schizophrenia or bipolar affective disorder. People who already have a mental illness are those who are most likely to experience problems with cannabis: it tends to make things worse, not better. While some people say cannabis helps them to feel better, for most it actually can stop medication working and they tend to feel brighter and less depressed when they stop.

## Warning signs that someone might be vulnerable to cannabis-related harm include

Feelings of anxiousness or paranoia when they use.

Finding that they are using more than they want to.

Being stoned is interfering with other things in their life, like school friends and family.

## What is THC?

THC is short for the chemical compound delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol. THC is the most talked-about active ingredient in cannabis because it delivers the "high" feeling associated with using the drug.

## Sources:

[www.parentinfo.org](http://www.parentinfo.org)

[www.heretohelp.org](http://www.heretohelp.org)

[www.verywellmind.com](http://www.verywellmind.com)



## What parents can do

Talk to your child about cannabis, use this sheet as a starting point if you wish.

Look for signs that they may be smoking cannabis through smells, red eyes, increased appetite and smoking paraphernalia they are carrying.

If you know they are using cannabis and want to help them cut down then suggest they:

Start using later in the day.

Don't use lots of tobacco.

Spend more time with non-using friends.

Cut down on tea, coffee and caffeine drinks, as these make withdrawal worse, especially problems with sleeping, which should get better after a week or so.

Contact Aquarius: [www.aquarius.org.uk](http://www.aquarius.org.uk) Tel: 0121 622 8181 or Talk to Frank: [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)  
Tel: 0300 1236600

### Encourage them to:

Chat to people they trust and ask them to help.

Get some patches for the tobacco addiction (but take them off a night)

Go and see their GP if they are finding it hard to reduce their usage.

**Discussing your and your child's concerns in the context of an open, caring and respectful relationship makes space for further dialogue on cannabis, and other issues that arise in the future.**

Should you wish to discuss concerns around cannabis with anyone in school, please call 0121 675 8989 and ask to speak to a Designated Safeguarding Lead.

"Unlike adults, the teen brain is actively developing and often will not be fully developed until the mid 20s. Marijuana use during this period may harm the developing teen brain."