

Jackson County Drug-Free Council, Inc.

May

Fact: Marijuana is the most frequently used illegal drug in the United States. **Fact:** Nearly 50% of all seniors have tried marijuana at least once. **Fact:** The average age for the first use of marijuana is 14 years old. **Fact:** Marijuana smoking affects the brain and leads to impaired short-term memory, perception, judgment, and motor skills.

Since 1991, lifetime marijuana use has doubled among 8th and 10th grade students, and has increased by a third among high school seniors. Research shows that accompanying this upward pattern of use, is a significant rise in the perception among students, that it is not harmful.

These changes in perception and knowledge may be due to a decrease in anti-drug messages in the media, an increase in pro-drug messages through our pop-culture, and a lack of awareness among parents about this resurgence in marijuana use- most thinking, that this threat to their children has passed.

Some of the signs that your child might be using marijuana are: seem dizzy, or have trouble walking; they might act silly and giggly for no reason; their eyes might be very red and bloodshot; they might have a hard time remembering things that have just happened. Parents should be aware of changes in their child's behavior, although this is sometimes difficult with teenagers. Parents should look for withdrawal, depression, fatigue, carelessness with grooming, hostility, and a change in relationships with family and friends. Academic performance changes, absenteeism and truancy, loss of interest in sports or other favorite activities, and changes in eating and sleeping habits could be related to drug use. Parents should look for drug paraphernalia, including rolling papers and pipes, odor on clothing or in their bedroom, the use of incense and other deoderizers, and an increased use of eye drops.

Marijuana is clearly a drug that can affect your child in many ways, not only with the above behavioral changes, but with their health as well. Marijuana use causes adverse changes in the brain, the lungs, the immune system and the reproductive system over time. This drug clearly poses a threat to the health and well-being of children and adolescents at a critical point in their lives, when they are growing, learning, maturing and laying the foundation for their futures. As a parent, your children look to you for help and guidance in working out problems and in making decisions. Talk to your children about marijuana....and listen. Just opening up this dialogue between children and their parents is a step in the right direction toward guiding them, and helping them to make the right decisions.