

POT SMOKERS, GROWERS ARE FINALLY OUT OF THE DARK

It's here, in all of its glory - marijuana has now been legalized in Canada.

Here in Ontario, it's a bit of a lacklustre celebration. It's legal, but we can legally order it only online. Privately run stores will come, further into the new year.

But nonetheless, for those who have lived the lifestyle for the past number of decades, it's time to be loud and proud with your cloud.

Smoke shop workers in Oakville, Burlington and Milton say they've seen a shift in the types of people coming through their doors in recent months, skewing much older than the stereotypical 20-something-year-old reefer smoker. Others have noted an increase in the number of patrons looking for information and advice.

At a shop on Burlington's Plains Road, there's been an uptick in "old-timers" looking for guidance on pot paraphernalia and consumption.

Legalization of the substance has obviously piqued the interest of many. And while some agree with the legalization of marijuana, others don't.

The fact of the matter is those who have lived that lifestyle were going to continue anyway.

When it comes to smoking in public, we're going to have to be careful about how we go forward. Currently, the provincial government says that people will be allowed to smoke marijuana wherever tobacco is smoked. That's OK for the most part, considering the systematically repealed rights of tobacco smokers over the past number of years. Because weed will be smoked only where tobacco is smoked, that means it cannot be smoked on any school or hospital properties, and it will need to be smoked away from sports fields where children are playing.

But when it comes to the grey areas - as there will be - you can't legislate stupid. Common sense will have to prevail when it comes to smoking marijuana in public. If someone around you is offended by the smell of your sticky icky, it's your responsibility to be respectable and move if it is deemed to be an issue. Just as socially conscious smokers have done for the past number of years.

As unfortunate as it is, a lot of the details of marijuana legalization, including issues about tenants of rentals growing the crop, will need to be figured out on the fly. There is legislation from the provincial government, but these small details - details that can have a major impact on people's quality of life - will need to be figured out sooner or later.

The bottom line for all of us will be to have general respect. Let's hope folks can keep that in mind as they spark up.

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SUPPORTING SOMEONE ON MENTAL-HEALTH LEAVE

'THERE IS A LOT
THAT WE CAN DO TO
SHOW COMPASSION,'
WRITES MCGREGOR



MELANIE
MCGREGOR
Column

Imagine a colleague who is off work for a physical health problem. Perhaps there are flowers sent and kind emails from colleagues. Very supportive, right? Now imagine a colleague who is off work for a mental health problem. Does the response change? Unfortunately, it sometimes does and includes gossip, doubt and judgment.

Though huge strides have been made and many workplaces are supportive of employees' mental health, stigma is still alive and well and many people are unsure how to respond

when a colleague takes a mental health-related leave. There is a lot that we can do to show compassion and support. Here are some suggestions:

1. If someone is going off work, showing your support can be something simple like saying "Take care" or "I'll miss you." Don't be silent because you feel awkward or unsure of what to say.

2. If the person would like to share information, be a compassionate listener, but don't pry or feel like you need to know all of the ins and outs of the problem to be supportive.

3. Keep in touch and talk with people as you usually would. Ask if they're up for meeting for a tea, or just say hi and ask how they're doing. They may be worried about what others are thinking, and you treating them the same as always can be reassuring. So, if you would usually talk about your favourite TV shows, do that - remember that they're

still the same people and may not want to talk just about their mental health.

4. Be welcoming when colleagues come back to work. How about a lunch date or a favourite coffee waiting for them? And ask how you can help. Returning to work can feel a bit daunting at first, and your support can make a big difference.

5. Don't make assumptions about people's abilities. Mental health problems don't mean they can't and won't be responsible, reliable, and contributing employees. In fact, being back to work can be a huge part of their recovery and help to improve their well-being.

We can all set an example of stigma-free support at work that affirms that mental health is indeed health.

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