

TEEN'S MIND MIGHT NOT BE CHANGED IN ONE CONVERSATION

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a person is 25 years old. She says habitual marijuana use prior to 25 can affect that development, possibly making it harder for youth to learn, make decisions and remember things.

Lindsay said marijuana use can also cause changes to a young person's brain structure that may not be fully reversible.

She noted that cannabis use can stunt the development of the emotional coping process if teens decide to deal with negative situations by getting high.

While this knowledge is important Lindsay cautioned parents against bombarding youth with every conceivable tragedy that could arise.

Scare tactics, she said, may only work in the short term (and often don't work at all).

Ultimately, children will listen if the parent has a positive relationship with them.

"That's doesn't mean being their best friend. That's not what we're talking about," said Lindsay.

"There are different components of it. It's expressing that you care. It's providing support, sharing power and really trying to inspire them in the end."

She said a parent's connection with their children is another important part of building a positive

THE ISSUE:

PARENTS MUST DEAL WITH KIDS IN AGE OF LEGALIZED CANNABIS

LOCAL IMPACT:

KIDS NEED TO KNOW IMPACT OF CANNABIS, ESPECIALLY ON UNDER-25 BRAINS

relationship. This can be achieved by having casual talks with them and using family dinners to discuss topics like cannabis.

Lindsay said being involved in your child's life is another part of building a positive relationship.

This could involve knowing who your child's friends are, and sharing mutual interests with your kids.

When the time actually comes to talk about cannabis, Lindsay offered numerous guidelines.

"If you come to the conversation with a teen and you are closed-minded, ruling with a hard thumb, being a dictator, what kind of a response do you think you are going to get? The complete opposite of what you want. They are not listening," said Lindsay.

"You need to come to the table with an open

mind. Does that mean you have to change your values? Absolutely not. It just means you want to have an open conversation. You want to try and remember when you were a teen and how hard and difficult it was for you. You want to be clear about your goals. Whatever perspective you have on cannabis, we know we want to keep it out of the hands of our youth. We want to be calm and relaxed. If there is shouting, nobody is listening. Be positive and don't lecture."

Lindsay also went over some possible cannabis chat scenarios, and questions a teen may ask their parents.

What should parents do if teens ask: "Marijuana is a plant. It's natural. How harmful could it be?"

Lindsay said one response could be "Not all plants are necessarily

healthy or good for you - think about cocaine or heroin or even poison ivy."

She said this answer helps the teen rethink their point.

Another response could be, "I understand that, and I am not suggesting that you're going to spin out of control, or that your life as you know it is going to be over. I would just like to redirect you to the idea that when a person is high, her judgment is not what it ordinarily is and that can be harmful."

Lindsay said this statement shows you are not using scare tactics and redirects the teen back toward the goal of helping them understand the potentially harmful effects of cannabis.

When it comes to parents who use cannabis, Lindsay said these parents need to be responsible and talk to their children about why it is OK for an adult to smoke it, but not a young person.

Lindsay said the answer is similar to how parents might explain why adults can drink alcohol, but youths can't. She said the comparison is appropriate because alcohol can also negatively impact the developing brain.

"I would be enjoying my red wine at Christmas dinner or something and I had that conversation with my kids that the reason why I can enjoy my red wine is because my brain is fully developed. Tomorrow morning I will

wake up and there won't be any permanent damage," said Lindsay.

"I remember a couple years ago I heard my daughter, who was 13 at the time, telling one of her friends that she wasn't going to drink because her brain develops until she is 24 ... You play an important part in influencing your children's behaviour and role modelling."

Lindsay said ultimately a teen's mind will probably not be changed about marijuana in just one conversation. She suggests that parents keep on top of these discussions.

She also said other good conversations to have with teens about cannabis include what-if scenarios, like what would you do if you went to a party and the friend who gave you a ride there smoked cannabis and now wants to give you a ride home?

"These are good dinner conversations to brainstorm, especially when they start going to their first parties because it will be there. They will encounter this," said Lindsay.

"They haven't thought of these things. They really haven't. They don't think anything bad will happen to them. They

think they're invincible. So you need to be that rational brain and this is a really good way to do that."

Lindsay also provided some of warning signs parents can watch for that could indicate regular cannabis or other drug use.

These include:

- Declining school work and grades
- Abrupt changes in friends
- Deteriorating relationships with family (beyond typical teenage moodiness)
- Less openness and honesty
- Abnormal health issues or sleeping habits

For more information visit https://www.drug-freekidscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Cannabis-Talk-Kit_EN.pdf and download the Cannabis Talk Kit: Know How to Talk with Your Teen.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY

The recent legalization of cannabis affects not only current users, but future users as well. At some point, parents need to have a discussion with their kids on the subject.

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D.Scott Campbell
Tel: 905-877-0055
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www.trascottfire.com Email: scott@trascottfire.com