

Marijuana: “Risk and Harm” and Healthy Alternatives

By

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Appeared in the Herald News Living Well Section

October 29th, 2009

Unfortunately due to the recent change in MA law decriminalizing possession of small amounts of marijuana, many young people mistakenly think that marijuana use is legal. Add that to their misperception that marijuana use is safe and “no big deal” and we have increased rates of youth using marijuana. As parents and adults, we need to tell our youth that marijuana use is neither legal nor safe, and we need to talk to them about healthy behavior.

Set a rule of no marijuana use in the family, because using it does have harmful physical and psychological affects, especially to a teen’s brain development. Explain that marijuana interferes with the parts of the brain that control short-term memory, coordination, learning and problem solving. It also can set off intense feelings of paranoia and panic. As well, using marijuana affects motivation. One BOLD member said, “Marijuana can give you great dreams, but you can’t get off the couch to do anything about them.” Finally, new research concludes that marijuana use can be addictive.

Some use marijuana for the mellow and relaxing feelings they say it creates. When youth use marijuana to relax, they are not learning natural and healthy ways to feel good. As a family, talk about healthy ways to relax that reward both body and mind. Here are some suggestions that your family can build on:

- 1) Take a series of slow, deep breaths.
- 2) Practice daydreaming about being in a peaceful place—at the beach, walking in the woods, watching a sunset, etc. Each person’s image is unique to them.
- 3) Practice slowly relaxing muscles from the toes to the top of one’s head while concentrating on slow and deep breathing.
- 4) Learn to do yoga, tai-chi, or other alternative exercise.
- 5) Learn to meditate.
- 6) Walk, run, bike ride, dance, lift weights—get up and move.

For more information on youth and marijuana, please go to www.abovetheinfluence.com, www.health.howstuffworks.com/marijuana or www.nida.gov and for relaxation go to www.relaxationresponse.org/steps.

Together we create a healthy community for the youth of Greater Fall River.