What You Know
About Cannabis Matters

A GUIDE TO STARTING A CONVERSATION WITH YOUTH



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Nunavut

QUICK FACTS

Youth today are exposed to cannabis at an early age. They may hear about it from friends, family, on social media, or in the community.

Knowing a few key facts about cannabis and youth can help you feel more prepared when questions come up or when a conversation gets deeper. Here's what you should know:



23% of youth (16 to 19) reported using cannabis at least once in the past 12 months. It's estimated that 1 in 6 teens who use cannabis will develop a cannabis use disorder.
There is no perfect ago to start the conversation as every child is different, but the best time to talk about cannabis is before they are exposed to it or feel pressure to try it.

Talking with youth about cannabis can be challenging, but it's essential for their health and well-being. This guide offers tips for parents and caregivers on how to have open and honest conversations to help youth stay healthy and make informed choices.

Why do youth use cannabis?

Youth use cannabis for many reasons:

- **To improve or intensify mood:** "It's exciting."
- **To be social:** "It helps me enjoy a party."
- **To cope with stress:** "It helps me forget about my problems."

- **To expand their views:** "It helps me understand things differently."
- **To fit in:** "So I won't feel left out."
- **To break with routine:** "I use it because I feel bored."

WHAT IS CANNABIS?

Cannabis is also called marijuana, pot, or weed. Cannabis can be smoked, vaped, or you can eat it. It comes in different forms like:



Dried flower:
Smoked in joints, pipes, or bongs.



Edibles:
Food or drinks.



Extracts:
Oils, shatter, vapes.



Topicals:
Creams and lotions applied to the skin.

Medical cannabis

This is prescribed by a doctor, under their guidance, to help manage certain health conditions when appropriate.

Young people use cannabis for different reasons:

Some may decide to use cannabis for fun when they hang out with friends, out of curiosity, or to stop feeling bored.

Some youth might also feel pressure to try it, or they decide to use it to deal with anxiety or stress.

HOW DOES CANNABIS USE AFFECT THE HEALTH OF YOUTH?

Using cannabis from a young age can increase health risks, especially to the brain. The brain keeps developing until age 25. The earlier someone starts using cannabis, the greater the risks of experiencing negative impacts.



SHORT-TERM EFFECTS OF CANNABIS USE:



Memory

Cannabis can change parts of your brain that help you think and remember things.

Learning and focus

Cannabis can make it harder to learn, focus, and concentrate.





Mood and feelings

Cannabis can make youth feel relaxed, but can also cause them to feel very anxious, panicked, disoriented, and fearful.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF CANNABIS USE:



Heart and lungs

Cannabis smoke contains harmful substances that can affect your heart and lungs, causing or worsening coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath.

Mental health

Using cannabis, especially with high THC, can increase the risk of anxiety, depression, and even seeing, feeling, or hearing things that aren't there (psychosis).





Addiction

Frequent cannabis use can lead to dependence. Over time, you may feel unable to control your use or need more cannabis to feel the same effects.

It is best to wait until the age of 25 to use cannabis. The later someone starts, the lower the health risks to the developing brain.

25+

HOW DO YOU TALK ABOUT CANNABIS WITH YOUTH?

When talking with youth about cannabis, focus on their life and goals. Honest, factual conversations help them connect with the information. They know more than we realize!



BEING A TRUSTED ADULT

Before starting the conversation, take a moment to reflect:

- Why do I want to talk about this with youth? What are the goals?
- What do I believe about cannabis, and where do those beliefs come from?
- Am I ready to listen more than I talk?
- Am I coming into this with judgment, or curiosity and care?

TRY TO BE:

- Respectful and honest, keeping an open mind and heart.
- A good listener, not just a talker.
- Open to hearing things you might not agree with.
- Willing to hear difficult truths.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Practice the Inuit Societal Values 'Tunnganarniq', being open, welcoming, and inclusive; and 'Inuuqatigiitsiarniq', respecting others, relationships and caring for people. Additionally, the below approaches can help start and guide the conversation.

#1 Create a Safe Space

Be calm, patient, and non-judgmental. Talk somewhere private and comfortable. Do your best to avoid shaming or disapproving language since this can close communication.

#2 Start with Their World

Ask about school, friendships, and goals. Show interest in them, not just their cannabis use.

#3 Be Present and Mindful

Turn off or move away from any distractions. Listen like you mean it, focusing on their words and actions.

#4 Use Youth-Friendly Language

Skip the scary warnings. Speak in a way that invites them in and encourages them.

#5 Ask Questions Like:

"What have you heard about cannabis?"

"What do you think about it? What do your friends think about it?"

"Have you seen people using it at school or in the community?"

"What do you think are some of the benefits or risks?



#6 Support Their Independence

Let them know it's okay to be curious. The goal isn't to control but to guide.

#7 Listen More Than You Talk

Let them lead the conversation. Ask meaningful questions. Reflect on what you have heard to ensure that you understand.

#8 Be Honest and Transparent

Be clear about why you are having the conversation. Stay respectful even if you have different opinions.

#9 Encourage Critical Thinking

Instead of saying, "Don't do it," try, "What do you think could happen if...?"

#10 Respect Boundaries

If they don't want to talk now, leave the door open for later.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS TO ASK



1. “Have you tried cannabis before? What was it like?”

2. “Do you know how strong the product was?”

3. “What are the reasons youth your age are using it?”

4. “Are there reasons that you are using that I can help you with?”

5. “Have you felt pressured by others to try it? What caused you to say yes or no?”

6. “If you were in a situation where cannabis was offered to you, what would you do to stay true to yourself and your values?”

EVERYDAY ACTIONS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Building trust and connection doesn't happen all at once. It's something you can nurture every day. These small, consistent actions help strengthen your relationship and make it easier to talk about things like cannabis when the time comes.

Stay Connected

Know their friends. Share activities. Show up for them.

Talk Often

Stay open to their questions and conversations. Let them know you're always there for them.

Stay Positive

Praise healthy choices. Stay calm even when you hear things you don't like.

Be a Role Model

If you use cannabis or drink alcohol, anticipate being called on it ("But you smoke weed/drink alcohol!"). Reflect on your own substance use. It may be useful to think about why you use and whether this could be impacting those around you. Talk openly about healthy ways to cope with stress.

Support Their Coping Skills

If cannabis is used to feel better or to cope with stress, explore alternatives together like art, music, sport or activities like going out on the land, berry picking, sewing, carving or hunting and fishing.

Conversations about cannabis, and other life choices, don't have to be perfect - they just need to be honest and real.

Being a caring adult means showing up with patience, an open-heart, and honesty. When you do that, you become someone they can trust not just about cannabis, but about anything.

REDUCING THE RISKS OF CANNABIS USE

19+ **In Nunavut, you must be 19 years of age to purchase or use cannabis.**

If youth you are close to are already using cannabis, here are some of the things they can do to reduce the impact on their health.

- **Delay use until the brain is fully developed (around age 25).**
- **Be aware that smoking cannabis can be harmful to the lungs. Try other methods and inform yourself on the risks.**
- **Avoid daily or near-daily use.**
- **Avoid deep inhalation or holding your breath after inhaling.**
- **Avoid using large amounts or cannabis with more than 10% THC.**
- **Avoid synthetic (man-made) cannabis products as they can be dangerous and have serious higher risks.**
- **Only use cannabis from legal sources. Legal products are tested, labeled, and regulated to help reduce health and safety risks.**

If a youth is using cannabis to cope with stress or trauma, consider helping them connect with cultural activities, family, and community supports. Sewing, beading, carving, hunting, and spending time on the land can promote wellness and resilience.

Different Ways of Using Cannabis Carry Different Risks

- **Trying it once** doesn't mean there's a problem. Encourage delaying cannabis use and making safer choices.
- **Even occasional cannabis use** can affect mental health. Talk about ways to reduce risks, such as avoiding alcohol when using cannabis and never driving while impaired.
- **Frequent or daily cannabis use** may be a sign that someone is using it to cope with stress or other challenges. It can also increase the risk of dependence and mental health problems.
- **Vaping cannabis** is like smoking cigarettes. It is not risk-free. High-THC products can lead to anxiety, psychosis or even hospitalization.

Signs That a Young Person May Be Struggling

- Big changes in sleep, appetite, mood, or friendships.
- Pulling away from family or favourite activities.
- Trouble at school or work.
- Using more often, or feeling unable to stop.
- Borrowing money or acting secretive about where they go.

These signs do not always mean substance use is a concern, but they are worth checking in about, especially when they occur together.

Dependence Can Happen

Youth may not realize how cannabis is affecting them until they try to stop and can't. Support and guidance from a health professional can help if a young person wants to cut back or quit.

HELP AND SUPPORT

If cannabis use is affecting someone's mental health, well-being or relationships, there are many supports to help.

- Talk to a health-care provider.
- Talk to trusted Elders, family and friends.
- Call the Nunavut Quitline at **1-866-368-7848** for confidential support from counsellors in Inuktitut, English, Inuinnaqtun or French.
- Text NUQUITS to 123456 for support and tips.
- Visit Facebook.com/NuQuits.
- Visit **nuquits.ca**.



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