



A Parent's Guide to
MARIJUANA

axis

"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

- C.S. Lewis

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Table of Contents

Puff Puff Pass	4
What exactly is marijuana?	5
How many people use it, and how does it affect its users?	6
Is it addictive or dangerous?	7
What are other ways marijuana affects users' lives?	8
How does marijuana compare to alcohol?	9
Why is it so controversial?	10
Why would teens want to use marijuana?	11
Based on the research and the Bible's guidance, what should we think about using marijuana?	13
How do I start this conversation with my kid?	15
Continue the Conversation	16
Invitation to Generosity	16
Sources Used in This Parent Guide	17

This guide will help you discuss the following questions:

- ❓ How does our culture view marijuana use?
- ❓ What effects does marijuana actually have?
- ❓ What do I need to know in order to have an informed conversation about marijuana with my teen?
- ❓ What does Scripture say about marijuana use?

Puff Puff Pass

Since the 1960s, Hollywood has described for us the typical “stoner.” And while the aesthetic may have changed over the years—“peace and love” hippies; Grateful Dead fans bedecked in “[drug rugs](#)”; skater kids in beanies and hoodies who always have a joint to share—the stereotype has remained largely the same: stoners occupy a niche in society, form their own separate culture, and aren’t generally popular, successful, or cool.

While this is the cliché that we often see in media, it can be [misleading](#). With marijuana decriminalized or legal at least for medical (if not recreational) use in [all but three states](#), people of all walks of life are using it. Currently, marijuana is the [most widely used addictive drug](#) in the U.S. among both teens and adults. [In 2020](#) over 10% of Americans over 26 reported smoking marijuana at least once a month. Given the widespread popularity of the drug, it’s something we should be talking about with our kids.

Although we all know of it, it’s important to be thoughtful in how we decide what to think about it. So rather than allowing our kids’ friends and pop culture to disciple our teens, let’s initiate the conversation and allow them to ask questions. That way, we can encourage them into a deeper understanding of God’s best for their lives and for the world He created.

What exactly is marijuana?

It's a [psychoactive drug that comes from the Cannabis plant](#) that people use both recreationally and for medical reasons. It's common for users to consume it via pipes, water pipes (bongs), hand-rolled cigarettes (joints), and even e-cigarettes (or vapes). They can also mix it into food (called "edibles") or make tea out of it.

[Tetrahydrocannabinol \(THC\)](#) is the main psychoactive ingredient. Its short-term effects can include feelings of euphoria, an altered perception of reality, an increase in appetite, extreme relaxation, or feelings of anxiety and severe paranoia. Cannabis also contains a compound called [cannabidiol \(CBD\)](#), which is non-psychoactive (or at least less so) and which some are investigating as a potential [substitute for prescription painkillers](#). Strains of marijuana that are higher in CBD actually help reduce the feeling of being "high."

Some people do use the formal term "cannabis," but American Addiction Centers gives several popular slang terms for marijuana in [this article](#). However, according to [WayofLeaf.com](#) there are literally hundreds of words for cannabis and cannabis-adjacent materials. Some of the most common are:

- Weed
- Pot
- Grass
- Dope
- Reefer
- Ganja
- Hash
- Herb
- Chronic
- The Devil's Lettuce

The WayofLeaf.com article linked above includes slang terms for when marijuana is mixed with other drugs, as well as slang terms for the action of using it, such as "toking," "blazing," and "torching up." The most common terms for being under the influence of marijuana are being "high" or "stoned." Other slang terms for being high include "baked," "blazed," "blitzed," "cooked," or "fried."

Reflection: What is your experience with marijuana, either in your personal life or what you've seen in media?

How many people use it, and how does it affect its users?

[48% of American adults](#) say that they have used marijuana at some point during their lives. 16% of adults report that they smoke regularly. According to an [article](#) by VeryWellMind.com, “More than one in three high school students (37%) have used marijuana, with one in five (22%) admitting to using this drug within the past month.”

Because marijuana is becoming more and more normalized, it is very probable that its use will grow over time. A [recent survey from the Pew Research Center](#) found that 91% of Americans say that legalizing marijuana is a good idea.

The authors of [Buzzed: The Straight Facts About the Most Used and Abused Drugs from Alcohol to Ecstasy](#) say that “people’s experiences with marijuana vary widely and depend on the potency of the drug taken.” It’s worth noting that there are different strains of marijuana, some more powerful than others.

Marijuana affects people in a variety of ways. It impacts the user’s judgment and motor skills. It also increases the heart rate, so it’s possible that using it has more severe effects on people with heart disease. Some research implies that there is a relationship between early pot use and the subsequent development of schizophrenia, but the evidence is inconclusive on this point. When people smoke marijuana, it takes only minutes for the drug to make its way into the bloodstream and then the brain, giving them a high. While the high passes fairly soon, THC can remain in the body for days following use. The Buzzed authors write:

About 30% of ingested THC (and its metabolites) may remain in the body a full week after smoking and may continue to affect mental and physical functions subtly. In fact, the remnants from a single large dose of THC may be detectable up to three weeks later.

THC impacts the body in the same way when people eat marijuana, but it takes longer to reach the bloodstream and the brain. As a result, the high is not as acute, although it does last longer. There is also the chance that people will achieve a stronger high from eating marijuana because they are more likely to consume larger amounts of it than they would if they were to smoke it.

Much of the research on marijuana is tentative, but current studies suggest that because teenagers’ brains are still developing, THC has a much greater ability to disrupt cognitive abilities in adolescents than it does in adults.

Reflection: Do you know anyone who uses marijuana? How does it impact them?

Is it addictive or dangerous?

[We could define “addiction”](#) as meaning that people are so dependent on a substance that even though it has negative effects on them, they compulsively consume it, develop a tolerance to it, and experience withdrawals when they stop using it. According to this definition, about 30% of marijuana users are addicted to the drug. This number contrasts with the 8.5% of people who are [addicted to nicotine](#) (the addictive substance in vapes and cigarettes), the 5.3% who are [addicted to alcohol](#), and the 1.9% who [use cocaine](#). According to the authors of *Buzzed*, “[T]here does not appear to be a significant degree of craving associated with marijuana...Even after the most intense exposure, the effects associated with marijuana withdrawal are mild.”

Nevertheless, short-term side effects can include symptoms such as a decrease in short-term memory, dry mouth, impaired motor skills, red eyes, and feelings of paranoia or anxiety. Apart from addiction, long-term side effects might include decreased mental ability in those who started as teenagers and behavioral problems in children whose mothers used cannabis during pregnancy. You can read more about these effects [here](#). Because marijuana is illegal, it’s difficult to study, so there’s still a lot of uncertainty surrounding how it impacts people.

Consuming marijuana increases the danger of driving and operating heavy machinery because of how it affects users’ ability to concentrate. It’s pretty much impossible to fatally overdose on marijuana, unlike other drugs like cocaine, heroin, or even prescription drugs.

[There are studies](#) linking marijuana use to nicotine and alcohol abuse, as well as research indicating that marijuana might “prime” the brain for addiction to other drugs, such as morphine. But correlation is not causation, as [this CDC article](#) points out, and many marijuana users never go on to try other illicit drugs. So we can’t really say for sure that marijuana is a “gateway” to more dangerous substances.

Reflection: What have you heard in culture about marijuana use? How can you tell between what’s myth and what’s truth?

What are other ways marijuana affects users' lives?

The idea that marijuana usage decreases motivation was widely accepted among previous generations, but many young people today call this belief into question. Marijuana advocates cite the fact that [many successful people](#), such as former Apple CEO Steve Jobs, Oprah, or Virgin CEO Richard Branson, have used marijuana at some point in their lives. While this might seem like a good argument on the surface, it would be sloppy to assume that their marijuana use either impacted them positively or didn't impact them negatively. Current research on marijuana use is largely focused on the potential for memory loss, but is [ultimately inconclusive](#).

It's worth mentioning the financial cost of marijuana use. Active users spend a significant amount of money on marijuana. From [Mode.com](#)'s marijuana price map, using California as an example, "At an average price of \$229 an ounce, a joint – which typically contains about 0.5 grams, or 0.018 ounces, of marijuana – costs about \$4... that's cheaper than the average nationwide price of \$5." Approximately [16%](#) are daily users, and many of them smoke more than one joint per day—not including the fact that there is often more marijuana used in bongos or pipes (other popular ways to smoke), so that would by necessity cost more money. So the daily user is spending at minimum \$5 per day, or \$1,825 per year.

Reflection: What things do you spend money on that might not be healthy?

How does marijuana compare to alcohol?

While we can learn something about the nature of marijuana by comparing it to alcohol, remember that the research on marijuana is limited. Nevertheless, here are some facts about each substance:

- ④ Drinking too much alcohol [can kill people](#), but it's next to impossible to die from overdosing on marijuana.
- ④ Both substances impair cognitive functions and motor skills. It's dangerous to drive after consuming either of them, although alcohol has a more severe effect.
- ④ Both substances can impair memory, but do so in different ways, and the research on marijuana is inconclusive. Binge drinking can cause people not to remember what happened the previous night, while memory loss from marijuana might occur as a result of long-term use of the drug.
- ④ Alcohol has more of an impact on how [other drugs taken simultaneously](#) affect the body.
- ④ Alcohol leads to serious health problems such as liver disease and other types of cancer. It can also have harmful psychological effects. Marijuana could be [harder on the heart than alcohol is](#) and has potential connections with psychosis.
- ④ There is evidence suggesting that consuming alcohol in moderation can lead to some minor health benefits. Marijuana has more obvious positive medical uses.
- ④ Alcohol is [more addictive](#) than marijuana.

Reflection: What is your experience with alcohol? How are alcohol and marijuana compared in media? In culture?

Why is it so controversial?

The controversy surrounding marijuana typically stems from its classification. In 1970, President Nixon signed the Controlled Substances Act, which classified drugs within [five “schedules”](#) (categories) based on “the drug’s acceptable medical use and the drug’s abuse or dependency potential.” This Act listed marijuana as a Schedule I substance alongside drugs such as LSD, ecstasy, and heroin. It is still classified that way (despite [many petitions](#) to change it and despite many states now decriminalizing it, with California being the first state to pass a law that allowed people to take it for severe medical conditions in 1996).

Schedule 1 drugs are classified as such [for 3 reasons](#):

- 1 The drug or other substance has a high potential for abuse;
- 2 The drug or other substance has no currently accepted medical treatment use in the U.S.; and
- 3 It has a lack of accepted safety for use under medical supervision.

As we know, there’s currently a lot of research surrounding the medicinal uses of marijuana (particularly CBD), so the second and third reasons no longer apply. As for its potential for abuse, we also saw that the research suggests that it’s less addictive than alcohol and nicotine, both of which are [exempted from](#) the Controlled Substances Act. Therefore, proponents of cannabis legalization feel that it’s unnecessarily stigmatized and seen as dangerous when other, more dangerous drugs are not, simply because they’re culturally accepted.

Reflection: Do you think marijuana is dangerous? Why or why not?

Why would teens want to use marijuana?

It's "cool." Media has great power to make various choices and values seem desirable or repulsive, and movies and TV shows often portray drug use in a light-hearted or satirical manner or as a way of having a good time. While watching people use weed in media won't inevitably brainwash teens into using it, culture does have power to influence how we see the world. Because of their status in pop culture, celebrities and professional athletes can also have a strong influence over the decisions young people make, and many stars do use and/or glorify drug use. Often, though, we see the damaging impact that drugs have in the lives of famous people. More on that below.

Not only does the idea of marijuana being necessary for a good time come across in media, but many students get this idea from their friends. So they want to experience what the drug is like for themselves to see if what their friends say is true. Plus, anything forbidden has an inherent appeal simply because it's forbidden. Because it's illegal for those under 18 to use marijuana, it has a draw similar to alcohol of being a rite of passage into increased maturity. [Rebellion is an obvious reason](#) why many kids start using drugs.

It's fun. As previously mentioned, the short-term effects of marijuana include feelings of euphoria and an altered perception of reality. At the beginning of the movie [This Is the End](#), actor Seth Rogen's character invites his friend over to hang out, and the two of them smoke pot and watch children's cartoons for hours. Although these cartoons would not normally be very exciting for men their age, they are in awe of the colors, images, and movements they see on the screen. They end up laughing hysterically at things that normally wouldn't be very funny. They view marijuana simply as a necessary part of having fun.

It provides an escape. Just about anything in life, whether it's video games, porn, food, or relationships, can become a form of escapism or self-medication. Drugs, of course, are a classic way people try to escape their lives. The physical impact of marijuana is something we should understand, but possibly one of the greatest dangers of marijuana is that people will rely on it to escape pain, grief, or boredom. Take as an example [Josh Gordon](#), wide receiver for the Tennessee Titans. Gordon has a status that many would covet, being a highly talented player in the NFL. But even though he has somehow been able to perform incredibly while under the influence, he has missed the vast majority of games he could have played in, either from being suspended or from being in rehab as the result of substance abuse.

In 2017, Gordon noted, “A bunch of guys smoke weed before the game,” then mentioned that he doesn’t think he’s been sober for any game in his professional career up to that point. He originally started using drugs in his childhood to cope with trauma and with his insecurities: “I didn’t want to feel anxiety, I didn’t want to feel fear.” While he was a highly functioning addict, Gordon says he realized that he could either continue his self-destructive lifestyle and eventually kill himself, or he could take his problem seriously and be able to continue in his career.

Many teens who suffer anxiety choose to smoke weed so that they can relax and be free from their worries. Many who choose to use pot are likely misinformed about its dangers. For teens who suffer from depression, it promises them an opportunity to feel a sense of happiness that they don’t feel elsewhere. Unfortunately, this doesn’t always work and can [worsen the symptoms of psychosis](#) in some people.

It provides community. Though the stereotype exists that people who smoke marijuana belong to a particular subculture in high school, marijuana use is not always specific to any one group of students. [One study](#) found that high school athletes are more likely to use marijuana than their non-athlete counterparts. The reasons why high schoolers smoke marijuana are varied, but one reason is the potential for making friends. There are many students who hang out together to smoke marijuana, and they are often looking for more people to join them. Many young students who don’t feel like they have a place in any other circles can find community with others who smoke pot.

Pop culture reinforces all these ideas. References to weed in pop culture date [as far back as 1928](#) with Louis Armstrong’s song “Muggles” (a slang term for the drug). There have been many others throughout the decades, but some more recent songs that do so are (language warning) “[Peaches](#)” by Justin Bieber, “[I Get the Bag](#)” by Gucci Mane, “[Rockstar](#)” by Post Malone, and “[MotorSport](#)” by Migos, Nicki Minaj, and Cardi B. In pop and especially hip hop culture, artists tend to talk about weed and other drugs as signs of their wealth and status, but also as ways to medicate their pain.

There are also plenty of movies and TV shows that portray and/or make light of marijuana use. The TV show *Weeds*, which aired from 2005-2012, depicted a single mom who grows and sells marijuana to support her family. It’s difficult to find a single Seth Rogen movie where he doesn’t constantly smoke marijuana in order to enjoy life. *Pineapple Express* is a well-known example—the title is actually a strain of marijuana. One of the main reasons Rogen’s movies are so beloved by teens and young adults is because of the humor and friendly demeanor Rogen projects.

Reflection: What examples of marijuana use in media can you think of? Is it generally portrayed positively or negatively? Or is it neutral?

Based on the research and the Bible's guidance, what should we think about using marijuana?

- 1 There is a continual theme in Scripture to obey the law when those laws are good, moral and just, so if marijuana use is illegal, that is enough of a reason not to use it. Of course, more and more states are legalizing marijuana, so this point will likely become irrelevant eventually.
- 2 There is enough evidence to suggest that marijuana use in teenagers harms the development of the brain, so it's fair to make a distinction between teen and adult use. No matter what people conclude about adult recreational marijuana use, there is strong evidence that teen use will do long-term damage.
- 3 If we have no problem using opioids like morphine or oxycodone for medical purposes, it seems clear that there should be no problem with using marijuana for medical purposes, given that opioids are far more addictive.
- 4 The only psychoactive substance the Bible gives us any guidance on is alcohol. Scripture permits some drinking while giving strong warnings against drunkenness (Deut. 14:26, Ps. 104:14-15, Jn. 2:1-9, Prov. 20:1, Eph. 5:18, 1 Cor. 5:11). Comparing alcohol to marijuana is somewhat tricky because both substances affect people differently depending on a person's genetics, gender, etc. When abused, alcohol's effects are much more severe than marijuana's. However, this does seem clear: being drunk means that people have lost their normal ability to [control their minds and bodies](#). The whole point of taking marijuana is to get high, which by definition means that people do not have full control over their faculties. Based on this reasoning, any use of marijuana to get high is immoral from a biblical point of view.
- 5 1 Corinthians also reminds us that while "[everything is permissible for me](#)," not everything is beneficial. We also shouldn't be "mastered by anything." This is a strong warning for anyone who is tempted to dabble in mind-altering drugs. Sure, it might be legal, but that doesn't make it good or moral. And, since marijuana does have dependency concerns, it would be wise to consider how easy it would be to be "mastered" by it.
- 6 One of the main reasons why so many teens (and adults) turn to marijuana is to ease anxiety, reduce stress, and to cope with suffering. It's understandable; nobody willingly

wants to suffer. But, if we run from our pain, if we always seek to medicate it or escape from it, we might be missing something that God is trying to teach us through our pain. As Dr. Tim Keller puts it, "[Christianity teaches us](#) that suffering is real...is often unfair...but there is a purpose to it, and if faced rightly, it can drive us like a nail deep into the love of God," who also suffers with us.

7 In so many ways, the use of marijuana is tied to our pursuit of pleasure. And in a culture that believes pleasure is the pathway to happiness, it's easy to see why our society would embrace the use of marijuana in the same way we embrace other pleasures like eating, drinking, or sex. There's nothing wrong with being happy or enjoying moral pleasures, but God doesn't call us to a life devoted to achieving pleasure or happiness. He calls us to a life dedicated to holiness, joy, and peace. Happiness is almost always tied to circumstances or moments of pleasure, whereas joy is far more transcendent. It's a fruit of the spirit, and unlike fleeting moments of happiness, joy can be a permanent posture of the heart. Ultimately, a life consumed by pursuing happiness and pleasure will actually never fully find them. Why? Because the abundant life is found only through Christ, by abandoning our pursuit of happiness to serve and follow Him. As counterintuitive as it may seem, it's by choosing to serve Him above everything else—including our desire to have a good time—that we find what our hearts so desperately desire.

We think [Susanna Wesley had a wise perspective](#) when she said:

How would you judge the lawfulness or unlawfulness of "pleasure"? Use this rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sight of God, takes from you your thirst for spiritual things or increases the authority of your body over your mind, then that thing to you is evil. By this test you may detect evil no matter how subtly or how plausibly temptation may be presented to you.

Reflection: What things in your life impair your connection to God? Is there anything that dampens your ability to think or feel?

How do I start this conversation with my kid?

Most teenagers who use marijuana [begin by age 16](#). If it is readily available to teens or they spend time with friends and/or siblings who use, these factors increase the likelihood that they will try it. So while it's rare for 10-year-olds to use marijuana, most kids have likely heard of it by the time they are that age, which means we need to start teaching them how to think through this complex issue around that time.

It's important that you don't assume that your kids would never try marijuana. If you assume that it's possible they might, you'll be prepared if they do. Regardless, your children probably have questions about it, and those questions will get answered somehow, whether it's by you, their friends, the media, or the internet. As their parent, you have a significant influence in your kids' lives, and what you communicate to them will impact how they view marijuana. So how should you go about discussing this issue with your children?

Be knowledgeable. If we make inaccurate or misinformed statements, we will lose credibility. It's important that you have researched the issue and thought through your opinions on marijuana use before you talk to your kids about it.

Be understanding. Don't get angry with your kids if they say that marijuana might not be that bad. Sincerely ask them why they think that is true, and work with them to understand where they're coming from. Show your kids you love them and respect their opinions, but that you want to help them think through the issue well. Remember that when they come of age, they will be in a position (depending on where they live and what the laws are then) to use legal marijuana. Rather than telling them what to think, your goal should be to help them make wise decisions on their own.

Be loving. We can't emphasize enough the importance of communicating that you love your kids and that your love is unconditional. It is crucial that, whether or not you and your kids agree when the discussion is over, they know that you love them and that your love will never go away. Remember that while it's easy to start lecturing your teens based on the belief that you're doing so out of love, you're much more likely to communicate love if you listen more than you lecture. You might even suggest researching this issue together.

Continue the Conversation

Any discussion of drug use is going to be a little fraught, especially if your teen, like so many others, doesn't see a problem with marijuana use specifically. In this case, try to keep an open heart; not condemning or judging but listening, praying, and continuing the conversation for as long as it needs to go. And remember, even if your teen is smoking weed themselves, that doesn't make them a dangerous or bad person. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. As pastor Tim Keller [said](#): "God sees us as we are, loves us as we are, and accepts us as we are. But by His grace, He does not leave us where we are."

Reflection: How has your family discussed marijuana in the past? How might that change for the better in the future?

Invitation to Generosity

If you like what you learned in this Parent Guide and want to help us continue to make great resources to serve parents like you, consider making a gift at axis.org. Thank you!

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