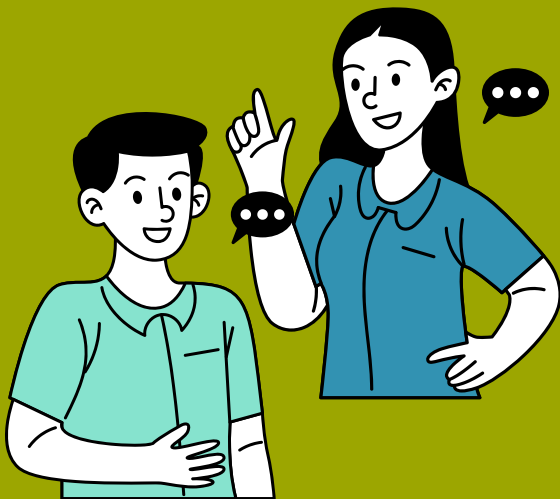


TALKING ABOUT CANNABIS (FOR TEENS)

A Youth Prevention Toolkit



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Introduction

As you grow older, you will be exposed to new beginnings, experiences, and challenges. This time in your life can have a significant impact on your future, so it is important to make responsible decisions. You may have heard a lot about cannabis* from your friends, social media, or the news. Learning the facts and choosing not to use cannabis during your teen years will help you become a better leader and set you up for a safe and healthy future. This toolkit is designed to provide you with useful information and resources to make safe and healthy decisions about cannabis.



**Although this toolkit primarily uses the word “cannabis,” the terms “cannabis” and “marijuana” are often used interchangeably.*

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What is Cannabis?



The term “cannabis” can refer to the cannabis plant or products made from the plant. People can consume cannabis in many different ways, including through inhalation, topicals, or edible products, such as candy or baked goods. Cannabis contains over 100 cannabinoids, such as delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Products containing CBD and other cannabinoids like Delta-8 THC, Delta-10 THC, and THC-O are also appearing more frequently in Virginia. Here are a couple definitions to help you become familiar with what different cannabis products may contain:

| What is it called? | What is it? |
|--------------------|---|
| THC | THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, is the primary psychoactive component in cannabis. In most cases, people use THC to refer to delta-9 THC, which is the compound most people associate with the intoxicating effect of cannabis. Other types of THC can have similar effects. THC can also be extracted from cannabis, and products made with THC in its concentrated form can be strong. Products containing Delta-8 THC, Delta-10 THC, and THC-O are usually made with extractions from legally grown hemp. These products are sold in convenience stores and vape shops and are often intoxicating. Under Virginia law, products containing THC should not be sold to those under 21 years old. |
| CBD | CBD, or cannabidiol, is a compound in cannabis frequently used in topicals, oils, inhalants, and edibles. CBD is nonintoxicating when used in normal doses. You should consult a healthcare provider alongside your parent/guardian(s) before using any CBD product. |

Cannabis and the Law

In Virginia, it is illegal for anyone younger than 21 years old to purchase, possess, or use cannabis. The only exception is for the medical cannabis program, which is accessible to patients 18 and older.* Violating this law can result in a civil penalty and required admission into a substance abuse treatment and/or education program. Possession or use of cannabis on school grounds or at school activities is against the law. Violating this law can result in a fine of up to \$1,000 and/or jail time. Using cannabis in a car – even as a passenger – is illegal and can lead to a Class 4 Misdemeanor. Driving under the influence (DUI) of cannabis is also illegal. A DUI charge can result in jail time and/or a fine. In addition, even a first-time DUI offense results in the loss of driving privileges for one year.



*Patients under 18 years old may access the medical cannabis program *only* with the assistance of their parent/legal guardian and after receiving a written certification from their health care provider.

13%

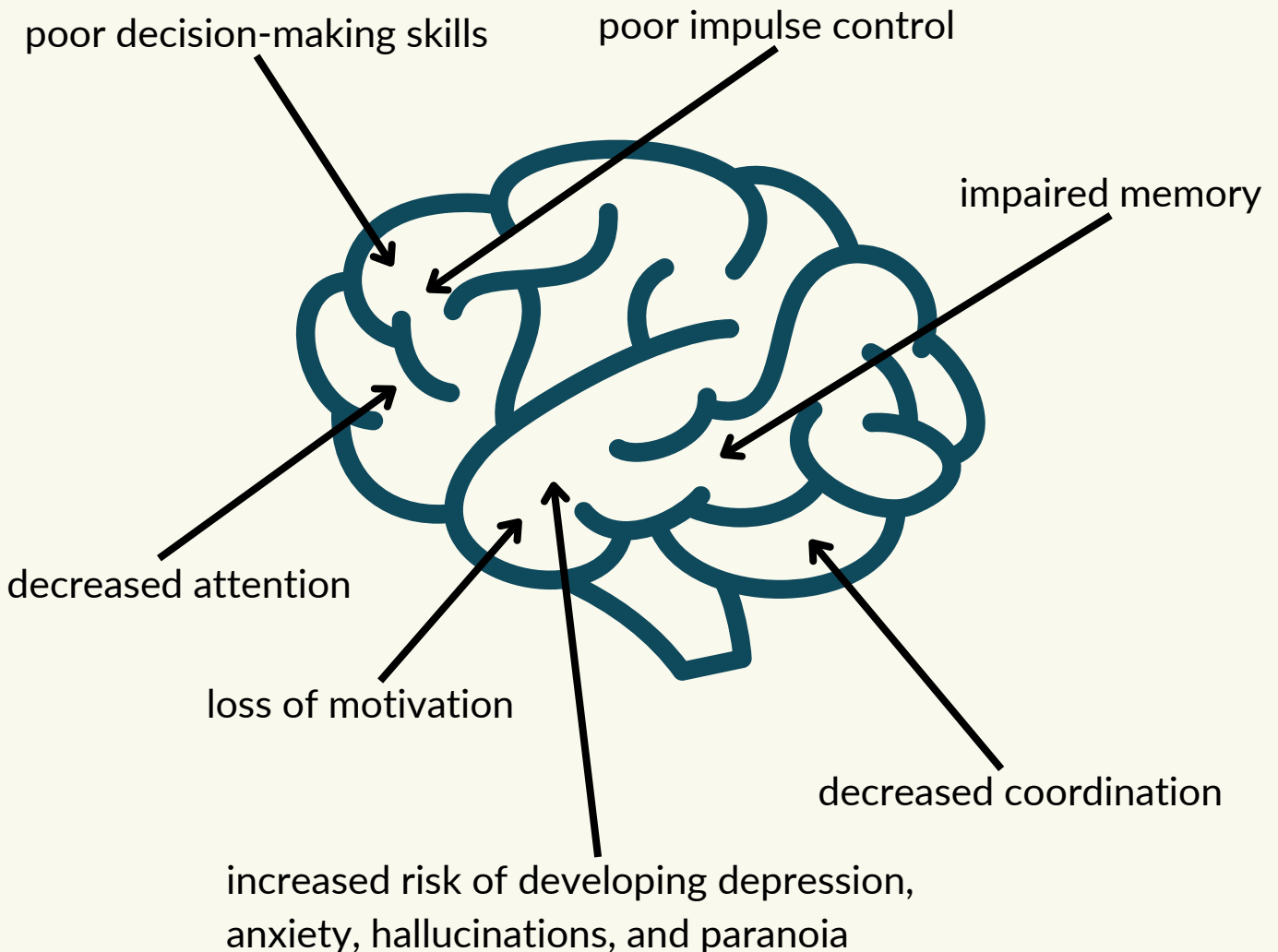
of high school students currently use cannabis, according to the 2021 Virginia Youth Survey.

1 in 25

middle school students have used cannabis at least once in their lifetime, according to the 2021 Virginia Youth Survey.

Effects of Cannabis on Your Brain and Body

Cannabis use can negatively affect your brain development. Underage cannabis use can result in a number of brain development issues, including:



The brain is not fully developed until around age 25. Using cannabis at an early age before the brain is developed increases both the risk of developing an addiction to the substance and the risk of developing mental health issues, such as schizophrenia. Youth cannabis use can also lead to higher risks of many physical health problems, including lung issues, heart attacks, vomiting, and sleep issues.

Events, Celebrations, and Milestones



Celebrations and milestones — such as attending school dances or sporting events, learning to drive, or graduating from high school — can bring new challenges. You may find yourself in different environments where you will have to make healthy and safe decisions. The decisions you make now can have effects long after high school.

For those who choose to pursue college, the choices you make as a teen can impact your options. Just as each state has its own rules on cannabis, so do colleges. Depending on the school, cannabis convictions and other penalties can negatively affect your chances of admission. Many colleges will deny or revoke scholarships and financial aid because of underage cannabis-related convictions.

You can demonstrate your leadership skills by planning ahead as you reach new milestones. Learn about the legal consequences and health risks of cannabis use, encourage your friends to make responsible choices, and lead by example.

Peer Pressure and Refusal Skills

You may sometimes find yourself in a situation where others try to pressure you to do something you do not wish to do. Peer pressure can be obvious or subtle, but no matter the scenario, do not be afraid to say “no” to cannabis use. There are several ways to say “no” to an uncomfortable situation involving cannabis. Your reason for saying “no” does not need to be complicated or even true. Whatever the reason, try to be confident in the delivery of your response. Here are some refusal skill techniques to help you say “no” to cannabis use:

No, I have to drive soon.

No, thanks. My parents will ground me if they find out!

I can't. I have to study for a test this week.

I don't feel like it, no thanks.

Other refusal skill methods include:



Offer alternative activities that do not include cannabis use.



Avoid locations where cannabis use is common.

Change the subject.



Walk away.



Use humor to defuse the situation.



Remember: real friends will be satisfied with a simple “no.”

Being a Good Peer Leader

You may not realize it, but you have a lot of influence on your peers through your actions. Making safe and healthy decisions about cannabis can help encourage your friends and classmates to follow your example.

ASK QUESTIONS.



You do not need to learn about the consequences of underage cannabis use on your own. Take time to ask a trusted adult about cannabis. A trusted adult can offer a safe space for you to ask questions and help you better understand the risks of underage cannabis use.

LISTEN TO OTHERS.

By actively listening to others when they say no or otherwise refuse, you model for others how to set boundaries.



HELP OTHERS.



Helping your peers without compromising your values is part of being a good leader. Create a space where others feel comfortable asking you for help.

LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES.

A sign of a good leader is someone who owns up to, and learns from, their mistakes. Do not be afraid to admit when you're wrong. Making mistakes gives you an opportunity to grow as an individual and helps set you up for success.



ENCOURAGE OTHERS.



Help your peers grow by acknowledging and encouraging them. When people feel encouraged, they are less willing to compromise their values or make risky decisions.

SPEAK UP.

Talk to a trusted adult if you see something that looks unsafe or harmful.



External Resources

[Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth \(VFHY\) Unfazed Campaign](#)

The VFHY empowers Virginia's youth to make healthy choices by reducing and preventing youth tobacco and nicotine use, substance use, and childhood obesity. Their Unfazed campaign is a source directed towards youth for information about the risk of using cannabis as a teen.

[Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Association \(SAMHSA\) Parents Resources Library](#)

SAMHSA is an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. SAMHSA has various resources for people of all ages on mental health, substance misuse, treatment options, and recovery.

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

The CDC is the nation's leading science-based, data-driven, service organization that protects public health. Their website contains information on cannabis' impact on youth and the brain.

[National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\)](#)

The NIDA is the lead federal agency supporting scientific research on drug use and addiction. Their website contains information, in both scientific terms and plain language, on cannabis and its health effects.

[Virginia Rules](#)

The purpose of Virginia Rules is to educate middle and high school students about Virginia laws and help them develop skills needed to make sound decisions, avoid breaking laws, and become active citizens of their schools and communities.

CCA Resources

Find these resources and more at cca.virginia.gov.

Cannabis Laws in Virginia Fact Sheet

Learn about what is legal and illegal regarding cannabis in Virginia, including topics such as possession, open container restrictions, and potential legal consequences.

Health Risks of Cannabis Consumption Informational Document

Learn more about how cannabis use impacts brain function and mood, risks cannabis use can pose to lung and heart health, and populations at greater risk of developing health issues from cannabis use.

Secondhand Smoke Exposure Fact Sheet

Learn more about how secondhand smoke affects youth and ways to reduce secondhand smoke exposure.

Risks and Consequences of Driving Under the Influence of Cannabis Fact Sheet

Learn more about the legal implications of driving under the influence of cannabis. This fact sheet covers information on how cannabis can impact driving, tips for planning a sober ride, and more.

Cannabis Use Disorder Fact Sheet

Learn more about cannabis use disorder (CUD). This fact sheet covers information on criteria used to diagnose CUD, as well as strategies to reduce cannabis use and resources for help.



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