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An Issue of Influence...

Marijuana: Is it a Threat to Our Youth?

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Marijuana has been getting a great deal of attention lately in the news. There is talk of its use in the health field as a form of medication, as well as whether legalizing it in general is a good idea. It is difficult to know what to think about it all.

Our youth are wrestling with the same issue. According to the 2009 Monitoring the Future Survey, marijuana use among adolescents has increased gradually over the past two years after years of a decrease in use. If there is so much debate on legalization, adult and youth alike question what is wrong with using marijuana. The answer starts with knowledge of the basics about marijuana:

THC is the chemical in cannabis, or marijuana which makes you feel "high".
When marijuana is smoked, THC goes quickly into the blood through the lungs and to the brain. When marijuana is eaten THC is absorbed more slowly into the blood as it has to pass through the stomach and intestine. THC is absorbed quickly into body fat and is then released very slowly back into the blood. This process can take up to one month for a single dose of THC to fully leave the body. The effects of marijuana will vary from person to person depending on physical characteristics of the person taking it, potency of the drug and the situation and form in which it taken.

Some may argue that if marijuana is used responsibly, the risks and dangers associated with the effects of the drug could be avoided. However, a question to raise : If at any time you let a chemical substance influence your decision making ability, is there a guarantee that once you are under the influence, that you are still able to act responsibly?

Recent studies on the brain show that using marijuana and other substances can cause problems with learning, memory and in youth brain development.

Research has found that THC changes the way in which your senses get information and the way your brain responds to the information. This process occurs through the hippocampus, a component of your brain that is crucial for learning, memory, and how information from your senses interacts with emotions and motivations.

The THC in marijuana decreases the activity and ability of the nerve fibers to process information. In addition, researchers have discovered that learned behaviors, also decline.

Research by Dr. Sanjeev Kumra, at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, states the following "...the forebrains regions are different in those who smoke cannabis compared to the healthy individuals who don't smoke cannabis." The abnormalities found in the research were the same as those found in schizophrenics. I understand that going from getting high to developing schizophrenia is a big leap. The percent of marijuana smokers that actually develop schizophrenia is not large, but the changes in the adolescent brain have been seen and documented.

An additional risk that occurs when an adolescent chooses to use drugs such as marijuana is that of developing an addiction. Studies support there is up to 4 times the risk of someone developing an addiction if consistent use starts before the age of 21. Many will argue that marijuana is not addictive. Evidence tells us differently. According to State of Minnesota data, the highest incidence of non-alcohol related admission to a treatment center is for marijuana addiction. Page two of this newsletter lists signs of addiction.

For more information:
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Addiction recovery statistics are pretty tough to swallow:

- 52.3% of those admitted to U.S. public substance abuse treatment programs in 2006 were re-entering treatment,

21.3% for the second time, 17.4% for the third or fourth time, and 13.6% for the fifth or more time.

One recent study found the that median time from first treatment to alcohol- and drug-free year was 9 years – with 3 to 4 episodes of treatment.

What is the bottom line when it comes to knowing these things about marijuana? The reason is that we need to be informed. Our youth see the same things we see and more. They are curious and want to make decisions on their own. The listen to their friends and do research on the internet, a percentage of which praises the use and benefits of marijuana. But the issue is that their brains are not fully matured and can receive a great deal of harm from using marijuana or any other substance. They need the guidance of caring adults in their lives to help them sift through the information to see what is information true and what is sugar-coated. They need help to understand the "why" in why it is not beneficial for them to use substances. They need to be heard in their view point and validated in their questions.

It is an Issue of Influence...

Is Marijuana Addictive?

Consider the following questions for yourself or someone you know who is using:

Tolerance: Has the use of drugs increased over times?

Withdrawal. When using is stopped, is there any of the following symptoms: irritability, anxiety, shakes, sweats, nausea, or vomiting?

Difficulty controlling use. Is use more or for a longer time than what is liked? Is the use to escape reality? Does the use stop after using one time, or does one time lead to more times?

Negative Consequences. Is use continued even though there are consequences in mood, self-esteem, job, health or family relationships.

Neglecting or Postponing Activities. Have social, recreational, work, or household activities been neglected or forgotten because of use?

Spending significant time or emotional energy. Is a significant amount of time spent obtaining, using, concealing, planning, or recovering from use? Is a lot of time spent thinking about using? Is use ever concealed or minimized? Is there thought of schemes to avoid getting caught?

Desire to cut down. Is there thought about cutting down or controlling use? Have there ever been unsuccessful attempts to cut down or control use?

If you answered yes to at least 3 of these questions, then the medical definition of addiction has been met. This definition is based on the of American Psychiatric Association (DSM-IV) and the World Health Organization (ICD-10) criteria.(1)

Shedding Some Light on the Symptoms of Marijuana Addiction

Anxiety

Paranoia

Aggression

Depression

Dilated pupils

Social isolation

Blood-shot eyes

Mental confusion

Impaired thinking

Impaired memory

Loss of motivation

Mood disturbances

Impaired coordination

Impaired concentration

Poor work performance

Poor school performance

Secrecy about use of marijuana

Uncontrollable craving for marijuana

Obsessive thoughts about marijuana

Psychosis

Schizophrenia

Increased heart rate

Reduced fertility

Lung damage

Increased risk of respiratory system cancers Selling of private property to pay for habit

Excessive amount of money spent on obtaining marijuana

Youth Event Calendar

Mondays at 5:30-7:00pm at the Laporte School in the FACS room.
Tuesdays at 4:00-5:30 pm at the HAPA/Taskforce office in the old Utke Hardware Building

Alternative Highs

Laporte:

Jan 15th

Lock In

9 pm to 7 am

Nevis 5th Quarters:

Jan. 15th & Feb. 19th

To follow home games at Bethany Lutheran Church

Park Rapids 5th Quarter:

Jan. 15th

Fun and Games

At the Park Rapids Middle School in the 8th Hour Room

Coming Soon:

BROOMBALL!