



# Reaching Out

## Norristown Area Communities That Care for Youth

### Keeping Youth Safe & Drug Free

Winter 2007

Inside	
Risks of Marijuana	2
What are the Signs of Marijuana Use?	3
Street Drugs	3
Marijuana and Driving	4

### Marijuana Usage in Norristown

The middle school years are a pivotal time for decisions regarding drug use.

According to a recent survey of youth, the following NASD students have reported marijuana use in their lifetime:

- 1.4% of sixth graders
- 12.1% of eighth graders
- 34.8% of tenth graders

The increase in use from grade to grade demonstrates the tremendous need to talk with your kids about drugs!

### Marijuana: Fact or Fiction

By Alissa McBride, Community Prevention Coordinator

While everybody knows that marijuana is an illegal drug, many people think that it is not as dangerous as “real” drugs. In fact, it is dangerous and there are some very serious consequences associated with its use. Below are some of the most common and destructive misconceptions:

**Myth:** It’s just a plant.

**Truth:** It is not just a plant. Marijuana smokers use the dried leaves of the plant *cannabis sativa*.



It’s the active chemical ingredient in marijuana, THC, which makes people high. The more THC, the higher the potency. THC content has increased dramatically over the last 20

years. THC affects the parts of the brain that control learning, memory, judgment and coordination. It impairs young people’s ability to concentrate and retain information. This is especially true when their brains are still developing. Marijuana is also associated with delinquent behavior. Research shows that the more marijuana teens use, the higher the rates of serious fighting at school or work.

(Marijuana continued on page 2)

### What is a Blunt?

Most often, loose marijuana dried buds and leaves are rolled into a cigarette called a **joint**. It may also be smoked in a pipe or a water pipe called a **bong**.

Over the past several years, it has appeared in cigars called **blunts**. This makes it a popular form in some U.S. cities with adolescents/young adults as it appears that they are smoking a cigar and not

marijuana. Blunts are made by slicing open cigars and replacing the tobacco with marijuana.

Material for this article taken from [www.coolnurse.com/marijuana.htm](http://www.coolnurse.com/marijuana.htm)

(Marijuana continued from page 1)

**Myth:** Marijuana is medicine.

**Truth:** The American Medical Association (AMA) has rejected pleas to endorse marijuana as medicine. A study done by the Institute of Medicine found that there is little or no medical value to smoking marijuana for virtually any ailment, including epilepsy and glaucoma.

**Myth:** The consequences for being caught with marijuana are not very serious.

**Truth:** In Pennsylvania, anyone in possession of or selling 30 grams or less of marijuana is charged with a misdemeanor, punishable by up to 30 days in jail and a fine of up to \$500. The penalties for posses-

sion of more than 30 grams increase to a possible year in prison and a fine up to \$5,000. In the Norristown Area School District, expulsion procedures are put into place for any student caught in possession of any amount of marijuana.



**Myth:** Once youth reach their teenager years there is very little that parents can do to prevent them from using marijuana.

**Truth:** Parents are the most powerful influence on their child's behavioral choices. Young people who learn about the risks of marijuana use at home are 50 percent less likely to try it than their friends who do not get drug information from their parents. It is crucial for parents to set guidelines, monitor that their guidelines are being followed and administered with consistent and reasonable consequences when necessary. It is also helpful to know your child's friends and their parents.

However, research shows that the most powerful ingredient to keeping youth drug free is for families to have strong bonds. Children who feel truly loved and needed are more likely to follow their parents' guidelines.

## The Risks of Marijuana

By Jennifer Yeager, Youth Services Specialist

Many times marijuana is the first illegal drug children try. That may be because of its low cost on the street. Perhaps it is because it can be easy to obtain.

Many children seem to hold the misguided belief that there are little-to-no health risks from smoking marijuana. This cannot be further from the truth. In fact, marijuana has been shown to increase

the likelihood of experiencing many health problems, such as:

- Loss of coordination
- Poor concentration
- Wide mood swings
- Aggression and hostility
- Loss of memory
- Increased anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Cancer of the larynx
- Cancer of the esophagus
- Lung cancer
- Emphysema
- Chronic bronchitis
- Increased blood pressure
- Impedes growth and development
- Decreases energy levels
- Can impair reproduction
- Impairs the immune system
- Depression
- Personality disturbances
- Impaired learning ability
- Addiction
- Brain damage

## What are the Signs of Marijuana Use?

By Rob Dallas, Youth Services Specialist

Is your child smoking pot? Millions of parents have to ask themselves questions of this nature on a daily basis. The unfortunate truth is that children are using illegal drugs at a younger age and the drugs of today are increasingly harmful to their health and development.

The age of first time use of marijuana is getting younger and younger. Last year among teens ages 12-17, the average age of the first-time user was 14 years old. So how can you tell if your child has been smoking marijuana?

There are many signs that can indicate whether or not your child is smoking marijuana. No one warning sign is necessarily more prevalent than the other, and there is no guarantee that all or even any of these symptoms exist.

One symptom is your child's change of friends. Often times when a child is hanging out with new people they become willing to do things out of character to fit in. Also the deterioration of long-standing friendships could be another aspect of this.

A decline in school work can represent a lack of motivation, which is another key symptom of regular marijuana use.

If your child is acting particu-

larly secretive about possessions and/or activities, it might be a cause for concern. This could be suggesting that they have something to hide.



It is also important to pay attention to clues around the house. Has money been disappearing? Be sure to note the presence of small medicine bottles, eye drops or butane lighters in the house. These clues are obvious and most important because they can provide evidence of drug use.

Finally is the use of strong odors to cover up the smell of marijuana smoke. Children often use cologne, perfume, candles, and incense.

You must be able to talk to your child if you think something

is wrong. How you approach your child with your concerns may determine how willing your child will be to talk. Jumping to conclusions and accusing your child will certainly not help.

Responding to the problem early is key because marijuana is a "gateway drug" and can lead to different forms of drug use.

### Street Drugs Workshop

Tuesday, March 20

Would you like to learn more about popular drugs among youth and the warning signs of drug use? Do you want to get help for your child or someone you know?

Please join CTC, Family Services and the Norristown Police Athletic League (PAL) for a free workshop on Tuesday, March 20, from 1-3 p.m. at Norristown PAL, 1101 Harding Boulevard, Norristown. Linda Kraft, project associate with the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, will answer these questions and more.

Pre-registration is required. Please call 610-630-2111.



KEEPING YOUTH SAFE  
&  
DRUG FREE

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**Communities That Care (CTC)** is a risk-focused approach to reducing adolescent problem behaviors through community mobilization and planning. Local citizens and community leaders work together to identify the risk factors that increase the likelihood of problem behaviors developing, and enhance the protective factors that can shield youngsters from problems. The risk and protective factors are used to implement a comprehensive plan to step ahead of the problems with far-reaching and long-lasting solutions.

[www.norristownctc.org](http://www.norristownctc.org)

## Smoking Marijuana Can Make Driving Dangerous

The cerebellum is the section of our brain that does most of the work on balance and coordination. When THC, the active chemical ingredient in marijuana, finds its way into the cerebellum, it makes scoring a goal in soccer or hitting a home run pretty tough.

THC also does a number on the *basal ganglia*, another part of the

brain that's involved in movement control.



These THC effects can spell disaster on the highway. Re-

search shows that drivers on marijuana have slow reaction times, impaired judgment, and problems responding to signals and sounds on the road. In one study of 150 reckless drivers, 33 tested positive for marijuana.

*Material for this article taken from  
[www.teens.drugabuse.gov](http://www.teens.drugabuse.gov)*