

# MYTH 8

## My kids won't be exposed to marijuana.

It's an unfortunate fact: If kids want marijuana, they can find it. More than half (55 percent) of youths age 12 to 17 responding to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health in 2002 reported that marijuana would be easy to obtain. The survey indicated that most marijuana users got the drug from a friend, and that almost nine percent of youths who bought marijuana did so inside a school building.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, nearly 17 percent of the young people surveyed said they had been approached by someone selling drugs in the past month.<sup>62</sup> In the 2000 survey, more than a quarter of 12- to 17-year-olds (26.6 percent) reported that drug-selling occurs frequently in their neighborhoods.<sup>63</sup>

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Kids are also exposed to a relentless barrage of marijuana messages in the popular culture—in the music they listen to, the movies they watch, and the magazines they read. And then there's the Internet, a crowded landscape of pro-marijuana and drug legalization Web sites. More often than not, the culture glamorizes or trivializes marijuana use and fails to show the serious harm it can cause.

The easy availability of marijuana has been a concern for years. Since the Monitoring the Future Survey began in 1975, most high school seniors said they could obtain the drug fairly easily or very easily.<sup>64</sup> Fortunately, non-use remains the norm, but an alarming number of young people have at least experimented with marijuana. The 2001 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System survey found that 42 percent of all high school students nationwide had used marijuana at some time in their lives.<sup>65</sup> A report based on that survey revealed

that from 1990 to 2001, the number of 9th graders reporting current marijuana use more than doubled, increasing from 9.5 percent to 19.4 percent.<sup>66</sup>

Marijuana use is in some ways like a contagious disease, spreading from “infected” individuals to others around them. And those most susceptible to its harmful influence are young people. Analysis of data from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse reveals that kids with friends who used marijuana were themselves more than 30 times as likely to have used marijuana in the past month. Kids were also nine times more likely to have used marijuana in the past month if they knew adults who used the drug.<sup>67</sup>

## **NOT JUST AN INNER-CITY PROBLEM**

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Some people have the impression that kids in the inner city are those most likely to get involved with drugs. Research shows, however, that marijuana use among youth in cities, rural areas, and the suburbs is roughly the same, and that use rates are similar regardless of population density. For example, annual prevalence rates of marijuana use among 10th graders are 28 percent in non-urban areas, 29 percent in large metropolitan statistical areas, and 32 percent in other metropolitan areas.<sup>68</sup>