

MYTH 9

There's not much parents can do to stop their kids from experimenting with marijuana.

Many people are surprised to learn that parents are the most powerful influence on their children when it comes to drugs. By staying involved, knowing what their kids are doing, and setting limits with clear rules and consequences, parents can increase the chances their kids will stay drug free. Research shows that appropriate parental monitoring can reduce future drug use even among adolescents who may be prone to marijuana use, such as those who are rebellious, cannot control their emotions, and experience internal distress.⁶⁹

In a government survey of youth ages 12 to 17, almost 90 percent of the respondents thought their parents would strongly disapprove of their trying marijuana once or twice.

The report, from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, also showed that the rate of past-month marijuana use was lower among kids who believed their parents would disapprove. In 2000, for example, 27 percent of young people who believed that their parents did not strongly disapprove of marijuana use reported past-month use of an illicit drug. For kids who thought their parents did disapprove, the use rate was only 4.9 percent.⁷⁰ As these numbers make clear, parents' attitudes and actions have a profound influence on their children's drug-using behavior.

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Kids who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents or caregivers are less likely to use drugs than kids who do not.⁷¹ Parents can create situations that help them connect with their children and stay involved in their lives. Experts suggest that parents try to be home with their kids after school, if possible, because evidence indicates that the riskiest time for kids with regard to drug involvement is between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. Parents who can't be home with their children should consider enrolling them in after-school programs, sports, or other activities, or arrange for a trusted adult to oversee them.

It's also important for families to participate in activities such as eating meals together; holding meetings in which each person gets a chance to talk; and establishing regular routines of doing something special (like taking a walk) that allow parents to talk to their kids. Opening channels of communication between parents and children, as well as between families and the greater community, gives young people greater confidence and helps them make healthy choices.