



International School Bangkok Middle School

A Guide for the Prevention of Substance Abuse

Revised: August 2007

Dear Parents, Students and Teachers,

The primary goal of this handbook is to educate parents, teachers and students about substance abuse so that they are better able to recognize and help adolescents who are using illicit substances. Working together as a community we can educate all about the risks of substance abuse and provide an environment that supports nonuse.

This handbook will discuss the following topics:

- Risk Factors – Signs and Symptoms,
- Negative Effects of Substance Abuse,
- Prevention Strategies,
- ISB Policy and Procedures,
- Thai Drug Laws,
- Frequently Asked Questions,
- Resources

If there are questions that arise from this guide, please contact your child's counselor or MS Administrators.

A special thank you must go to the "Community of Concern", to ISB's Substance Abuse Prevention Committee for helping to develop this guide for the prevention of substance abuse, and to Doug Helgeson, HS Dean of Students for putting the bulk of the guide together.

Regards,

James Souza and Moe Baron-Toaldo
MS Principal MS Vice-Principal

Risk Factors – Signs and Symptoms

Academic Performance

Slipping grades
Tardy or absent often
Excuses for incomplete assignments
Short attention span/difficulty concentrating
Change in attitude toward coaches and teachers
Change in motivation to perform

Alcohol and Drug Curiosity

Talks about alcohol and drug use
Change in attitude about tobacco use
Starts smoking cigarettes
Interested in music/literature on pro-drug use
Wears hats, shirts, jewelry, etc. with alcohol/drug logos
Evidence of drug paraphernalia
Hostility in discussing alcohol/drugs

Behavioral Changes

Lack of interest in personal appearance
Withdrawal, isolation, fatigue, depression, anxiety
Aggressive, rebellious behavior
Lack of cooperation; defies rules
Increased friction with family
Begins to make up own rules
Difficult to engage in usual conversation
Increased need for money
Comes home late and sneaks off to bed
Lying, stealing

Peer Relations

Change in friends
Vague about whereabouts
Phone calls from friends who are "new"
Sudden status with peers
Avoids old friends

Physical Changes

Blood shot eyes/dilated pupils
Weight loss or gain
Dazed look
Runny nose, frequent colds
Coughing
Bruises
Loss of appetite
Forgetful
Sleeping more than usual

Physical Evidence

Matches and lighters

Rolling papers

Sudden concern for privacy of things

Mouthwash, gum, breath sprays

Unfamiliar smell on clothing and/or breath

Disappearance of alcohol from home

Eye drops (e.g. Visine)

Negative Effects of Substance Abuse

The Gateway Drugs

The most widely used drugs are nicotine, alcohol and marijuana. Each is destructive in its own right. The use of any one of them seems to "open the door" to involvement with other drugs. Tobacco, alcohol and marijuana are referred to as "gateway drugs" in that individuals rarely use potent drugs such as cocaine or heroin without first having used tobacco, alcohol and/or marijuana. Many people who become addicted to these drugs began using during adolescence.

Tobacco

- The peak time for the initiation of smoking is in sixth and seventh grades.
- Nicotine is highly addictive and new research shows that kids exhibit serious symptoms of addiction within weeks or just days of first smoking.

Alcohol

- Among kids who begin drinking at age 13, 43% will go on to develop alcoholism.
- Children of alcoholics have a 4 to 10 times greater risk of becoming alcoholics than children of non-alcoholics.
- Quantities of alcohol without getting sick. As a consequence, death due to alcohol overdose has escalated among teens.

Marijuana

- Most affected are the centers of the brain that regulate a person's highest levels of thought, behavior and cognitive functioning.
- THC, the principal intoxicating chemical, is stored for weeks in the fatty tissues of the body, including the brain.

The Negative Effects

Consequences

Arrested psychological development. The major task of adolescents is to grow into responsible adults. Adolescents need to learn how to accept and handle their emotions: joy, excitement, anger, frustration, anxiety, disappointment, sadness and fear. They also need to learn how to celebrate, relax and feel accepted, be part of a group and yet be an individual. They learn these skills through trial and error and repetition over time. Alcohol or drug use short circuits this entire process and stunts or prevents normal development. **They may mature physically, but their emotional and psychological maturity may be greatly delayed.**

Confusion. Parents who allow their kids to drink or use drugs are unintentionally sending the message, "I don't care about you." or "I'm not willing to do whatever it takes to protect you." Schools and the media stress the dangers of alcohol and drugs, but peer pressure and advertising can encourage kids to try these substances. These conflicting messages are confusing. *Lost opportunities* may include suspension or expulsion from school.

Depression and Suicide

Depression. Depressed adolescents may be more likely to use alcohol or drugs as a way to feel better.

Depression is defined as an illness when the feelings of depression persist and interfere with a person's ability to function. More than 11 million children and adolescents in the general population suffer from depression at any given point in time. Kids under stress, who experience loss, or who have attention disorders are at a higher risk for depression. Depression also tends to run in families.

The following behaviors may be warning signs of depression that can lead to suicide:

- Increased sadness, tearfulness, moodiness, anger or irritability
- Decreased interest in activities; or inability to enjoy past favorite activities
- Persistent boredom; low energy
- A major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns
- Social isolation, poor communication, difficulty with relationships
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
- Frequent absences from school or poor performance in school; poor concentration
- Giving away favorite possessions

Prevention Strategies

Most parents have a sixth sense about how their kids act and feel. Learning the difference between "the symptoms of growing up" and the warning signs of drug use is not always easy. Recognizing a problem is the first big step. Asking for help is the next one.

Be wary of denial

There is the element of shame and inadequacy associated with drug use. Many adults feel helpless and assume that they can take care of the problem within the family itself. However, now is the time to reach out for professional and community based help.

Confronting the problem

Agree on a course of action with your spouse or other adult family member BEFORE talking with your adolescents. Be open and honest with your feelings, but do not let anger or fear overwhelm your effectiveness to communicate.

Do let your child know that you do not condone his or her behavior.

Do tell your child that you value him or her and will be a supportive advocate.

Do set new guidelines and limits for your child's behavior.

Do become more aware of your child's activities.

If your child is under the influence of drugs:

Right now:

Do try to remain cool and calm.

Do try to find out what he or she has taken and under what circumstances.

Do call a doctor or take your child to the hospital if he or she is incoherent and/or seriously ill.

Do tell your child that you will talk about the matter the next day.

Don't shout, excuse, or use physical force. This can only make matters worse.

The next day:

Do talk with your child as soon as possible.

Do have your child assume responsibility for his or her actions, including cleanup.

Do try to find out the circumstances under which he or she came to use, including the people they were with.

Don't name call, belittle, blame or threaten. Mutual respect should be safeguarded.

Don't discuss anything with your child if you are too angry, or unable to talk without losing your temper.

Do seek help from community supports: medical, religious, self-help groups and the school.

Do enforce consequences, e.g. loss of privileges.

Communication:

1. Communicating With Your Child Fosters Self Respect

Internal control helps adolescents make safer decisions, but high self-esteem is what allows them to believe in and stick by their good choices. A child who has a positive self-image is one who will most likely have the courage to resist peer pressure to use drugs. In order to encourage non-use among our children, it is important to build good relationships with them based upon mutual respect.

Make time for your son or daughter. Find an activity you enjoy doing together and pursue it.

Listen, really listen. Because parents have so much to do and so little time, they often try to listen while doing other tasks. Put your chores aside so your child knows you're really paying attention. Don't do all the talking or give long lectures.

Encourage independent thinking. Eventually your child will make a decision about whether to smoke, drink or use drugs or not. Wanting to be accepted by peers is a major reason kids try these substances. Help them practice making decisions on their own. Let them know it is OK to act independently from others and to think for themselves.

Praise your kids for who they are, not just for their accomplishments. When parents are quicker to praise than to criticize, kids feel good about themselves, and develop the self confidence to trust their own judgment.

Tolerate differences. Build strong family relationships by openly encouraging your children to talk freely about their lives, problems, school and work. Talk about topics where all people do not have the same opinion.

Give adolescents responsibility for their own problems. Allow your kids to experience the consequences of their behavior even though these consequences may be uncomfortable or embarrassing.

Remove the stigma of failure from your home. Young people need to understand that the only failure is in not trying. Mistakes are not failures. Mistakes simply provide us with new information that can help us to succeed. We all need the freedom to be imperfect.

Encourage outside interests. Kids who are involved in after-school activities and sports develop friendships and interests that will help to keep them away from drugs. Preteens and teens who learn to have fun, as well as cope with stress in healthy ways, will be less likely to turn to artificial substances to relax.

2. Communicating With Your Child

Establish Guidelines

Many parents hesitate to discuss drug use with their children. Some of us believe that our kids won't use drugs. Others delay because we don't know what to say or how to say it, or we are afraid of putting ideas into our children's heads. However, many young people in treatment programs say that they had used drugs for at least 2 years before their parents knew about it.

Take a firm stand against any form of drug use. Do not accept getting high or drunk as normal at any age. Exercise parental authority and responsibility. Be persistent.

- *Know where your son or daughter is.* Let them know where you can be reached at all times in case of emergency. Assure them that they can telephone you for a ride home whenever they need to, at any time, for any reason, without you asking any questions. Pick a code phrase that your child can use as a cue for you to come and pick them up- "I have a headache" or "Tomorrow I'm supposed to start work on that huge project..." When you pick up your teen, if it is not too late, do something fun together.

Do not serve alcohol to underage kids and don't allow kids to bring tobacco, alcohol or other drugs into your home. Set reasonable limits to help your child say "No." Establish guidelines, rules and curfews both for weekdays and for weekends that must be followed. State clearly the rules and values of your family and what the consequences are if they are ignored.

Teach resistance skills. Help your children develop coping strategies for dealing with problem situations. Talk through strategies with them for saying "No," such as "my parents will be up waiting for me," and make sure they know whom to call upon if help is needed. Provide them with phone numbers and taxi fare to carry with them. Advance planning can give them a way out of a difficult situation.

Be willing to be unpopular. Try to accept that there will be times when your kids won't like what you say, or will act as though they don't like you. Being your child's friend should not be your primary role during this time in their lives. It is important to resist the urge to win their favor or try too hard to please them. Inflammatory remarks such as, "You don't understand... I am the only one who..." are simply tactics kids use to get you to relent and say yes when you want to say no. Be consistent. Hold your ground.

Be at home while your preteens or teens are getting ready to go out. When they are leaving, remind them of your expectations that they not drink, smoke or use other drugs. Give them the confidence to stay in control. If they are meeting at a friend's house make sure to contact the parents to ensure that they will be home.

Be awake. When your son or daughter comes home after an evening out, wait up for them or ask them to awaken you when they arrive. It will be easier for you to determine if they have been smoking, drinking or using other drugs. Administer the hug/sniff test when they get home.

3. Communicating With Other Parents - Network Frequently

The best offense in the battle against drug use among adolescents is to know what's going on. Most parents have heard the whining refrain, "All the other kids' parents let them..." This persuasive and manipulative phrase may result in making you feel alone in your decision making. It is never too early or too late to turn the tables and really find out what other parents are doing. We, as parents, do more to shape our kids' views than any other single influence in their lives.

Get to know your son's or daughter's friends. If your child is associating with kids who are using drugs, your child is at risk.

Get to know the parents of your child's friends. You can become involved with other parents through the Parents' Organization, sports or drama activities, volunteering, etc. Develop a "united front" and discuss concerns openly.

Be a good role model. Set good examples in your own life. Believe that kids can understand and accept that there are differences between what adults may do legally and what is legal for adolescents. Keep that distinction sharp.

Call to confirm the activities your preteen or adolescent plans to attend. Find out if parties will be parent supervised. When in doubt, consider asking the parents hosting the party for their assurance that they will serve no alcohol and that they will not permit guests to bring alcohol.

Ask for help. Give permission to other parents to call you if they see your son or daughter participating in activities they know you would not approve of. Encourage your children to ask for help if one of their friends is experiencing difficulties with drug use by telling you, talking with their parents or speaking directly with the friend.

Provide help. Call the parents of any boy or girl at any event whom you perceive to be high, stoned, or drunk. It takes a brave parent to call another with bad news. Be willing to provide a ride to protect the teen or to call the police if necessary.

Know what to do if you suspect a problem. Realize that no adolescent is immune to drugs. Learn what other people are observing. Trust your gut. If you think there might be a problem, there probably is. Remember addiction is a disease, not a cause for shame. Seek professional help immediately.

A PARENT'S REPORT CARD-GO FOR STRAIGHT A'S

- Be Aware** of their attitudes.
- Be Alert** to their environment.
- Be Around** their activities.
- Be Assertive** in your parenting.
- Be Awake** when they come home.

4. Communicating with the School - Work Together

The school encourages parents to become involved with the school and our children's activities. As the primary educators of our children, the schools and parents form a unique partnership.

Take advantage of volunteer opportunities. One of the best ways to learn what is going on at school and to get to know other parents is to volunteer at the school. The PTA provides a myriad of ways for parents to become involved.

Know the school's Substance Abuse Policy. Actively support the policy.

Talk with the school counselors, principal or vice-principal if you suspect a problem with drug use because it is usually easier to take care of a problem in the earlier stages.

Studies show that the younger kids are when they start to drink, the more likely they will develop problems with addiction in the future. We can educate our kids about the medical, legal and other consequences of underage drinking so that they may make responsible decisions about not drinking.

ISB Substance Abuse Prevention Policy and Procedures

ISB employs a Public Health Model for substance abuse prevention which focuses on the following three areas:

- Education about substance abuse through Health class,
- Discussion with the trainers from Freedom from Chemical Dependency (FCD), and
- Random/ad hoc Substance Abuse testing.

The school involves parents in its prevention process by conducting parent awareness sessions with the FCD trainers and by asking for volunteers to sit on the Substance Abuse Prevention committee which meets a few times during the year. If parents are interested in sitting on the committee they should contact the Middle School administration.

ISB Drug Policy

The use, abuse, possession or consumption of, being under the influence of, buying or selling of, giving or trafficking in: narcotics, stimulants, barbiturates, suppressants, hallucinogenic drugs, marijuana, alcohol, tobacco, non-prescribed medication or any other dangerous substances by any student of the school is prohibited. This policy shall be in effect for all students while on campus, on school sponsored activities or trips, or while representing the school in any capacity either on or off campus. If it is determined that a student is in violation of this policy, disciplinary action up to and including expulsion will be applied. The administration is authorized to conduct breathalyzer tests, random and ad hoc hair and urine testing, locker inspections and searches of the personal belongings of students.

Drug Testing

Middle School students may be subjected to random and ad hoc hair testing, urinalysis or breath analysis periodically during the school year. Students with positive drug test results will be suspended for up to ten days and required to undergo ongoing personal/family counseling sessions. Students returning to school after a positive test will be subject to

additional tests. Expulsion will result should a second positive exam occur at any time during enrollment at ISB. A refusal to take a test will be construed as a positive test.

To Summarize

Infractions of the Drug Use Policy will result in the following:

First Offense: Suspension of up to two weeks with mandatory six counseling sessions, at least two of which must be completed before the student returns to school.

Second Offense: Expulsion.

ISB Middle School Self Reporting of Substance Abuse - Policy

If a student self reports prior to a drug test being administered the following policy will be in effect:

1. Student will be required to complete a minimum of six counseling sessions within a period of six weeks with a counselor acceptable to ISB and to follow up with any recommended continued counseling. The cost is the **RESPONSIBILITY** of the parent/guardian.
2. A summary report from the counselor upon completion of the six required counseling sessions needs to be submitted to the ISB Middle School administrators.
3. No additional disciplinary action will be taken.

If a student “self reports” after the initiation of a drug test, the following policy will be in effect:

1. Student will be required to complete a minimum of six counseling sessions within a period of six weeks with a counselor acceptable to ISB and to follow up with any recommended continued counseling. The cost is the **RESPONSIBILITY** of the parent/guardian.
2. A summary report from the counselor upon completion of the six required counseling sessions needs to be submitted to the ISB Middle School administrators.
3. The student may be suspended for up to ten school days.
4. Student will be expelled from school on the next positive Drug Test during the students remaining time at ISB.

Thai Drug Laws

The Substance Abuse Prevention committee feels it is prudent to inform our students and parents about the Thai drug laws and about the punishments associated with illicit substance use and possession in Thailand. The following table illustrates the offences and punishments under the Narcotics Act B.E. 2522:

Frequently Asked Questions

What does ISB do to prevent substance abuse?

ISB's approach to substance abuse prevention focuses on creating environments that support non-use. Substance abuse prevention is a matter of keeping the pool of non-users as large as possible by supporting good decision-making and offering positive, healthy alternatives to drug and alcohol experimentation. Studies show that the longer into early adulthood that we are able to delay experimentation with substances, the less the likelihood is that an individual will have substance abuse related difficulties in adulthood.

To this end, ISB has a multifaceted approach:

- Our health classes in grades 6-8 and 10 educate children about the risks of substance abuse and provide students with refusal skills that they can use should they find themselves in situations where drugs are available, or when peer pressure to use drugs is an issue. Testing provides a ready made and very credible reason to refuse.
- Each year, ISB funds two visits by Freedom from Chemical Dependency (FCD) group from the United States to work with students in grades 7,8, 9 and 12. FCD also provides training to ISB teachers and workshops for parents (on campus and in the Sukhumvit area).
- To support non-use, ISB also tests 20% of its students in middle school and 50% in high school.
- Hair testing has a detection window of ninety days and it is also significantly more accurate than urinalysis. Studies show that hair testing is 5-10 times more likely to detect illicit substance abuse than urinalysis.
- In the middle and high schools, ISB has counselors to confidentially assist children and families with substance abuse issues.
- ISB has an active Substance Abuse Prevention Committee, which consists of counselors, health teachers, parents and administrators.
- Students attend ISB for 14% of the total hours in a year. During that time, we educate them, we test them, and we provide support.
- ISB provides a personalized education. Our teachers know their students well enough to notice changes in behavior. Your children are aware that their teachers know them well.

A US Embassy sponsored expert in substance abuse prevention visited ISB in 2001 to meet with counselors, health teachers and administrators. ISB received a glowing report and as a direct consequence of this visit, ISB was the only international school in the world invited to a Colgate sponsored conference, summer of 2002, on substance abuse in the US.

What do other schools do?

IASAS schools are quite similar in their substance abuse prevention methods and

Offence	Punishment
Production, importation, exportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Imprisonment of 1 –10 years and a fine of 10,000 – 100,000 Baht.• In case of morphine, opium or cocaine: Imprisonment of 20 years to life and a fine of 200,000 – 500,000 Baht.
Disposal or possession for the purpose of disposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less than 100g: Imprisonment of 3 - 20 years and a fine of 30,000 – 200,000 Baht.• Greater than 100g: Imprisonment of 5 years to life and a fine of 50,000 – 500,000 Baht.

Possession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 100g: Imprisonment of up to 5 years and a fine of up to 50,000 Baht. • Greater than 100g: Imprisonment of 5 years to life and a fine of 50,000 – 500,000 Baht. (considered disposal)
Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imprisonment of up to 10 years and a fine of 5,000 – 100,000 Baht. (depends upon the amount possessed)

substance abuse policies. We share a common stance in that we are proactive in dealing with this issue and we do not pretend that it does not exist. ISB is not in denial that students will arrive at school with the same proportional representation of substance abusing/experimenting as from where they came.

Is it true that ISB only pretends to test students and does not really send hair samples for analysis?

We select a cross section of students taking into account gender, grade and nationality. In accordance with Board Policy, we test at least 50% of the high school students and 20% of middle school students each year. Each sample is sent to Psychemedics Corporation in California (the same company used by other IASAS schools that do hair testing).

Why was my son/daughter tested more than once?

We randomly generate a list of students to be tested. No one is taken out of the sampling pool once they have been tested. We want students to realize that even if they have been tested once or twice, they still have the same chance of being selected again as everyone else.

What happens if a student tests positive?

ISB has a *health model policy* in place:

- The first time that a student tests positive, he/she faces a period of suspension. During this time a program of family counseling for assessment of substance abuse and treatment planning must be arranged. The family counselor must be satisfied that genuine efforts at change are occurring for a student to be able to continue at ISB. The student is informed that he/she will be tested regularly upon his/her return to ISB. The aim is to support non-use.
- The second time that a student tests positive, he/she is asked to withdraw from ISB.

What can I do as a parent to help my children keep clear of drugs?

The most important preventative measures are

- Know where your children are going and who they are going with.
- Get to know your children’s friends and their families. Speak to the parents of your children’s friends and speak frankly about what is permissible behavior.
- Discuss the issue of substance abuse with your children. Tell your children that you forbid the use of these substances because you love them.
- Discuss the consequences of breaking the rules.
- Think of ways that your children can respond if they are offered drugs. A ready-made answer is “I don’t want to get tested at ISB”.
- If you suspect that your children’s friends are using drugs, call their parents.
- Be awake and greet your children when they return home – no matter how late. Administer the “Hug-sniff test” when they come home.

If I have substance abuse problems, how can I get help?

- Speak to your parents, a teacher or a counselor. ISB counselors are available to offer confidential assistance.
- For students who self declare to the school administration, a three-strike policy goes into effect. We will help them begin a substance abuse counseling program and provide regular testing to support non-use.

If I am worried about a friend, what can I do?

- The most important action you can take is to bring this issue to the attention of a caring adult. This may be a parent, a counselor, or a teacher. Only when we have knowledge of a problem can we begin to address it and provide professional support.

If I want more information about ISB’s Substance Abuse Prevention Program, or I have suggestion to make, what can I do?

- Make an appointment with a MS or HS administrator. We are very happy to hear from you.
- Join ISB’s Substance Abuse Prevention Committee

National Institute on Drug Abuse, Questions and Answers about Marijuana

Some of these questions may have been answered previously in this handbook, however the importance can not be overstated. This document has been obtained from the National Institute on Drug Abuse web site. Their web site has a number of excellent resources for parents and students. The facts and figures represent the situation in the United States of America and do not necessarily depict what is happening in Thailand, however, it is important to use numbers to show how wide spread a problem substance abuse has become.

How is marijuana used?

Most users roll loose marijuana into a cigarette (called a joint) or smoke it in a pipe. One well-know type of water pipe is the bong. Some users mix marijuana into foods or use it to brew a tea. Another method is to slice open a cigar and replace the tobacco with marijuana, making what’s called a blunt. Lately, marijuana cigarettes or blunts often include crack cocaine.

How many people smoke marijuana? At what age do children generally start?

A recent government survey tell us:

- Marijuana is the most frequently used illegal drug in the United States. Over 83 million Americans over the age of 12 have tried marijuana at least once.
- Over 12 million had used the drug in the month before the survey.

“The Monitoring the Future Survey”, which is conducted yearly, includes students from 8th, 10th, and 12th grades. In 2001, the survey showed that 20 percent of 8th-graders have tried marijuana at least once, and by 10th grade, 20 percent are “current” users (that is, used within the past month). Among 12th-graders, nearly 50 percent have tried marijuana/hash at least once, and about 22 percent were current users.

Other researchers have found that use of marijuana and other drugs usually peaks in the late teens and early twenties, then declines in later years.

How can I tell if my child has been using marijuana?

There are some signs you might be able to see. If someone is high on marijuana, he or she might

- seem dizzy and have trouble walking;
- seem silly and giggly for no reason;

- have very red, bloodshot eyes; and
- have a hard time remembering things that just happened.
- When the early effects fade, over a few hours, the user can become very sleepy.

Parents should be aware of changes in their child's behavior, although this may be difficult with teenagers. Parents should look for withdrawal, depression, fatigue, carelessness with grooming, hostility, and deteriorating relationships with family members and friends. In addition, changes in academic performance, increased absenteeism or truancy, lost interest in sports or other favorite activities, and changes in eating or sleeping habits could be related to drug use. However, these signs may also indicate problems other than use of drugs.

In addition, parents should be aware of:

- signs of drugs and drug paraphernalia, including pipes and rolling papers.
- odor on clothes and in the bedroom
- use of incense and other deodorizers
- use of eye drops
- clothing, posters, jewelry, etc., promoting drug use

Why do young people use marijuana?

Children and young teens start using marijuana for many reasons. Curiosity and the desire to fit into a social group are common reasons. Certainly, youngsters who have already begun to smoke cigarettes and/or use alcohol are at high risk for marijuana use.

Our research also suggests that the use of alcohol and drugs by other family members plays a strong role in whether children start using drugs. Parents, grandparents and older brothers and sisters in the home are models for children to follow.

Some young people who take drugs do not get along with their parents. Some have a network of friends who use drugs and urge them to do the same (peer pressure). All aspects of a child's environment - home, school, neighborhood - help to determine whether the child will try drugs.

Does using marijuana lead to other drugs?

Long-term studies of high school students and their patterns of drug use show that very few young people use other drugs without first trying marijuana, alcohol, or tobacco. Though few young people use cocaine, for example, the risk of doing so is much greater for youth who have tried marijuana than for those who have never tried it. While research has not fully explained this association, growing evidence suggests a combination of biological, social, and psychological factors are involved.

What are the effects of marijuana?

The effects of marijuana on each person depend on the

- type of cannabis and how much THC it contains;
- way the drug is taken (by smoking or eating);
- experience and expectations of the user;
- setting where the drug is used; and
- whether drinking or other drug use is also going on.

Some people feel nothing at all when they first try marijuana. Others may feel high (intoxicated and/or euphoric).

Fact: Marijuana users may have many of the same respiratory problems that tobacco smokers have, such as chronic bronchitis and inflamed sinuses.

What are the long-term effects of marijuana?

While all of the long-term effects of marijuana use are not yet known, there are studies showing serious health concerns. For example, a group of scientists in California examined the health status of 450 daily smokers of marijuana but not tobacco. They found that the marijuana smokers had more sick days and more doctor visits for respiratory problems and other types of illness than did a similar group who did not smoke either substance.

Cancer

It is hard to find out whether marijuana alone causes cancer because many people who smoke marijuana also smoke cigarettes and use other drugs. Marijuana smoke contains some of the same cancer-causing compounds as tobacco, sometimes in higher concentrations. Studies show that someone who smokes five joints per day may be taking in as many cancer-causing chemicals as someone who smokes a full pack of cigarettes every day.

Tobacco smoke and marijuana smoke may work together to change the tissues lining the respiratory tract. Marijuana smoking could contribute to early development of head and neck cancer in some people.

Immune system

Our immune system protects the body from many agents that cause disease. It is not certain whether marijuana damages the immune system of people. But both animal and human studies have shown that marijuana impairs the ability of T-cells in the lungs' immune defense system to fight off some infections.

Lungs and airways

People who smoke marijuana regularly may develop many of the same breathing problems that tobacco smokers have, such as daily cough and phlegm production, more frequent chest colds, a heightened risk of lung infections, and a greater tendency toward obstructed airways. Cancer of the respiratory tract and lungs may also be promoted by marijuana smoke, since it contains irritants and carcinogens. Marijuana smokers usually inhale more deeply and hold their breath longer, which increases the lungs' exposure to carcinogenic smoke. Thus, puff for puff, smoking marijuana may increase the risk of cancer more than smoking tobacco does.

How does marijuana affect the brain?

THC affects the nerve cells in the part of the brain where memories are formed. This makes it hard for the user to recall recent events (such as what happened a few minutes ago). It is hard to learn while high - a working short-term memory is required for learning and performing tasks that call for more than one or two steps.

Do marijuana users lose their motivation?

Some frequent, long-term marijuana users show signs of a lack of motivation (a motivational syndrome). Their problems include not caring about what happens in their lives, no desire to work regularly, fatigue, and a lack of concern about how they look. As a result of these symptoms, some users tend to perform poorly in school or at work. Scientists are still studying these problems.

Can a person become addicted to marijuana?

Yes. While not everyone who uses marijuana becomes addicted, when a user begins to seek out and take the drug compulsively, that person is said to be dependent on the drug or

addicted to it. Some heavy users of marijuana show signs of dependence because when they do not use the drug, they develop withdrawal symptoms. Some subjects in an experiment on marijuana withdrawal had symptoms, such as restlessness, loss of appetite, trouble sleeping, weight loss, and shaky hands.

Are there treatments to help marijuana users?

Treatments for marijuana dependence were much the same as therapies for other drug abuse problems. These include behavioral therapies, such as cognitive behavioral therapy; multi systemic therapy; individual and group counseling; and regular attendance at meetings of support groups such as Narcotics Anonymous.

How can I prevent my child from getting involved with marijuana?

There is no magic bullet for preventing teenage drug use. But parents can be influential by talking to their children about the dangers of using marijuana and other drugs, and remain actively engaged in their children's lives. Even after teenage children enter high school, parents can stay involved in schoolwork, recreation, and social activities with their children's friends. Research shows that appropriate parental monitoring can reduce future drug use, even among those adolescents who may be prone to marijuana use, such as those who are rebellious, cannot control their emotions, and experience internal distress. It is important to get involved in drug abuse prevention programs in the community or at school come to the FCD Presentations in the Fall.

Talking to your children about marijuana

As this booklet has shown, marijuana is clearly a dangerous drug which poses a particular threat to the health and well-being of children and adolescents at a critical point in their lives – when they are growing, learning, maturing, and laying the foundation for their adult years. As a parent, your children look to you for help and guidance in working out problems and in making decisions, including the decision not to use drugs.

Further Reading References

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