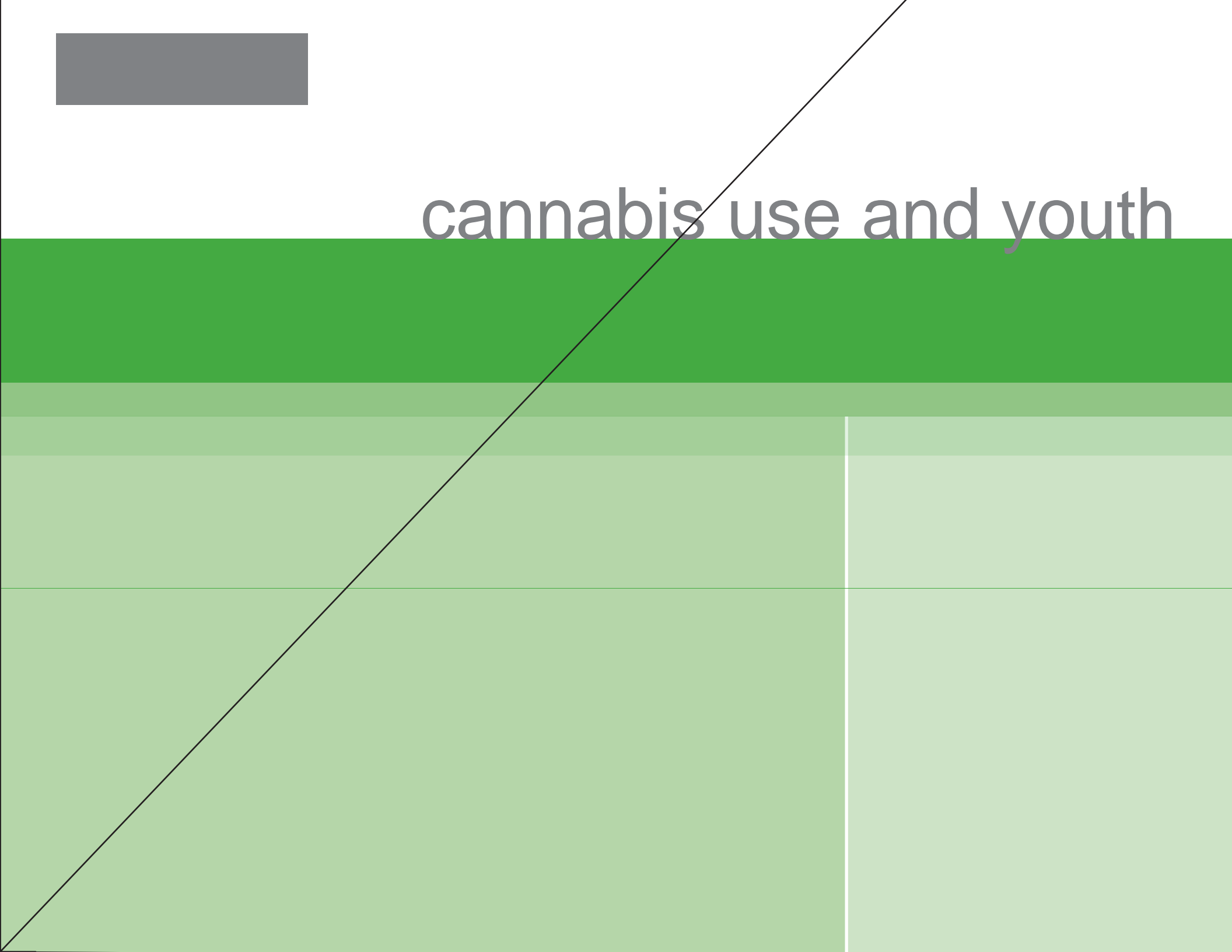




# cannabis use and youth



# introduction

Everywhere you turn today, it seems somebody is talking about cannabis.

It's hard to understand the ways it may affect our children. Is it addictive? Does it cause psychosis? Is it really a medicine? What will happen if my child uses it? What should I tell—or not tell—my child about it?

For this reason, the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, in partnership with the F.O.R.C.E. Society for Kids' Mental Health and the Canadian Mental Health Association (BC Division), has developed this guide. The

guide puts them in perspective within their individual situation.

Our goal is to offer you an honest and thoughtful discussion on cannabis so you can make better decisions about cannabis use—or non-use—in the context of your family.

## What's Inside

**You may have heard**.....Page 2

*Myths, facts and misunderstandings about cannabis are explored, explained and put into perspective.*

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*Why developing your relationship is more important than details about drugs.*

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### © 2012 Here to Help

This guide was developed by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, the F.O.R.C.E. Society for Kids' Mental Health, and the Canadian Mental Health Association (BC Division), members of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information. Funding was provided by the BC Mental Health and Addiction Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. Please send comments to [info@carbc.ca](mailto:info@carbc.ca).

Thank you to the BC parents and youth who participated in the making of this guide. Your experiences, insight and feedback added great value to the project.

*People are complex. Life is messy sometimes. And there's no "one answer" for everyone.*

## you may have heard...

**You may have heard** a variety of claims about cannabis in the media or in everyday conversation. For instance, you may have heard that cannabis use causes cancer or leads to quitting school. You may have also heard that the risk of developing cancer is low for cannabis smokers and that the drug can help relieve anxiety about school.

While there is at least some truth in almost all of them, accurate and balanced information about cannabis is more complex than simple statements.

Like it or not, **there are no simple answers** to explain the ways cannabis use may affect people's minds, bodies, relationships and future opportunities. Why? Because people are complex beings, and our choices and behaviours are complex too.

Even if you have only limited experience with drugs, you likely know more than you think about the key issues. Most people, for example, understand intuitively that all drugs can be both good and bad. Even medication recommended by a doctor can cause harm, especially if not taken properly. When it comes to cannabis, almost everyone knows people

or other drugs. Likewise, most people know of someone who has had bad experiences.

### **Hemp. Cannabis. Marijuana. Hash.**

Chances are you've heard these words before, though you may not know the difference between them. Are they the same or different? The answer is "both."

**Hemp** is a plant that, like other plants, has roots, a stalk, leaves, items such as paper and fabric.

#### **Cannabis**

produce varying mind-altering and medicinal effects when smoked or consumed. The most talked-about strains of the hemp plant are cannabis sativa and cannabis indica.

#### **Marijuana** (aka buds).

**Hash**, short for hashish, is made of pressed resin from cannabis buds, and is therefore stronger in effect.

While most drugs are useful in some way, all drug use carries some risk. Generally, it is safest not to use any drug unless one can be sure the

not increase the potential for harm.

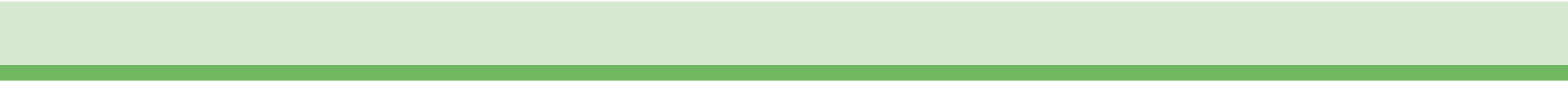
It can help to think of drug use on a spectrum as shown in the illustration below.

The level of risk and amount of harm related to cannabis use depends on many factors:

- More drug equals more risk. Increased risk is linked with a greater amount and more frequent drug use, and higher strength of a drug.
- Younger age equals more risk. The younger a person is when they start using a drug regularly, the more likely they are to experience harms or develop problematic substance use later in life.
- at a weekend party and walking home later is less likely to result in harm than smoking cannabis on school property or driving under the

- Motives are important. If a young person's reason for using cannabis is follow. If their motive is a strong and enduring one (e.g., a chronic sleep or mental health problem), then more long-lasting and intense use (with greater risk of harm) may follow. When someone uses a drug in order







## Comparing common ways to use cannabis

Laboratory experiments suggest that some ways of smoking cannabis



## Exploring Medical Cannabis Use

Cannabis has been used as a medicine in many parts of the world for thousands of years. These days, many people in Canada want more evidence about what cannabis is (and is not) effective in treating, and the best way to deliver that treatment.

of cannabis for the following conditions: anti-spasm for multiple sclerosis, anti-convulsive for epilepsy, anti-nausea for chemotherapy, and appetite stimulant for people experiencing extreme weight loss. Recent research has shown cannabis is effective in managing pain.

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# you and your child

**When you're thinking about talking with your child** about drugs,

There is no rule about how or where a conversation about cannabis should start either. But considering how often drugs are talked about on TV, in the newspaper and at school, the subject might easily be brought up naturally while watching a movie together or while swapping stories about what happened at work and school that day.

Another “natural” way to start a conversation about cannabis is to bring it up in the context of other drug use. For instance, if you are planning to visit a relative who uses tobacco, you could inform your child about it and ask them what they know about smoking or how they feel about smoking. Or if you are having a beer or taking medication, you could ask, “Why do you think some people accept the use of alcohol and medication but not cannabis?”

It may be more comfortable to talk when you are not sitting across the table looking directly at each other. Try starting a conversation in the car or on the basketball court. You could say, “I’ve heard things on the news about kids smoking pot at school. How about your school? How does your principal deal with students who use drugs?”

### Monitoring your motives

The goal of open communication is to get your child talking and sharing their thoughts and feelings with you. Ideally, they will one day ask you what you think and feel about things too. Establishing a connection through conversation is more important than assessing the details of what they tell you. After all, it is not really an open conversation if you are only inviting your child to talk so you can jump on them for ideas you do not like.

### Practising good conversation skills

Your child, like anyone else you talk to, will be a better conversation partner if you stick to some basic rules about communication.

- Be a good listener. Avoid the temptation to shower them with wisdom, and let them do at least half of the talking.
- Acknowledge their point of view. This does not mean you have to agree with what they say, but instead, to try not to react in a way that will shut down their desire to tell you how they think and feel about things.
-

## Responding to Your Child's Cannabis Use

Discovering (or suspecting) your child has been using cannabis or any other drug can be scary, especially if you sense that it is not just part of “normal” experimentation.

While it can be tough to resist the urge to go wild with worry or anger, the best thing you can do for your child is to respond responsibly. It is important not to let your concerns harm the relationship and the trust you have with your child.

### Stay calm

Yelling and making threats will not help the situation. If anything, “freaking out” will give your child another reason to hide things from you. Searching their room or personal belongings may harm the trust between you and your child.

### Talk to your child

Sit down with them and tell them how you feel. If they are high, wait until the effects have worn off so you can have a more meaningful discussion. Say, “I’m worried because…” or “I’m afraid because…” Then give your child an opportunity to express their own feelings. Make sure they know you are really listening. And allow them time to think things through before speaking.

### Offer alternative choices

If your child is using drugs because they like the buzz, you may want to suggest activities that will naturally boost their adrenaline levels, such as rock climbing or mountain biking. If your child is using cannabis to calm themselves or to relieve feelings of anxiety, you could help them explore calming or meditative activities, such as yoga, running and swimming.

### Lower the risks

A child who is using cannabis may need help learning to manage the risks and use the drug in the safest way possible. One way to help your child lower the risks related to using cannabis is to have a conversation about safer ways to smoke (see Quick tips for safer cannabis use). Another way is to discuss safer contexts and settings for use. Allowing your child to smoke cannabis at home may help to provide a safer environment but it is important to weigh the risks involved.

If your child is engaging in risky activities such as using cannabis at school or selling cannabis, it is important to talk with them about why they are engaging in these activities so that you can assess the level of risk, help them think through the consequences and identify alternatives. For example, if your child is selling cannabis to make money, talk with them about safer ways to earn an income.

### Quick tips for safer cannabis use

- Avoid smoking cannabis with tobacco
- Avoid deep inhalation or breath-holding
- Use a vaporizer
- If smoking cannabis, use joints rather than water bongs
- prevent burns
- Purchase from a trusted source

### Consider what to share (or not share) about your past

Many parents want to know if it is good or bad to tell their children about is ncesj0 -c not shait their,safe0 gsipeoingt

### Keep the art of motivation in mind

While no parent is 100% responsible for their child's choices and

One way involves checking in with them about their goals—over the next semester or year or even longer—and getting them to articulate how their use of cannabis or other drugs might impact those goals.

Taking a motivational approach is less about pressuring your child to change their cannabis use and more about supporting their internal

*It means steering a conversation toward possibility and action.* And it is light in spirit and tone because it involves imagining success in the future.

**Want to learn more about the art of motivation?** Visit Helping Schools at [www.carbc.ca](http://www.carbc.ca) and click on Art of Motivation.

In short, rather than make your child say and do what you want, help them identify what *they* want—to earn money for a cool gadget, get a driver's licence or graduate from high school—and support their efforts. You might need to help them understand what is involved in reaching a goal, and help them identify both internal and external resources they can draw on to ensure their success.

### Give it time

It will likely take more than one conversation for you to understand your child's drug use. But the good news is that, over time, you might discover your child has less of a problem than you thought. That is, your teen could very well be experimenting with cannabis the way many young people do without ever developing a risky or harmful pattern of use.

If a harmful pattern is emerging, you will need to be even more patient. But it may help to consider this: the path to your child's drug use took time

drug use may be related to life challenges—feelings of failure or a lack of connection at school or with loved ones—that sometimes take a great deal of work to resolve. It might even be related to physical and mental health issues.

### Signs of risky or harmful cannabis use

- using regularly at an early age
- daily or near daily use
- using during school or work
- using as a major form of recreation
- using to cope with negative moods
- experiencing chronic coughing, shortness of breath, wheezing or psychotic symptoms

**Note:** A young person may have one or more of these signs without having a short-term or long-term problem with cannabis. However, the more signs, the higher the risk.

### Seek help

Not every parent is equipped to handle drug use issues on their own. If you need help understanding or communicating with your child, look for local resources and organizations that can assist you. You could try talking to

# appendix

## Therapeutic Use of Cannabis

In Canada, THC and other pure cannabinoids are available in three prescription medications:

- Marinol (dronabinol) is a synthetic form of THC.
- Cesamet (nabilone) is another synthetic cannabinoid. Both are prescribed to relieve nausea and stimulate appetite, and both are taken in pill form.
- Sativex is derived from the cannabis plant. It is a combination of THC and CBD (cannabidiol). It is prescribed for the relief of pain in multiple sclerosis and taken by spraying the substance under the tongue.

Generally, the effects of smoked or vaporized plant cannabis are more

and other cannabinoids taken in pill form. Also, the absence of certain cannabinoids in synthetic compounds can lead to harmful side effects such as panic attacks.

The advantage of smoked or vaporized cannabis is that people can determine the most effective dose and feel the effects more quickly.

People who smoke cannabis for therapeutic purposes learn to self-regulate their use depending on their physical condition.

## Drug interactions

Because of the way cannabis is metabolized, scientists believe there is a yet been recorded.

Reports from patients indicate that negative drug interactions are not common. Patients report that they are able to reduce the doses of some of their pharmaceutical drugs (particularly opiate-based painkillers) when using cannabis. Cannabis has also been shown to mitigate the negative side effects of pharmaceutical drugs and other therapies. This helps patients stick to their treatment schedules.

## Contraindications

Certain conditions increase the risk of using cannabis. Patients with a history of psychotic disorders should be under careful psychiatric monitoring when using cannabis. Cannabinoids are contraindicated for patients with a history of active cardiac ischemias. Those receiving digitalis or other cardiac medications should only use cannabis under careful supervision by a medical doctor. Cannabis use should be avoided

intracellular pathogens, such as those that cause Legionnaire's disease, Leishmania and tuberculosis.



### Canada's medical cannabis program

The Marihuana for Medical Purposes Regulations (MMPR) provide a way to access dried cannabis for medical purposes in Canada. According to the regulations:

- Support for a person's use of cannabis for medical purposes is required from a doctor or nurse practitioner.
- If provided with a signed medical document, a person may purchase the designated amount of cannabis for their medical condition from a licensed producer.

For more information about the Marihuana for Medical Purposes Regulations, visit the Health Canada website: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>.

