



Talking to Youth about Cannabis

A Tool Kit for Understanding
and Preventing Cannabis Use

JANUARY 2020

Before You Start

Talking to youth about cannabis can seem hard. This tool kit is designed to help.

Who is this tool kit for?

The tool kit is for adults who want to help to talk to young people about cannabis. It was designed together with people in and around Leduc, Alberta, but it can be used by anyone.

“Leduc has one of the biggest marijuana farms in our backyard. It’s not like we can hide it. We need to get the right information to help our kids stay safe.”
–Leduc parent

“It’s a lot more common at school than adults think”
–Advice from a Leduc youth

I’m looking for:

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- What’s the science?
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Cannabis: What's the science?



What is cannabis?

Cannabis has a lot of names – marijuana, weed, pot, joint, bud, green, herb, flower, hash, or smoke.

It has hundreds of chemical substances and compounds. The two most important are known as:

THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol)
this makes you feel 'high'.

CBD (Cannabidiol)
this relaxes you, but it does not make you feel 'high'.

How can you use cannabis?

Eating or drinking

mixing it into food such as cakes, or mixing cannabis oil with teas and sodas

Vaping

reheating dried or liquid cannabis through a vaping device

Dabbing

sniffing heated cannabis concentrates

Sublingually

applying drops of cannabis oil under the tongue

Smoking

rolling it in cigarette paper or using a pipe. Smoking a "popper" means combining cannabis with tobacco and smoking both through a water pipe

“It's legal now and most people support it anyways. It's medicine, not a drug.”
–Edmonton youth

Are medical and non-medical cannabis the same thing?

Medical marijuana can be prescribed by a health provider to treat problems like nausea, loss of appetite, pain, depressed mood, anxiety or insomnia. About half of the cannabis used in Canada is for medical purposes.

Medical cannabis typically contains lower levels of THC and higher levels of CBD than non-medical cannabis. This means it doesn't get you 'high' the way non-medical cannabis does. Medical marijuana is not the same as the non-medical cannabis you can buy from a store or on the street and does not affect you in the same way.



Did you know?



- Vaping and dabbing are popular ways to use cannabis in Leduc right now. Because vaping and dabbing use oils, not leaves, they don't have a smell.
- Young people around Leduc say they buy cannabis from (illegal) dealers, because it's cheaper and easier. Street cannabis can contain things like chemicals, mould or bacteria – or even other drugs – that can make it less safe than legal cannabis.

What's legal

18+

Adults over 18 years of age can buy, possess, use or grow cannabis



Purchased from licensed retail stores or AGLC-operated online sales



Up to 30 grams can be purchased at a time



Each detached home household can grow up to 4 plants



Edibles (e.g. candies & baked goods)

and not legal?

<18

Youth under age 18 cannot buy, possess or use cannabis



Smoking in some public places (in Leduc, consumption is restricted in the same way as alcohol)



Driving under the influence of cannabis, or consuming in a vehicle



Purchasing or selling homegrown product

“They know people using it medicinally so they think it's safe.”
—Leduc community member

“People take it for stress. It makes you feel better.”
—Leduc youth

Did you know?



- Youth caught with more than 5 grams of cannabis can face criminal charges.
- Driving can be unsafe for up to 12 hours after using cannabis.
- The legal age is not 18 in all provinces. In some it's 19.
- Homegrown cannabis is only legal if it is consumed by the producer. You can't legally sell homegrown cannabis.
- Individuals with an Alberta Class 5 Graduated Drivers Licence (GDL) or a Class 7 driver's licence must have zero blood alcohol and blood drug concentration when driving. Breaking this law can mean losing your licence—and your car—as well as criminal charges.



What does cannabis do?

Most common short-term effects:

Mental Effects

- Feeling high (euphoria), sense of wellbeing
- Feeling calm and relaxed
- Changes in your judgment, concentration, information processing, and decision-making
- Paranoia, hallucinations, or psychosis, ideas that seem detached from reality
- Different perceptions of time and space (like time passing more slowly)
- Changes in your short- and medium-term memory

“I heard one guy say he drives better when he’s high because he’s hyper-vigilant.”
–Leduc youth



“I got crazy paranoid, like someone was after me”
–Leduc youth

Physical Effects

- Decreased motor coordination, balance, and reaction time
- Swelling of blood vessels (e.g. red eyes)
- Increased heart rate and decreased blood pressure
- Irritated respiratory system (from smoking or vaping)
- Increased appetite
- Dry mouth and throat
- Feeling sleepy

How cannabis affects someone depends on:

- Their age
- The amount used
- Speed of consumption
- Level of THC (an active ingredient)
- How it was consumed
- Their physical condition and mood
- Whether it was consumed with alcohol or other drugs



Risks of cannabis



Disruption of normal brain development

Young people's brains are growing and developing rapidly until they are in their twenties. Using cannabis over this time gets in the way of normal brain growth.

Prolonged use can damage someone's:

- Ability to learn
- Ability to control their emotions and impulses
- Ability to deal with stress.

All of these things are really important for being able to make good decisions and have good relationships as an adult.

Cannabis doesn't affect an adult's brain in the same way, because it is not growing in the same way as a youth's. The impact of cannabis on a youth's brain can be permanent.



Risk of addiction

One in six people who initiate cannabis use during adolescence experience cannabis addiction.



Physical problems

Smoking cannabis can cause breathing problems such as bronchitis, coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath.



Unsafe driving

Driving after using cannabis is one of the biggest safety risks for youth, who are likely to be inexperienced drivers. The risk is even greater if the youth has been drinking alcohol and/or using cannabis.



Potential mental health impacts

Regular cannabis use can have potentially bad effects for some people who might be vulnerable to mental illness and is associated with higher rates of some mental illnesses.

“They don't know what kind of damage they might be doing to their brains.”
-Leduc youth workers

“Some people don't consider driving while high to be as bad as drunk driving.”
-Leduc youth worker



Why do youth want to use cannabis?

“It’s become more accessible. There are a lot of plants everywhere. It’s easy to buy”
–Leduc Youth

“They see other people in the media do it and they see them as role models”
–Leduc youth

“I started when I was 15, because I was bored”
–Leduc youth



In general, adolescence is a difficult time, when things can feel overwhelming and difficult.



To cope with difficult feelings

Youth can feel stressed because of things like bullying, fights with parents or friends, or pressure to do well at school. They might be dealing with sexual abuse or violence at home. They might be struggling with negative attitudes from others about people of their sexuality, race or gender. Some youth say cannabis helps them cope with these feelings.



To try something new

The thrill of trying something new, especially when it feels good and seems rebellious. They might do it when they feel bored, and think it’s a fun thing to do with friends.



Because it’s there

Cannabis is easy to get compared to a lot of other drugs. Youth see it being used around them, and many of them know adults who use it.



To fit in

Peer pressure can be a strong influence, and some young people say cannabis makes them feel like they fit in. They might also see people they look up to using cannabis—their parents, older brothers and sisters—and want to be like them.

What are the most useful ways to help?

There is no guaranteed way to stop youth from ever trying cannabis. But there are some things you can do to stop it from becoming a problem.



Be there for them

A supportive family and other adults in a young person's life lowers the probability that a young person will develop problem cannabis use.



Give them the facts

Educating youth about the risks of cannabis use is essential. Start early, and be consistent in your messages.



Reflect on your actions

Reflect on your own use and those of other adults you know. Youth see what adults around them are doing. They internalize messages about what's normal, how to cope with difficult things, and how to have fun.



Get them involved

If they're not doing something constructive with their free time, help them think about what they like to do, and get them involved in activities that will develop new skills in areas that interest them, build self-esteem, and expand their social network.



Address mental health concerns

Mental health issues like depression and anxiety are leading causes of youth cannabis use. Youth can be experiencing stress from exams, fights with parents or friends, bullying, or social responses to their sexuality or gender. Some may have experienced sexual or physical violence.



Be open

Adults who think or know a young person is using cannabis should remain approachable and keep an open mind. Punishing or threatening youth can further alienate them and might make a problem worse, as it limits their willingness, ability and comfort to ask for help.

“We need to recognize that many of our kids have experienced trauma.”
—Leduc community member

“Don't use scare tactics – like we're going to waste our life if we try it once”
—Edmonton youth



What makes a good conversation?

Leduc youth said they want the adults in their lives to talk to them about cannabis. When they have questions, they are looking to parents, teachers, family members, and other adults they know to give them honest and factual information to help them make decisions.

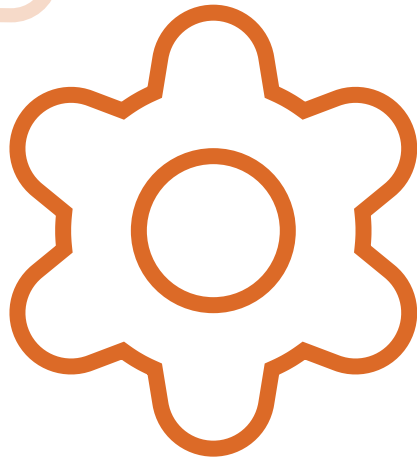
It can seem hard if you don't have the right information or are worried about what questions they might ask or what they might say.

This tool kit uses advice from Leduc youth, community members, and others to provide tips and pointers for making sure your conversations about cannabis are informed and helpful.

“Parents have experience. We want to hear about cannabis from them.”
–Leduc youth

“Teachers play a big role in your life. I feel comfortable talking to them about cannabis.”
–Leduc youth





1

Adopt a constructive mindset

Think about what you hope to accomplish through talking to the young person.

Do you want them to know they can talk to you? To understand the risks? To plan how to stay safe? Think about what you want to say, but don't forget to listen to them, too.

Put yourself in the young person's shoes.

Think about what might be worrying them and how they feel about their life. Think about what questions you could ask to understand their perspectives better. Write them down if it helps you.

Practice listening and trying to understand the young person's views.

Especially if they're different from yours. You don't have to agree, but listening shows you care and can offer a chance to hear where they're coming from.



2

Do your research

Be prepared with information.

Read the information about cannabis in this tool kit. Use the additional resources provided to answer any questions you have.

Don't worry if you're not an expert.

If a youth asks you a question you can't answer, you can look it up later. Maybe you could do the research together.

Plan some key messages

based on whether they're already using or just thinking about it. Page 21 has some suggestions.



“Don't lecture us, just talk normally. Don't be weird about it.”

-Leduc youth





3



Create a safe space

Listen more than you speak.

Ask clarifying questions to understand their position.

Reserve judgement and keep your tone calm.

Encourage a two-way conversation

by answering their questions honestly.

Keep conversations free of stigmatizing language like “stoner”, “pothead”, or “loser”, particularly toward the youth and their friends.

“I don’t want to hear the same thing a hundred times.”
–Leduc youth

4



Pick a good time

No child is too young for a chat about cannabis, but what you say will depend on how old they are and your relationship to them.

Aim for privacy, where youth feel comfortable speaking without being overheard.

Any time the topic comes up naturally is best. Avoid scheduling a time in advance.

Follow the youth’s lead. If they really don’t want to talk about it, don’t push it. Let them know you’re available to talk whenever they like.

Aim for a time when you won’t be interrupted, like in the car or after class.





5

Start talking

If you're finding it hard to work out where to start, try one of the following conversation starters. If you don't like any of these words, substitute ones that feel natural to you.

Remember that even if it seems like they're not listening, they are probably hearing what you're saying and might come back with questions later on.

If you're not sure where to start, try one of these conversation starters.

Do you know anyone who has tried cannabis?

Do you smell that?
Do you know what it is?

Do you get why cannabis is legal for adults but not for people your age?

Did I ever tell you why I started using cannabis?

Have your teachers talked to you about cannabis?
What did they say?

Do the kids at school talk about cannabis?
What do they say?

Someone at work said their kid smoked pot. Has anyone ever offered any to you?

I heard the other day that it's not safe to drive for up to 12 hours after you've used pot. Did you have any idea it was that long?



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“Tell us stories from real life.”
–Leduc youth

Keep talking

Listen to what they say.

Tailor your responses to what you hear from them. You might find some of these messages helpful to try.

If cannabis use is less frequent or they're just thinking about it:

- Your brain is still developing and cannabis use can affect your memory and attention later on.
- It's not a good idea to use cannabis at the same time as alcohol and other substances.
- Driving after using cannabis is not safe. Don't get in a car with someone you know has been using cannabis. If you've been using cannabis, make a different plan to get home or sleep at a friend's house.
- If you're going to use cannabis or be around people who are, it's important that you're safe. What are some things you can do to keep safe? Let's talk about who you will call and what you'll do if you start to feel unsafe.

“Be open and curious. Try to understand our situation.”
–Leduc youth

If someone seems really addicted to cannabis – it stops them doing a range of normal and healthy things, they are suffering physical or mental health effects, or they say they want to stop but can't:

- There are people who can help you understand why you use cannabis and how you can cut back or stop. I can support you to get that help.

For information on local treatment options, refer to the section on local resources.

If cannabis use is more frequent or has been going on for a while:

- I want to understand what's going on for you. What do you think cannabis is helping you with?
- There are some types of cannabis and cannabis use that are more dangerous than others. Did you know that smoking cannabis and holding your breath are really dangerous for your lungs?
- It sounds like you're using cannabis to help you cope with some big stuff. A [doctor/counsellor/healthcare worker] might be able to talk to you about other ways you can get help with those things and feel better.
- Cannabis use now can affect your brain forever. I'm worried you are doing damage to yourself that you won't be able to fix later.
- Are there things you'd like to be doing instead of using cannabis? What if I gave you a hand to help you do more of those things?

“Don't ask us if we've used it.”
–Leduc youth



What can go wrong?

Do your best to avoid the following common mistakes:

Talking without listening

Youth want to feel heard. Try paraphrasing what they've said in your own words to show you've been listening.

Minimizing their situation

Teenagers' problems may seem insignificant to adults, but for them they can feel all-consuming.

Forcing a conversation when they're not ready

If they don't want to talk to you, don't force it. Try at another time, let them know you're always there to listen.

Trying to solve their problems for them

You can provide guidance and support, but ultimately they are going to make their own decisions.

Putting them down

Telling them their problems are their own fault or not important, or not listening to their side will erode trust and shut down communication. It may end up strengthening the feelings that are leading them to think about or use cannabis.

Giving them information you're not sure of

Be honest about what you know and don't know. If you don't have an answer, look it up later.

You could even look it up together.



Using stigmatizing language

Terms like "stoner", "pothead", "drug addict" and "user" characterize addiction as a personal choice or a moral failing. Youth might be upset, offended, or become defensive if you use these words about them, their friends, or people they know. Neutral terms like "someone who smokes pot" are factual and create respect and openness in conversations.

“Begin talking about it at an earlier age, and keep talking about it through high school.”

—Canadian youth



What if it doesn't work out how you planned?

Don't panic!

Take some time to think calmly afterward about what worked and what didn't, work through these steps one more time, and try again.

Talk to other adults about what's worked for them. You could also try asking another adult the young person trusts to talk to them. If you do, respect that the young person might have confided in this person, and don't ask the adult to break that confidence.



What makes for a useful presentation about cannabis?

Adults may be looking for speakers about cannabis use or advice about helping children and youth not use cannabis. Here are some pointers to look for in determining the suitability of a proposed presentation and presenter:

Is the target audience clear?

The information should be tailored for the target audience, including their age, role, information and awareness level, the issues they are facing, and the goal of the session.

Is the information evidence-based?

The source of information should be stated and should include a range of recent, credible sources.

How much time has been allocated for discussion?

Presentation of information should account for no more than half of the total time for the session. The rest should be devoted to open discussion from participants on questions / issues of their choosing.

“Use different approaches for different audiences.”

–Canadian youth



“It’s easier to talk in a group than one-on-one. A small group, not too big.”
–Leduc youth

Who is facilitating the discussion?

Discussion should be facilitated by people with experience working with youth, up-to-date knowledge of the subject matter, and who display openness to a range of perspectives and views.

How will emotional responses be addressed?

There should be a clear plan for dealing with any strong feelings among people in the room.

How will divergent perspectives be accommodated?

Discussion should address views that are based on inaccurate or misleading information, and counter them with relevant, factual and evidence-based sources.

Is the approach honest and respectful?

Materials should avoid things like scare tactics and stigmatizing language (“druggie”, “losers”), and acknowledge that there is a spectrum of cannabis use, with a range of impacts on people’s lives.



Where can I go in Leduc for help and advice?



Leduc Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)

Provides youth and family support, including subsidized counselling and referrals to other required supports

780.980.7109 | fcss@leduc.ca

Other local FCSS services in Alberta

Similar to above, but varies from community to community.

Google “FCSS community name”

Alberta Health Services Addiction and Mental Health, Children and Adolescent Services

Addictions assessment and treatment for youth

780.342.2701 | 780.986.2660

Alberta Health Services Addiction and Mental Health, Youth Addictions Counsellor

Provides individual counselling, family support and universal programming to the Leduc, Beaumont and Devon communities

780.717.1880

jennie.mclester@ahs.ca

Private counselling services

Private agencies that provide counselling and therapy to support emotional and psychological health

Google “youth counselling Leduc”

School Resource Officers

Police liaison officer providing educational resources, counselling, presentations, etc. in schools

Contact your school

Leduc Beaumont Devon Primary Care Network (PCN)

Medical practitioners who can advise how to address cannabis use disorders

lbdpcn.com

Narcotics Anonymous

Support groups for people with substance use issues

eana.ca/meetings

Parents Empowering Parents

Support groups for parents of youth / adult children with substance use disorder

pepsociety.ca/meetings

Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Program

Provides parents / guardians with a protection order that permits their child to be taken for detoxification treatment

alberta.ca/protection-children-abusing-drugs-program.aspx

Alateen

Support groups for teenage family members and loved ones of alcoholics

al-anon.ab.ca/meeting/leduc-monday-night-afg

What other information is out there?

All audiences

Cannabis in Canada: Get the Facts Government of Canada

A collection of resources from various sources, vetted and compiled by the Government of Canada

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/health/campaigns/cannabis/education-resources.html>

Alberta Cannabis Framework and Legislation Government of Alberta

Webpage detailing Alberta's legislation and regulation

<https://www.alberta.ca/cannabis-framework.aspx#p6241s6>

10 ways to reduce risks to your health when using cannabis Canadian Research Initiative on Substance Misuse

List of 10 recommendations for safer cannabis use, based on scientific research

<https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/pdfs---reports-and-books---research/canadas-lower-risk-guidelines-cannabis-pdf.pdf>

Youth

Cannabis: Important things to know Kids Help Phone

Information site aimed at youth, with 24-hour phone and chat line

<https://kidshelpphone.ca/get-info/cannabis-important-things-know/>

Is cannabis safe to use? Facts for youth aged 13–17 years Government of Canada

7-page information document aimed at youth

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/drugs-health-products/is-cannabis-safe-use-facts-youth.html>

The Blunt Truth: Useful tips about safer ways to use cannabis

Infographic document aimed at youth

https://www.camh.ca/-/media/images/all-other-images/research-lrcug-for-youth/lrcug_for_youth-eng-pdf.pdf

Adults

Cannabis Talk Kit: Know How to Talk with your Teen Drug Free Kids Canada

Discussion guide for parents, with suggested scripts to begin conversations

https://www.drugfreekidscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Cannabis-Talk-Kit_EN.pdf

Parents: Help your teen understand what's fact and fiction about marijuana Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction

Infographic poster aimed at parents

<https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-05/CCSA-Marijuana-Fact-and-Fiction-Infographic-2016-en.pdf>

Clarity on Cannabis: FAQ for Educators Alberta Health Services and Alberta Education

7-page information document aimed at educators

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/pf/if-pf-drugsafe-cannabis-faq-educators.pdf>

10 Questions About Cannabis Use and Your Student Teen Mental Health

Infographic poster aimed at educators

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/FINAL-Cannabis-One-Pager-for-Teachers.pdf>

Talking Pot with Youth: A communication guide for youth allies Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction

Comprehensive guide to preparing for a conversation with youth about cannabis

https://ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-03/CCSA-Cannabis-Communication-Guide-2018-en_0.pdf

Safety First: A reality-based approach to teens and drugs Drug Policy Alliance

44-page information document aimed at parents –uses a harm reduction approach

http://www.drugpolicy.org/sites/default/files/safetyfirst-4.24.19_0.pdf

Discussing Pot and Driving with Teenagers: A guide for adults

Discussion guide, includes 10 questions to ask teens and discussion supports

https://www.cpha.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/resources/cannabis/Pot%20+%20Driving%202018/pot+driving_discussion-guide_e.pdf



ABOUT THIS TOOL KIT

Who created this tool kit?

This tool kit was developed by the City of Leduc (the City), in consultation with the Leduc Community Drug Action Committee (LCDAC) and Family and Community Support Services (FCSS).

The City saw a need for a practical, evidence-based tool kit for parents and those who work directly with children and youth in local schools and youth-serving agencies, to promote cannabis awareness and education among children, youth and their families. The Tool Kit is intended to provide accurate information about cannabis, and practical tools to support conversations with youth about cannabis use.

Who had input?

Local youth, parents, educators, youth workers, health professionals, and police from Leduc and Edmonton were consulted.

The quotes provided in the Tool Kit come from these discussions.

Information in this kit is also derived from the following sources:

- *Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, Canadian Youth Perceptions on Cannabis, 2017.*
- *Canadian Nurses Association, Harm Reduction for Non- Medical Cannabis Use, 2017.*
- *Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, The Effects of Cannabis Use during Adolescence, 2015.*
- *Canadian Public Health Association, Frequently Asked Questions about Pot and Driving, 2018.*
- *Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, Talking Pot with Youth: A Cannabis Communication Guide for Youth Allies, 2018.*
- *Government of Canada, Health Effects of Cannabis, 2017.*
- *National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Understanding the Links Between Adolescent Trauma and Substance Abuse, June 2008.*

“Just say no is not realistic
—tell us how to stay safe
if we use it.”

—Canadian youth

“My neighbour's son started
smoking every night to help
him sleep. She kicked him out.
I understand how she feels about
drugs, but maybe it would have
been better to try talking to
him about the things that were
worrying him.”

—Leduc parent



LEDUC COMMUNITY
DRUG ACTION
COMMITTEE

CITY OF
Leduc