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Parent and Youth Support Groups

FACTS ABOUT MARIJUANA

Cannabis, Sativa, more commonly known as a "pot" or "grass", Marijuana is a very common drug. Marijuana is typically a starting point for many substance users. For many years there has been a lot of misinformation about marijuana, but recent studies have proven that it is dangerous, as well as addicting.

What is Marijuana? Marijuana is a plant which is dried, then rolled into cigarettes, or joints, or it is put into a pipe, and smoked. The main mind-altering ingredient in marijuana is THC (Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol), but more than 400 other chemicals are also in the plant. The amount of THC, which is dependent upon how the plant is grown and the type of plant, will determine the strength of the marijuana. Marijuana can also be enhanced with other common grasses and/or sprayed with PCP (Angel Dust), making the drug even stronger.

Another common process is to press a plant's leaves and flowers into a resin called "Hashish" or "hash", which are five to ten times stronger than crude marijuana. Hash oil may be used on marijuana or even on regular cigarettes.

What are the effects? There is absolutely no scientific evidence that indicates marijuana improving hearing, eyesight, and other things, as some people claim. Studies of marijuana's mental effects show that the drug can impair reflexes, reduce short-term memory, alter sense of time, and reduce a person's ability to do things which require coordination, like driving a car, for instance. Marijuana interferes with learning by impairing thinking, reading comprehension, verbal and mathematical skills. Some immediate physical symptoms of marijuana include: faster heartbeat, pulse rate, bloodshot eyes, and dry mouth and throat.

A common psychological reaction to marijuana is the "acute panic anxiety reaction" which is the extreme fear of losing control. The chronic user is characterized as apathetic, lacking good judgment and is introverted. Habitual marijuana use may result in the inability to design or implement plans. The habitual user is marked by fragmented thinking and fanciful ideas which makes it difficult to plan for the future.

ARE THERE LONG TERM EFFECTS?

Scientists believe that marijuana can be especially harmful to the lungs, even more so than cigarettes, because users inhale the unfiltered smoke deeply and hold it in their lungs as long as possible. The exposure of lung tissue to the damaging smoke is increased, increasing

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the risk of emphysema and cancer. In fact, recent studies which examined human lung tissue that had been exposed to marijuana smoke over long periods of time showed cellular changes which proved to be precancerous. These studies indicate that long term marijuana smoking can cause lung cancer and other serious lung diseases.

Studies of men and women who use marijuana have shown that it may influence levels of hormones relating to sexuality. Women start having irregular menstrual cycles; both men and women may experience a temporary loss of fertility. Marijuana may be particularly harmful during adolescence, a time of rapid physical and sexual development.

Research studies also suggest that the use of marijuana during pregnancy may result in premature babies and in low birth weight.

Is it addictive? A drug is physically addicting if the user becomes tolerant of the drug over time, making it necessary to increase the dosage to experience the same effects, and if the user experiences withdrawal symptoms after discontinuing use. There is conflicting evidence on whether or not marijuana has these effects. However, there is much evidence to show that using marijuana does lead to psychological dependency and has been associated with the loss of interest in all activities except those related to drug use. The lack of drive or incentive has been termed the "Amotivational Syndrome", resulting from personality changes that the chronic user undergoes. Most frightening of all, most hard narcotic users will admit that their drug habit started with marijuana. Research shows that the earlier people start using drugs, the more likely they are to go on to experiment with other drugs. Not everyone who smokes marijuana will turn to other drugs, but the probabilities are extremely high.

What to look for:

Marijuana is a dried green, leafy substance with stalks and seeds that is usually packaged in a plastic bag. The amounts vary, but a common amount would be an ounce, or a gram. Cigarette papers, or "zig-zags", pipes and glass water pipes (bongs) are used to smoke marijuana. You may find marijuana stalks and seeds thrown away, as they are often discarded because they are difficult to smoke.

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What can I do? Marijuana is dangerous and can lead to more and more abuse. If you or a loved one is using marijuana, get help now. Treatment centers will treat the disease of substance addiction with intense psychological/psychiatric counseling, group and individual therapy, and support group meetings.

Make the call and make the difference now.

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