

## **Marijuana and your child**

Marijuana in Denver is only legal for individuals 21 years or older; but with dispensaries and advertisements for marijuana everywhere you turn, do you have the facts that you need to explain to your child why it is important that they refrain from use?

Marijuana can have a dramatic effect on the developing teen brain. The tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in marijuana, which is the chemical responsible for most of marijuana's psychological effects, affects specific areas of the brain—pleasure, memory, thinking, concentration, sensory and time perception, and coordinated movement. These continue to develop until age 25. Research suggests that frequent use of marijuana while the brain is developing can result in impaired learning and memory as well as a decreased IQ.

Teens who try marijuana are also 9 times more likely than adults to develop a dependence on marijuana. The reason for this is that the brain's limbic system, which is the reward system, develops first, while the prefrontal system, which controls judgment, develops at a slower speed. This means that there is a period during the teen years when the brain's drive for pleasure is high, but its ability to make deliberate decisions is low.

Talking to your child about the effects of marijuana, and why it is important to you that they abstain from using, is the most beneficial thing that you can do to keep your child from using marijuana. It is never too early to have an age-appropriate, non-judgmental discussion with your child. For tips on how to talk to your child about marijuana, check out the DenverRAP parent toolkit located at <http://denverrap.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Parent-Tool-Kit.pdf>.

If your child is using marijuana, there are many resources available in Denver for your child to receive the help that they need to stop. One example is the Substance Abuse Treatment and Education (STEP) Program at Denver Health, which offers supportive programs to help young people address and manage substance abuse addictions, including cannabis use disorder. For more information visit: <http://www.denverhealth.org/medical-services/mental-health-and-addiction-services/our-services/adolescent-substance-abuse-treatment>.