

Protecting Our Children

Marijuana: More Harmful Than We Thought... Especially For Girls

(NAPSA)—A recent study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University in New York found that one in four ninth-grade girls who were sexually active reported using alcohol or drugs at the time they last had sex. With marijuana by far the most widely used illicit drug among teens today, parents of teen girls should take note of the widely underestimated risks of using marijuana.

Marijuana or alcohol can cloud judgment and decision-making, increasing girls' vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. In fact, one study found that teens who have used marijuana are four times more likely to have gotten pregnant or to have gotten someone pregnant than teens who have never smoked pot.

Parents are the first line of defense in warning their daughters about these risks of using marijuana and alcohol. Statistics show that the use of marijuana among high school students increases with age, with 16.5 percent of ninth grade girls and more than 20 percent of 12th grade girls reporting marijuana use in the past month.

Warning Signs

Warning signs of marijuana use include:

- Bloodshot eyes or clothes that smell of smoke
- Isolation, depression, fatigue or anxiety
- A decline in school performance or attendance
- A change in sleeping or eating habits
- Use of incense or room deodorizer



What Parents Can Do

First, parents should remember that they are role models for their kids and act accordingly. Experts suggest that they can talk to their kids about how taking drugs puts them in risky situations and may lead to decisions they will later regret. They can let their daughters and sons know that in their household there is a firm rule of no marijuana or other drug use, and that there are clear consequences if the rule is broken.

Perhaps most importantly, parents should stay involved in their kids' lives. Know who she's with, what she's doing, where your teen is and when she'll be home. Ask who, what, where, when. Keep the lines of communication open. It may be your child's lifeline.

For more information on communicating with your daughter about the risks to her health and future, visit www.theantidrug.com. The site also offers a brochure called "Keeping Your Kids Drug-Free: A How-To Guide for Parents and Caregivers." The brochure can also be ordered by calling 1-800-788-2800.