Mississippi Medical Cannabis Program Toolkit

LET'S TALK CANNABIS:

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS & GUARDIANS

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Mississippi Medical CANNABIS Program

This Parent and Guardian Toolkit is designed to provide you with the facts, science, and tools you need to have thoughtful, productive, and ongoing conversations with kids as young as 10 about the harms and risks of underage cannabis use.

THE RISKS

Since the brain doesn't fully develop until you're in your mid-20s, substances like cannabis can negatively affect a young person's body in many ways. Research shows that cannabis may:

- Impair memory, learning, clear thinking, decision-making and motivation, all of which can affect school performance.
- Increase the risk of chronic cough, bronchitis, and asthma severity.
- Increased risk of mental health problems like depression, anxiety, and psychosis.

YOUR INFLUENCE

It might be hard to believe at times, but research shows you are your child's number one influence on behavior. What you say and do matters. If you avoid conversations about cannabis (or any drug), they might think the topic is off-limits. It's better to let your child know they can discuss it openly with you. That way, they'll receive the information and support they need to make healthy decisions.

What You Can Do:

- ✓ Educate yourself on the risks of underage cannabis use.
- ✓ Start the conversation early on and talk often about making safe and healthy choices.
- ✓ Model healthy and safe behaviors.
- ✓ Provide and discuss ways to say no to cannabis.
- ✓ Set boundaries by enforcing consistent rules.
- ✓ Ensure your teen knows you disapprove of underage cannabis use.

BEST PRACTICES FOR STARTING THE COVERSATION

No matter their age, it's essential to set rules and have ongoing conversations with your child about cannabis use. If possible, have these conversations early, before they consider experimenting. Still, talking with them at any age or stage makes a difference. Follow the tips below to be ready for productive, healthy and supportive conversations about cannabis.

Talk early and often:

- ✓ Start the conversation early, even before your kids start to think about experimenting, when they first start asking questions.
- ✓ Stay involved and keep the conversation going as they grow. Discussions about cannabis (or any other drug) use should not be a one-time thing. They should be ongoing because risk factors for substance use can change and multiply over time as teens deal with the different trials and pressures of adolescence.

Be casual but clear:

- ✓ Have casual conversations instead of lectures or formal family meetings.
- ✓ Choose informal times to talk, such as in the car, during dinner or while watching TV.
- ✓ Look for natural opportunities to talk about cannabis with your kids, like when you're driving past a dispensary or watching a character on TV use cannabis.
- ✓ Be consistently clear on where you stand. Leave no room for doubt.

Be open, and listen without judgment:

- ✓ Listen carefully to your teen without judgment. Ask open-ended questions that encourage your teen to elaborate. Having a genuine conversation lets your teen know they can come to you whenever they have questions or problems.
- ✓ Correct any misconceptions your teen may have, such as "everyone smokes weed" or "marijuana won't hurt me."
- ✓ Address and acknowledge their comments so they know you're paying attention and understand them.
- ✓ Let your teen know they can always come to you if they're in trouble and that their safety and well-being are your number one priority.

Keep it grounded and fact-based:

- ✓ Focus on the facts and discuss how cannabis use might affect them.
- ✓ Teens know when you are trying to exaggerate information or scare them, so focus on real-life situations and believable consequences.

If you suspect your child is using, don't panic:

- ✓ Stay calm. Overreacting may lead your teen to rebel, feel resentment, or take greater risks.
- ✓ Seek to understand and empathize with their reason for using. Help them explore safer and healthier alternatives.
- ✓ Talk about your concerns and give positive reasons for wanting your teen to stop using cannabis.
- ✓ Keep the conversation open to problem-solve.
- ✓ Remind your teen of the ground rules you set earlier or set new ground rules and consequences.

Let them know you care and are always there for them:

- ✓ Maintaining a strong and open relationship with your teen reduces their susceptibility to outside influences.
- ✓ Creating a supportive and nurturing environment can help your child make better decisions.

Help them say "no":

- ✓ Helping your child deal with peer pressure can prevent them from using drugs.
- ✓ Let them know they can say "no" if they're put in a situation that makes them uncomfortable.
- ✓ Work with your child to think of a way to handle this situation, whether it's simply saying, "No, I don't smoke," or "I have a game tomorrow," or "I have to go to work tomorrow."

Plan for Peer Pressure

Peer pressure can be especially strong for children and teens. Talk with your child about creating an "exit plan" if they are ever offered cannabis. Having a plan in place can help them make safer decisions.

Examples may include:

- ✓ Calling or texting a trusted adult
- ✓ Using a predetermined code word to signal they need help
- ✓ Practicing ways to say no in a comfortable, supportive setting

Rehearsing these strategies ahead of time can build confidence and reduce stress in real-life situations.