

A Pot Primer for Parents.

Know enough basic facts about marihuana to talk to your son and daughter about it.

As a parent, you're concerned. You read that college, high school, even junior high students smoke marihuana. What about your own son or daughter? Have they tried it? Would they tell you? Do you just keep quiet and hope—do you talk?

Your youngsters may joke about grass, tea, joint, roach, head—words that mean something different to you. They seem to know more about drugs than you do—that's their side of the generation gap. But not all their "facts" may be facts.

Can you talk frankly to your child about pot?

As frankly as about other important matters, with tact and mutual respect. It may be easier to start by discussing marihuana experiences he's heard of from his friends. You won't want to come across as accusing or angry—it's as risky to assume he does "turn on" as to assume he doesn't. Keep it simple, direct. And make sure your concern for him, and what happens to him, shows.

Who uses pot, and why?

More boys than girls. Girls are likelier to try if their boyfriends smoke it. A majority of young people have not tried it, and have enough self-assurance to resist trying it. A number have tried it once or twice out of curiosity or boredom. A smaller number "turn on" just on weekends. A small percentage become "heads"—their lives centered around marihuana or other drugs, with very little interest in anything else.

What proven facts about marihuana can you tell him?

1. Individuals react very differently to this drug, which is why you hear stories of extreme reactions, and stories of no reactions.
2. Reactions vary according to setting, expectation, pattern of use, and the strength of the marihuana (which varies greatly).
3. Because of all these variables, little has been proven conclusively about specific effects of marihuana on

the mind and body. This does not mean there *are* no ill effects, but that they cannot be catalogued and predicted exactly.

4. Involvement with this drug during the years while the young personality is finding and shaping itself, and learning how to deal with life's problems, is an intangible danger to try to measure, but of deep importance. That's a hard fact for the young to understand.

5. The possession of marihuana is illegal under local laws. In many states, it is a felony, equivalent to the possession of heroin. The laws provide severe penalties. Even being in the company of someone who possesses marihuana may make your child liable for arrest.

Easy answers to hard questions.

There aren't any. If your children ask, "What about parents' drinking and smoking?" a partial answer is that *your* body and personality have matured. Once anyone becomes dependent on any drug, including alcohol and cigarettes, it can be difficult to stop. Even if you're convinced they're harmful.

"Why do adults say marihuana leads to stronger drugs when that hasn't happened to my friends?" A teenager's experience is limited; it *has* happened. While marihuana itself does not lead to other drug use, association with "dealers" and drug users may be the first step to experimenting with LSD, speed and even heroin. And these drugs are far more than a stronger form of pot.

"What about the people who say pot is OK?" To be honest, scientists still don't know everything about the specific effects of marihuana. But certainly, the "authorities" your children quote, know even less. No expert is saying today that pot should be legal.

It boils down to this. Marihuana is a risk nobody *has* to take. Least of all somebody you care about.

For more detailed facts about marihuana and other drugs, write for free booklets to:
National Institute of Mental Health
Box 1080, Washington, D.C. 20013

