

When It Matters Most

Facilitating Honest Conversations
with Youth About Drugs

Shari Egeland
Executive Director
Omni Youth Programs
shari@omniyouth.net



We cannot control every choice a young person makes—but we can influence whether they come to us before, during, or after a risky moment.

**First,
Understand the Risks**



THE RISK HAS CHANGED

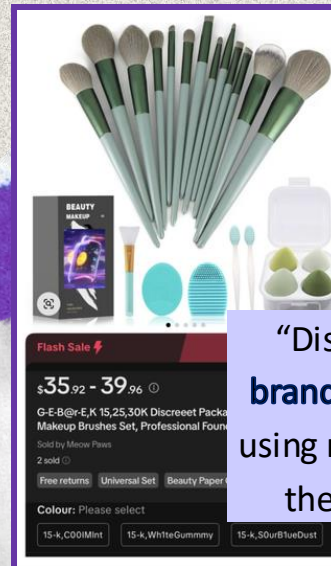
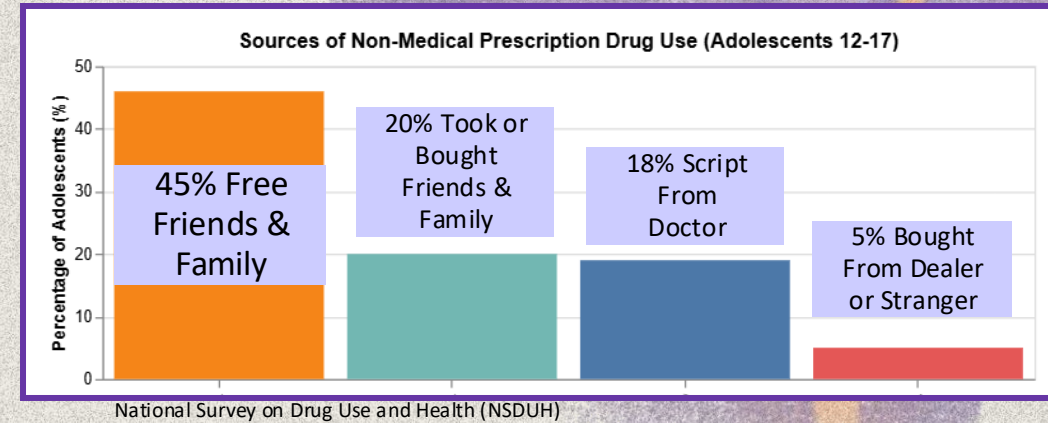
This is not about addiction progression anymore—it's about exposure risk.

Counterfeit Pills are Common

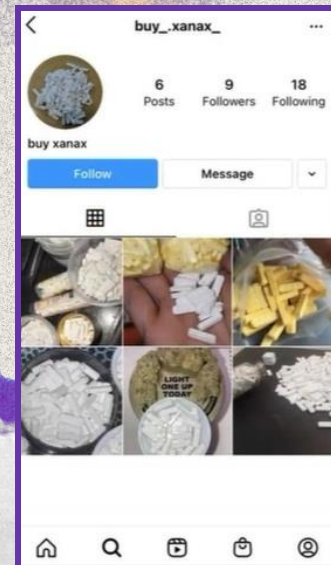
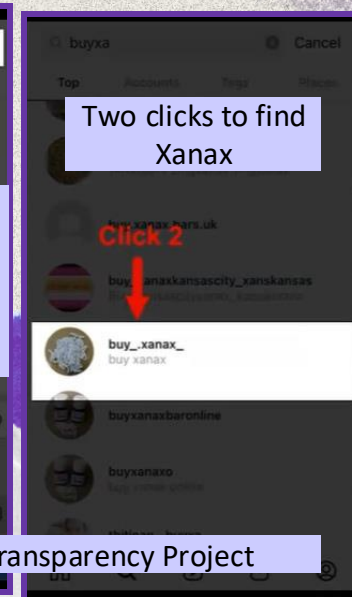
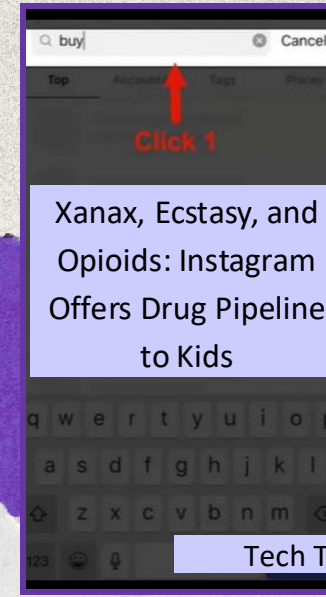
Youth may not know what they're taking.

One-time use can be fatal.

Faster delivery methods & ease of access increase impact.



“Discreet” Geek Bar-brand disposable vapes using makeup brushes as the primary photo.



Tech Transparency Project

THE RISK HAS CHANGED

Today's substances aren't just more available—they're stronger, faster-acting, and far less predictable.



Substances are More Potent

Products are engineered for stronger effects.

Youth often don't know potency levels or their effects.

Regulation & quality control are extremely difficult.

WHY IS MARIJUANA SO DANGEROUS TODAY?

THC POTENCY

1960s-1980s	TODAY
2-4%	15-99%

Teen THC Use

5x increase in psychotic disorders

JUST SAY KNOW

JustSayKNOW.org

Alcohol #1 Substance Used by Youth

BuzzBall Cocktails

BERRY CHERRY LIMEADE

15%

BIG SIPS W/ARHEAD SOUR! WILD WATERMELON

16%

Tip Top Margarita

26%

Many RTD cocktails are moving from the standard 5% ABV to 10%, 15%, and 40% sometimes tripling the alcohol content.

50 Woodstock Joints = 1 Marijuana Dab

JUST SAY KNOW

JustSayKNOW.us

The Flavor Ban Affects closed-system e-liquid cartridges. Disposables and refillable cartridges are still allowed.

97% of youth who vape use flavored products.

CIGS IN AN E-CIG

1 Pack of Cigarettes ~22mg of Nicotine	1 JUUL Pod ~41.3mg of Nicotine	1 Vuse Pod ~90mg of Nicotine	1 Elf Bar ~650mg of Nicotine
AMOUNT OF NICOTINE IN ~20 CIGARETTES	AMOUNT OF NICOTINE IN ~37 CIGARETTES	AMOUNT OF NICOTINE IN ~82 CIGARETTES	AMOUNT OF NICOTINE IN ~590 CIGARETTES

Did You Know?

The average nicotine pouch (Zyn 6mg) user consumes 8-12 pouches a day. This is the same amount of nicotine as 1-1.5 packs a cigarettes!

THE RISK HAS CHANGED

The issue isn't just access—it's perception.

Social media is shaping how young people think about drugs before we ever have a conversation with them.



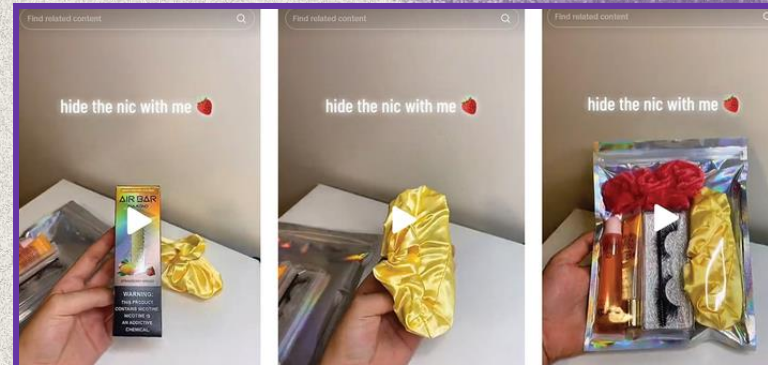
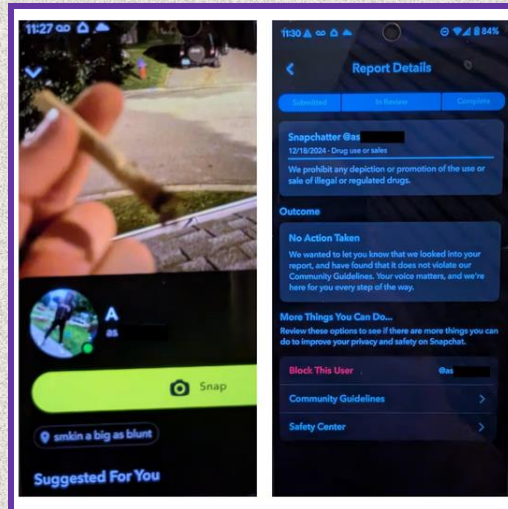
Social Media Influences Perceptions

Social media amplifies extreme behavior without consequence.

“Quick hacks” & dangerous advice.

Makes them believe there is a safe way to use.

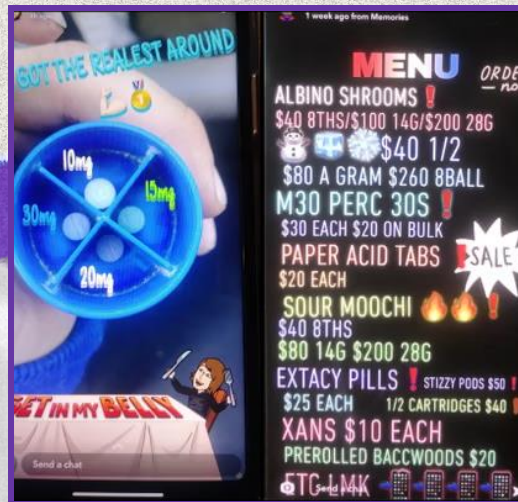
FOMO → increased likelihood of use



“How to hide drug use from parents”

“How to sober up fast”

“How to avoid getting caught”



“It's not addictive”

“It helps with stress so it's good for you”

“It's just water vapor”



WHY YOUTH USE

Most young people aren't trying to harm themselves—they're trying to cope, connect, or experiment.

Next, Understand the Why



STRESS / ANXIETY
DEPRESSION



SOCIAL
BELONGING



CURIOSITY,
RISK-TAKING, BRAIN
DEVELOPMENT



MISINFORMATION
“It’s just a pill”
“You won’t get addicted”

NORMALIZE TALKING ABOUT IT EARLY & OFTEN

The goal is not one big talk—it's many small, ongoing conversations.

Start The Talk

"I've been worried about you.
I've noticed you've
(been drinking a lot, seemed down).
Can we talk about what's going on?"

"It seems like things don't seem to be
going great for you right now.
Do you want to talk about it?"

"I care about you and want to
make sure you are okay.
Can we talk for a bit?"

"I see you're going through something.
How can I best support you?"

"I've noticed you haven't seemed like
yourself lately. How can I help?"

"If you don't feel comfortable talking to me, is
there someone else you can talk to?
Can I help you think of / find someone?"



FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUTH

**Then,
Listen....**



“Be curious. Not judgemental.” ~ Ted Lasso

WHY CONVERSATIONS BREAK DOWN

When a young person believes vaping is harmless, weed is stress relief, and pills are safe—our conversations have to start by understanding what they already think is true.

✘ Fear-based messaging

“You will die if you try drugs”

✘ Yes/No questions
Interrogation style

“Did you do it?”

✘ Lecturing instead of listening

Understanding doesn't mean agreement.

“That's not true.”

✘ Judgment or punishment

Youth fear consequences.

“You're in trouble.”



FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUTH

Young people open up when they feel safe—not judged.



STAY CALM

If adults panic →
youth hide

“You are my main
concern right now.”



RESPOND, DON'T REACT

Separate behavior
from the person.

“Help me understand
what happened.”



OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

Ask. Don't assume.

“Tell me more about...
How are you feeling
about...”



Validate feelings
(not behavior)



Feeling heard =
more honesty next
time





Give, Info & Support

Support doesn't end the conversation—it's what makes the next one possible.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

One conversation won't fix everything—but it might save a life.

USE “THIRD-PARTY” CONVERSATIONS

Talk about news stories, social media, or school trends .

Reduces defensiveness.

Use everyday moments (car rides, TV,)

MEET YOUTH WHERE THEY ARE

Understand their platforms (TikTok, Snapchat).

Acknowledge what they're seeing.

Keep conversations short and natural.

Follow up & revisit.

BUILD EXIT PLANS

Make sure they have a way out.

Safety first.
Conversation later.

Practive refusal skills.

KEEP IT R.E.A.L

- R:** Refuse; Say No
- E:** Explain Why You Don't Want To
- A:** Alternative ; Suggest Something Else
- L:** Leave. TL or Walk Away

SUBSTANCE USE & MISUSE PREVENTION MONTH
Telling the Prevention Story



OVER 3/4 OF YOUTH DON'T USE SUBSTANCES.

Most youth (age 12-17) have never used alcohol, nicotine, or illicit drugs in their lifetime.

- **79%** have never had a drink of alcohol
- **81%** have never used tobacco or vaped nicotine
- **76%** have never used illicit drugs (such as marijuana)

Source: 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (rounded to whole numbers)

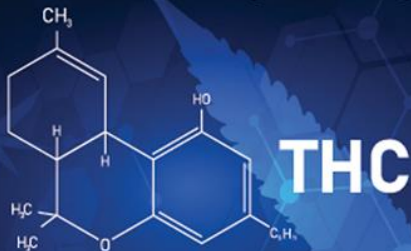
SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

BE HONEST ABOUT RISK (WITHOUT FEAR TACTICS)



Addiction to THC is up to 7 times higher for a growing brain (12-18) than an adult brain (22-26)

While the legal age to use marijuana is 18 (medical) or 21 (recreational), the scientific age for an adult brain is 25 to 30 years old. We would have less addiction if people abstained from any addictive substance until age 30.

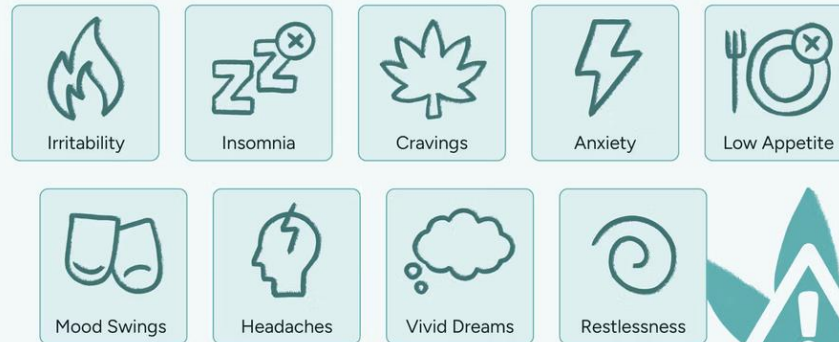


JUST SAY KNOW

Drug and Alcohol Dependence Volume 92

JustSayKNOW.org

Common Marijuana Withdrawal Symptoms



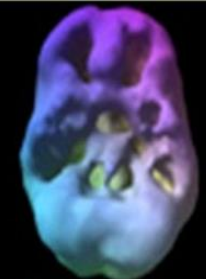
Recovery.com

SIGNS YOU MIGHT HAVE A SERIOUS VAPING RELATED HEALTH ISSUE:

- ✓ New or worsening cough
- ✓ Shortness of breath/difficulty catching your breath/winded easily
- ✓ Chest burning/chest tightness/chest pain
- ✓ Abdominal pain, loss of appetite, weight loss, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea



OPTIMAL?
Healthy Brain Marijuana Brain



16 yr. old daily user

Amen Clinics

BE HONEST ABOUT RISK (WITHOUT FEAR TACTICS)

Every honest conversation is a step toward prevention.



FACT:
THE TEEN BRAIN IS STILL DEVELOPING UNTIL ABOUT AGE 25.
Nicotine, alcohol, and other drugs can interfere with memory, attention, and emotional regulation.



9 OUT OF 10
PEOPLE WITH ADDICTION
STARTED USING
SUBSTANCES
BEFORE THEY TURNED 18.



**First Use Before Age 21 =
40% - 80% Chance of Addiction in Later Adult**

**First Use After Age 21 =
under 10% Chance of Addiction in Later Adult**

RESOURCES AT HAND

talk
they hear you®

underageddrinking.samhsa.gov
#TalkTheyHearYou

Download on the App Store | GET IT ON Google Play | Get it from Microsoft



Prevention Talk Tips
Teens (13 - 18 years old)

TALK EARLY TALK OFTEN

Teens are smart and aware—they already know a lot about substances and want honest, real life information. This makes it an important time for parents to guide them toward positive choices. Here are some tips and scenarios you can use to help your teen stay healthy and safely handle situations involving substances.

Let your teen in on all the things you find wonderful about them. They need to hear a lot of positive comments about their lives, who they are as individuals and all of the wonderful things they have to look forward to if they are healthy and safe.

Engage with your child about their everyday experiences. Doing so fosters trust, improves communication, and ensures that discussions about your expectations regarding substances feel consistent rather than unexpected.

Make it clear that you disapprove of all alcohol, vaping, nicotine and drug use, and look for opportunities to discuss your feelings about substance use in a productive way: letters from the school, reacting to advertisements or seeing substance use on TV and in movies. Focus on the behavior as the negative thing, not on the person. Be ready to listen rather than give a lecture. Try using open-ended questions to get the conversation started and role play resistance skills.

Ensure your teen is clear about your expectations and the consequences for violating them—and commit to enforcing those consequences. Research shows that teens are less likely to use nicotine, alcohol, and other substances when parents consistently set and uphold clear limits. Consequences should be reasonable, enforceable, and time-limited so teens can see a path forward and remain motivated to make healthier choices. If there's no end in sight, teens will feel like there's no way out and no real reason to continue to refrain from engaging in the undesired behavior.

Talk Kit: Talking to Teens About Marijuana

FAQs

What To Say When Signs of Use

Resources

Role Play Scenarios
Real life scenarios that introduce the risks related to substance use.

Scenario	What To Say
You're with your child and you both notice a few kids vaping.	"It's concerning to see kids vaping. Lots of teens are doing it these days, but it's not safe. What do you think about vaping? Do your friends ever bring it up?" "Vaping might seem trendy, but it's harmful for teens." Make your expectations clear and share why you don't want your child vaping—like the chemicals involved, health issues, and the danger of getting addicted to nicotine.
Your teen is starting high school... and you want to remind them that they do not have to give in to peer pressure to vape, drink or use substances.	"This can be a fun time in your life, and we want you to enjoy yourself with your friends, but we also know you might experience pressure to drink alcohol, vape or use marijuana or other stuff. A lot of people feel like this is just a normal part of being a teenager, but most teens actually DON'T DO those things."
Your teen is about to attend a party or a group outing with friends.	"You may be faced with some hard choices to make for yourself, and you might even make some mistakes. Just know that you can talk to us about anything, anytime—even if you DO make a mistake or feel stuck in a situation and need our help, we won't freak out and together we'll figure out a way to help and support you."
Your kid comes home smelling of alcohol or cigarette smoke.	Maintain a calm, composed, and serious tone—rather than reacting with yelling or heightened emotion. This communicates that the situation is far more significant than a routine conflict or teenager rebelliousness. "I'm very concerned that you were drinking. I love you and want to

Fatal Vision

"Grounded" App Helps Cut Back on Marijuana Use

used weed

since quitting weed

Trigger Analysis Graph

Money Saved

Progress

Get support from our community that helps each other stay Grounded

TEXT "DITCHJUUL" TO 88709

AND GET FREE ADVICE, TIPS AND INSPIRATION FOR QUITTING.

Narcan? Yes, You Can!

In An Overdose, Doing Nothing is the Biggest Risk — Narcan Can Save a Life

- Anyone can use Narcan in an emergency.**
Naloxone (including over-the-counter nasal sprays like Narcan® and RVive™) does not require a prescription and is widely available for anyone to obtain and carry. Because naloxone has very low risk and won't harm someone who isn't experiencing an opioid overdose, its use by bystanders is encouraged to save lives.
- Narcan is safe for everyone.**
Narcan is safe to give to people of all ages, from infants to elderly adults. It is a safe, non-addictive medication. Narcan is safe for pregnant people, children and pets.
Even if there are no opioids in the system, it isn't harmful. Narcan only reverses the effects of opioids, the individual does not have to be breathing for Narcan to work.
- Is it legal to administer Narcan?**
California's Good Samaritan law explicitly protects people who call 911 and provide emergency medical care, including administering naloxone in an overdose situation—even if they are not medically trained.
There is no state requirement that a non-medical person be licensed or have formal certification in order to administer naloxone during an overdose emergency.
- Does having Narcan make drug abuse more likely?**
Having Narcan does not encourage people to misuse drugs. States that have laws making Narcan easier to get haven't seen more people misusing drugs.
Seatbelts → don't cause reckless driving. Fire extinguishers → don't cause fires. Narcan → doesn't cause drug misuse.
- Where do I get Narcan?**
Naloxone is ordered through California Department of Healthcare Services' Naloxone Distribution Project (NDP). The NDP is funded by SAMHSA and administered by the CHCS to combat opioid overdose-related deaths throughout California. Scan the QR code or go to: <https://form.ndpform.com/25186869735176> or <http://ndpform.caac.com>

OMNIYOUTH.NET 916-538-9158 SHARI@OMNIYOUTH.NET

"MARIJUANA IS A PLANT. IT'S NATURAL, SO IT'S SAFE."

YouTube

Here are the first 5 tips to help you

KEEP THE DOOR OPEN

One conversation won't fix everything—but it might save a life.

Even if the first conversation doesn't go well—what matters is that the door stays open.

The goal isn't perfect kids—it's connected kids.

Connection is the strongest prevention tool we have.

Stay connected, stay calm, and keep the door



shari@omniyouth.net