

I-502

Assessing Opinions about Marijuana

Insights from Teens and Parents in Washington



PERRYUNDEM
RESEARCH/COMMUNICATION

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Background.

On November 6th, 2012, Washington Initiative 502 passed by popular vote – removing state-law prohibitions against producing, processing, and selling marijuana, and allowing limited possession of marijuana by persons 21 and over. Marijuana sales are now subject to a 25 percent excise tax; a portion of this revenue is allocated to the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) for substance abuse prevention and marijuana education.

To inform this education effort, DOH commissioned an assessment of racially and ethnically diverse Washington teens and parents. This assessment involved 16 focus groups conducted in January 2015 by PerryUndem, a research firm.

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Methodology.

The focus groups were held in two sites – Spokane (1/20/15) and Seattle (1/31/15). The focus group discussions covered:

- A homework exercise to visualize teens' current life and their future;
- A discussion of goals;
- Current challenges and pressures;
- Parent/teen conversations about challenges like marijuana;
- Awareness of marijuana;
- Knowledge of and feelings about the new law;
- Reasons why some teens use marijuana;
- Reasons why some teens do not use marijuana;
- Reactions to message concepts; and
- Reactions to potential messengers.
- In the parent focus groups, we tested a recent radio ad about marijuana prevention.

To help inform the statewide education effort, the teen groups focused on finding commonalities across age, gender, racial/ethnic groups. Similarly, the parent groups focused on finding common ground among diverse parents.

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Methodology.

14 Teen "BFF" Groups

We conducted 14 "BFF" groups with teens. These are small group discussions (3 or 4 teens each) with friends that last 60 minutes each;

We conducted 6 BFF groups in Spokane and 8 BFF groups in Seattle;

All teens in this study were in 7th, 8th, 9th, or 10th grade;

Professional focus group facilities used their database, referrals, and random recruitment methods to recruit the primary teen participant for each BFF group;

After the primary participant was recruited, the teen (and his/her family) assisted in finding two good friends to participate in the group (which is why groups were racially/ethnically mixed). African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and White teens participated in the BFF groups, often together;

There was diversity in family income and level of involvement of teens in extra-curricula activities; and

Teens were asked not to speak about their personal behavior or that of friends and family – rather, they were asked to talk more generally about kids their age.



2 Parent Focus Groups

- Two traditional focus groups were held with parents (8-10 participants);
- One group was held in Spokane and one group was held in Seattle;
- Professional focus group facilities used their database, referrals, and random recruitment methods to recruit parents;
- African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and White parents participated; and
- A few parents (in both Seattle and Spokane) had children who participated in the teen groups.

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Summary.



Teens.

These Spokane and Seattle teens enjoy their lives. They like hanging out with friends, playing sports and video games, learning musical instruments, and they are trying to do as well as they can in school.

Even those facing more challenges and stress seem optimistic. They have friends and are looking forward to the future. Anything is possible.

These teens have goals. Most plan on college, getting a good job. Some plan to move away. Many want to have a family. They do not want to risk these goals.

All are aware of marijuana. It is present in their lives. They know there is a law that recently legalized it.

All know marijuana by a number of different names (dope, pot, weed, kush). But marijuana is the term that should be used in an awareness campaign. Most know it can be smoked, but have also heard of edibles or vaping.

Awareness and experience varies by age. Seventh and 8th graders have less knowledge – it is not as present in their lives although 8th graders tend to have basic facts about impacts on health/brain.

Ninth and 10th graders see marijuana all around them. They know friends who use, peers talk about it, and they smell it at their high schools, parks, neighborhoods.

There are important distinctions between age groups. Older teens are more savvy, cynical. They process information differently, know a lot about marijuana already, and are starting to see consequences.

Teens.

Most of these teens – especially the younger ones – think the law was a bad idea. They worry it makes marijuana easier to get, and think it gives teens the impression it is okay.

Some feel marijuana is more prevalent now. They hear about it on the radio and in the news, see it on billboards, smell it walking to school. But a few older teens think that if a teen wanted to get marijuana before the law, they could get it.

Teens get their knowledge about marijuana and the law from many places. School health classes are the main source for middle school students but parents, friends, kids at school, older siblings, online sources, TV (e.g., Vampire Diaries), and the news are also sources.

School health classes play an important role.

It seems to be their main source of factual information about marijuana (and other drugs). Classes often focus on the health risks and seem to be offered in 8th grade. Many teens remember and worry about the side effects they learned about in this class.

Teens want to hear from their parents/guardians. For the most part, they think talking about marijuana with their parents is helpful and informative (even if a little awkward). It shows they care. But older teens feel they know more than their parents do about marijuana.

Teens think kids their age use marijuana for a number of reasons. These include: they want to relieve stress or just escape; to be cool; to fit in; they start hanging around with the wrong group; and they are bored.

Teens.

Most younger teens think those who are using marijuana are making bad decisions. They feel they are not being smart about their futures.

Still, some teens cite exceptions – particularly older teens. They bring up students who can do well, get good grades, and succeed at school even though they use marijuana.

Teens name many reasons not to use marijuana. These include: not wanting to ruin their futures; don't want to hurt their brains; fear of addiction; wanting to do well in school; not interested in it; fear of getting into trouble; and not wanting to disappoint parents.

The two strongest message themes for teens tap concerns about their future and health risks. Their concerns about the future have to do with the potentially negative consequences of using marijuana on their grades, ability to get into college, and future prospects. Their concerns about health risks mostly center around the brain – they learned in health class about negative effects on brain development.

Legality and social norm messages test poorly. Most teens do not think a message stressing that marijuana is illegal for those under 21 is compelling. They do not believe it will stop a teen from using. They also reject a message that asserts most teens do not use marijuana so they should not use it too. These teens are independent minded and resent a message that suggests they will follow the crowd.

Teens do not want to be talked down to or just told "do not use marijuana." Many also dislike scare tactics. Teen boys and girls (particularly older ones) will not take these kinds of messages seriously.

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Teens.

Teens offer advice on messengers. Teens want to learn about marijuana vicariously through others and hear about real impacts on people's lives. They also want to hear from trusted teachers and coaches, their parents, and doctors or nurses they know.

Teens will listen to people who know what they are talking about. Most say that potential messengers would need to understand the real risks or health effects of marijuana. For this reason, listening to teens who have never used marijuana is not seen as effective – teens assume they would not know what they are talking about.

Many of these teens say schools/school health classes would be a good way to reach them. They also say online videos or digital ads would be good.

The campaign would need to be interesting, eye-catching, and informative. Humor may also be a way to grab their attention. They will ignore a boring ad.

Teens are looking for ads to underscore a couple core points. They would like them to focus on the health risks, but also discuss how using marijuana could affect their future. They want this information presented in a neutral, unbiased way.



Parents.

Spokane and Seattle parents worry about their teens using marijuana. But they have other worries too: sex, alcohol, bullying, poor grades, other drugs, and just getting into trouble. Marijuana is not their top worry.

Parents believe it is important to discuss marijuana with their teens. Most say they are doing this and that it makes a difference. They want their teens to hear from them first, not friends or other teens.

Conversations are usually opportunistic rather than planned. The triggers are an incident at school, talking about friends, or watching TV or news together. Parents want more information to help with these conversations.

Parents see a role for others too. Teachers, coaches, friends, and peers are also seen as having an influence on their teens.

Most parents do not think the law is a good idea. Some worry it makes it easier for teens to use marijuana and others think it sends a mixed message to their teens (i.e., that marijuana is okay).

Messaging aimed at parents should stress their central role in their teen's life. By far the best message for parents to engage with their teens on this issue is to remind them that they want their teens to learn about marijuana from their parents first – not other teens, the Internet, or other sources.

For their teens, they want messaging to focus on consequences and impacts on their future. They want messages that underscore how marijuana can take teens off track and limit their opportunities (e.g., through criminal records).

A few key messengers stand out for parents. They think coaches, teachers, pediatricians, police, mental health specialists, and social workers are the best people to speak to parents and teens about this issue.

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Findings:
teens.

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Their lives now.*



They are focused on...

- Getting good grades.
- Graduating from high school.
- Their friendships/hanging out.
- Excelling at sports/band/gymnastics/dance.
- Playing video games.
- Spending time on social media.

* These images are the actual images teens brought to the BFF groups as part of their homework exercise.

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In 10 years.

What they want
down the road..

- Successful career in fields like engineering, programming, medicine, animation, sports.
- To own a business.
- A wife, husband, children.
- To own a home.
- Opportunities to travel, experience other cultures.



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Marijuana knowledge.

All have heard of marijuana, though they have varying degrees of knowledge. Age seems to be the biggest indicator of how much teens know, both for boys and girls. The youngest participants, those in 7th grade, know the least and have large knowledge gaps. Eighth graders know more factual information but have limited exposure to marijuana. Those in 9th or 10th grade know the most, are more aware of consequences, and are much closer to it. There is also a general consensus that teens often start to use marijuana in 9th and 10th grades.

Also, there was a subgroup of the 9th and 10th graders who seemed more immersed in marijuana and more at risk as a result. They seem to have people close to them who use marijuana. These teens seem to have the most ambivalence to the topic.

Not only does knowledge about and experience with marijuana seem to evolve from 7th to 10th grade – everything else seems to change too. Teens may become more skeptical; they process and react to information differently; and they are more judgmental.

These different characteristics were noted in the BFF groups. In developing a campaign for this broad age cohort, we need to keep this in mind.

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Marijuana knowledge.

7th Grade

- Surface level knowledge.
- Know what it is and believe some people their age use it.
- Hear people talking about it at school, but do not know specifics.
- Some have heard of the health risks.
- Some report that it has not been addressed formally by teachers or parents.

8th Grade

- Becoming a growing presence.
- More of their peers use/talk about it.
- More likely to be addressed by their parents.
- Most have had a class at school that teaches them about marijuana and other drugs. (8th grade seems a critical time period for learning).
- All have heard about the health risks of using marijuana.

9/10th Grade

- They know a lot more.
- More attuned to marijuana use – it is talked about more among their friends and they believe more kids their age are using it.
- Much closer to the issue and more at ease discussing it.
- More aware of the long-term consequences and risks of using marijuana.

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Terminology/methods of use.

Teens know marijuana by many names, but the most recognized name is just "marijuana." Others include: weed, pot, hash, kush.

Most know that marijuana is smoked. But some have heard that it can also be eaten, vaped, or used in a hookah. Older teens know more about different methods of use.

hash weed kush
marijuana
dabs pot

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A few teens seem to conflate marijuana risks with those commonly linked to tobacco cigarettes. They often mention risks like lung cancer and emphysema when discussing marijuana.

How marijuana compares.

Teens are mixed on whether marijuana is worse than tobacco and alcohol.

Some believe marijuana is more dangerous because it affects brain development, can cause people to make bad decisions, and can damage the lungs. Others think tobacco and alcohol are worse because they have heard examples of people dying from using these substances (i.e. lung cancer, alcohol poisoning, car accidents), whereas they have not heard these stories about marijuana.

Of the three, teens know the least about marijuana, particularly the health risks. Most believe all three substances can be bad for you but find it hard to compare the specific risks.

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Teen voices.

“I think the number [of kids who use marijuana] gets... less when you get in college as I feel as though there’s less...it kind of peaks around our age and then drops off.”

- 10th grade boy, Spokane

““ There’s a shop right next to our school actually... which is kind of weird to have. I kind of think it’s a bad idea to do it right in front of a high school... because I’ve seen people like standing out there and kids could literally just walk up and ask them to buy something.”

- 9th grade boy, Seattle

““ It’s bad for your body. And it’s bad...because some people might not like it and then if they find out that you do it... then it sets a bad example for that person.”

- 8th grade boy, Seattle

“You’re dependent on it. You’re physically, mentally, emotionally all dependent on it. But, it’s habit forming because you can like, if you have the willpower, you can you get off it and you’re fine.”

- 9th grade girl, Seattle

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“ I'd probably ask my health teacher before [my parents] because he's probably more knowledgeable on the subject. But yeah, definitely I would feel comfortable going to [my parents].”
- 9th grade boy, Spokane

Talking to parents.

Most teens say they have spoken with their parents about marijuana.
The conversations:

- Are usually initiated by the parent.
- Some conversations focus solely on: “Don’t use marijuana.”
- Others focus on the risks involved and potential impact on their future.
- Are generally welcome – shows parents care.
- Are sometimes awkward, but mostly informative.
- A few older teens feel they know more than their parents.

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Why some teens use.

Teens believe a combination of factors contribute to marijuana use – many of which are related as teens try to navigate the social landscape of school and friendships.

- To relax or unwind from stress.
- To look cool or fit in.
- Because they started hanging out with the “wrong kinds of people.”
- Because their friends or family members are doing it.
- Have difficult family situations.
- Out of boredom/just something to do.
- To escape/not wanting to feel things.

Not Focusing On Their Future?

Some teens think other teens use marijuana because they are not thinking about their long-term future. They do not think possible consequences are strong deterrents to their peers who use marijuana.

Also, some older teens (particularly those more immersed in it*) say they know students – “the exceptions” – who use marijuana but still do well in school and get good grades. This causes a few teens to question how much marijuana can actually affect their ability to succeed.

* Although we did not allow any personal examples to be shared, we considered teens to be immersed in marijuana when they were able to share generalized examples of things they've seen and conversations they've heard.

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Teen voices.

“ To get away. [From] anything. Troubles and parents. Troubles at home, mental issues, like just wanting to get away from anything. ”
- 10th grade boy, Spokane

“I think it's definitely a curiosity. Because I don't see a lot of peer pressure per se. I don't ever see teenagers being like, 'Well, you're a loser if you don't do this,' you know?”
- 9th grade girl, Seattle

“If kids go to parties or something and it just kind of seems like the majority of the kids are doing it, they might say, 'Hey, I want to have a good time with the rest of these people because it looks like they are.' ”

- 9th grade boy, Spokane

“ I think sometime it's stress... Sometimes around the school, it's just they can do it because they can. ”
- 9th grade girl, Seattle

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“

Because they know somebody that's done it and they went down the wrong path or they might have gotten in trouble or suspended. That's what usually happens if they catch them at school.."

- 9th grade girl, Seattle

Why some teens don't use.

On their own and without prompting, teens are able to list reasons not to use marijuana. These include:

- Negative health consequences and impact on their brain.
- Not wanting to ruin their long-term plans, or lessen their motivation for school.
- Fear of getting into trouble, both with the law and their parents.
- Do not want to disappoint their parents.
- Scared of becoming addicted, dependent.
- Do not want to make bad decisions while high.
- Worried it could lead to other drugs.
- Not wanting to dull their experiences.
- Simply not being interested/not part of their lives.

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The law.

Almost all know about the law. They heard about it through the news, from parents and family members, at school, online. However, they lack details.

Many are confused about whether the legal age is 18 or 21. Some are not sure whether the law is about medicinal or recreational marijuana. It seems only a few teens have had detailed conversations about the law.

Have Things Changed?

Teens have mixed views on whether the law has impacted their exposure to marijuana or not.

- Many feel they are around it more (some says they smell it when they walk downtown, or go to parks).
- Some have seen shops that sell marijuana, particularly in Seattle, where some teens report a shop right near their school.
- Some say marijuana is talked about more among friends and adults.
- Some feel more kids their age are now using it.
- A few believe it is easier to get.
- A few believe it legitimizes using marijuana for some kids.

But others do not feel the law has changed much about their lives. Instead, they reason that they may just be hearing about it now more because they are older.

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**Messages
+ messengers:
teens.**

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Messaging overview.

What worked...

Two broad message themes stood out – both in Spokane and Seattle. Teens in both locations seem to favor messages that focus on:

- marijuana's effect on their future goals and opportunities; and
- marijuana's effect on health and brain development.

Another message about wanting to experience life fully – to be present – also showed potential (it emerged in Spokane and tested well in Seattle).

What did not work...

There was also consistency in the messages teens did not like. The least effective messages focus on:

- social norms – most teens do not use marijuana so you shouldn't either;
- the legal consequences of underage use of marijuana; and
- being an experiment – long term effects are not known.

Teens feel these messages are either not believable or are not compelling.

I-502 Overview – message ratings.

Message	Girls' Avg. Score 1-7	Boys' Avg. Score 1-7	7 th /8 th grade Avg. Score 1-7	9 th /10 th grade Avg. Score 1-7	Total Avg. Score 1-7	# Chosen as top msg.
h) It's my life and my future at stake. Right now, I'm focused on the things that make me happy, not someone else. I may be judged if I do marijuana, and I may be judged if I don't. But what's important is the life I want for myself: the career, the family, the experiences and adventures. And I'll be the judge of that.	5.8	5.9	6.0	5.7	5.8	26
c) Life is full of possibilities, and there's too much to lose. I'm excited about my future, and using marijuana puts it at risk. It could limit my friendships, get me kicked off a school team, cause me to lose my driver's licenses and my job, and let down my family. I want to experience my life to the fullest while I'm young, and for now that means not using.	5.0	6.3	6.3	5.2	5.6	30
a) My health is worth protecting. Marijuana can impact teenagers' memory, motivation and ability to learn – and teens are nearly twice as likely to become addicted than adults. I need every advantage to succeed in life – and marijuana just isn't one of them.	5.6	5.6	6.0	5.2	5.6	25
i) I want to experience life clearly and fully. Some teens think marijuana helps them unplug and deal with stress – but I think it makes you less present, less yourself. It lets life pass you by when you could be really experiencing it, however exciting, hard, intimidating, or hopeful it might be. That's not the kind of stress relief I need.**	5.3	5.7	5.7	5.4	5.5	14**
e) Education helps me get where I want to go. Students who don't use marijuana are more likely to have good grades and finish school. Using marijuana makes succeeding in life that much harder.	4.9	5.9	6.0	4.9	5.4	24
b) My brain is awesome, and I want to keep it that way. I depend on my brain for the life I want, no matter what kind of life that is. But my brain will still be developing into my twenties, and using marijuana before then can change its structure. People who use marijuana during their teenage years can ever lose IQ points between childhood and adulthood.	5.0	5.3	5.6	4.7	5.2	21
g) I don't want to be an experiment. The truth is that we don't know all of marijuana's health impacts. But we do know what marijuana has specific health impacts on teenagers – like the fact that it can change brain development. I want to have experiences in life, but I don't want to be an experiment.	5.2	3.6	4.6	4.1	4.4	13
d) Plain and simple: It's against the law. Marijuana is illegal in Washington State for people under 21, and if I get caught I could lose my driver's license or my job. It's illegal for a reason – and it can wait.	4.6	4.0	4.1	4.3	4.3	14
f) I'm not doing it, and most other teens aren't either. Marijuana may be in music and movies, but the truth is that it's just not that common in real life. In fact, the vast majority of teens in Washington don't use marijuana – nearly 80% of them don't. On this one, I'm going to stick with me and the crowd.	3.7	3.3	3.5	3.3	3.5	5

**Only tested in the Seattle groups

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Best messages: future goals.

The three messages below test well because they link marijuana use with teens' goals. These young teens are hopeful about the future and see marijuana as something that can keep them from the life they want. This is both believable and compelling. Message h – "it's my life and my future at stake" – tests equally well with girls and boys and should be considered as the top message. The line "I may be judged..." is particularly liked by teens – they view themselves as independent-minded and like that reflected in messages.

Message	Girls' Avg. Score 1-7	Boys' Avg. Score 1-7	Total Avg. Score 1-7	# Chosen as top msg.
h) It's my life and my future at stake. Right now, I'm focused on the things that make me happy, not someone else. I may be judged if I do marijuana, and I may be judged if I don't. But what's important is the life I want for myself: the career, the family, the experiences and adventures. And I'll be the judge of that.	5.8	5.9	5.8	26
c) Life is full of possibilities, and there's too much to lose. I'm excited about my future, and using marijuana puts it at risk. It could limit my friendships, get me kicked off a school team, cause me to lose my driver's licenses and my job, and let down my family. I want to experience my life to the fullest while I'm young, and for now that means not using.	5.0	6.3	5.6	30
e) Education helps me get where I want to go. Students who don't use marijuana are more likely to have good grades and finish school. Using marijuana makes succeeding in life that much harder.	4.9	5.9	5.4	24

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Teen voices.

“Say you were at a college, you took a drug test and the college is one of the best colleges in the U.S. You took a drug test and failed; you just lost an entire career.”
– 8th grade boy, Spokane

“ I don’t want it to mess up my life and I want to get a good job and I just don’t want to be like the people on the street. ”
– 8th grade boy, Spokane

“ It can if you let it, it can maybe affect your future negatively if you start smoking weed and then you like get into other things. And then your future can all just fall apart you know. Like, it’s not your number one priority anymore, school. ”
– 9th grade girl, Seattle

“I don’t think just [using] marijuana [once] is worth losing something that could be forever, like a job or a future that you could have in a sport. I don’t think it’s worth all that.”
– 9th grade girl, Seattle

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Best messages: health effects.

Messages about health and brain development test well too. Health consequences are believable to teens – most have heard about developmental side effects in their classes and from their parents. Health messages may have power for younger teens in particular because they reinforce what they are learning at school. But these messages may have less power with older teens who want more than just the facts about health.

Message	Girls' Avg. Score 1-7	Boys' Avg. Score 1-7	Total Avg. Score 1-7	# Chosen as top msg.
a) My health is worth protecting. Marijuana can impact teenagers' memory, motivation and ability to learn – and teens are nearly twice as likely to become addicted than adults. I need every advantage to succeed in life – and marijuana just isn't one of them.	5.6	5.6	5.6	25
b) My brain is awesome, and I want to keep it that way. I depend on my brain for the life I want, no matter what kind of life that is. But my brain will still be developing into my twenties, and using marijuana before then can change its structure. People who use marijuana during their teenage years can ever lose IQ points between childhood and adulthood.	5.0	5.3	5.2	21

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“My health is worth protecting because I’m an athlete and I wouldn’t want to get into that mess.”
– 8th grade boy, Seattle

“At a young age it has a large effect on your brain. And so, like it could hurt your health like long term. Like all things, memory, motivation and ability to learn. It can cut those in half. I don’t see why you would risk it.”
– 10th grade boy, Spokane

Teen voices.

“It does affect your brain chemistry and it can affect your health especially when you’re a kid. If you’re past 21 there’s much less of a risk, but when you’re a teenager, you know, you make your own decisions in the end. But it’s really not, it’s not the wisest choice, especially depending on who you are health wise.”

– 10th grade girl, Spokane

“I just think that I don’t want to mess with my brain and marijuana... can lower your IQ points and I’d like to stay smart...my future depends on how smart I am.”
– 8th grade boy, Spokane

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Best messages: being present.

A few teens in Spokane talked about the “dulling” effects of marijuana and expressed their preference to experience life fully – not just in a daydream. This led to the creation of a new message (below) which we tested in Seattle. It ended up testing well with both teen girls and boys and offers another potentially effective line of messaging to teens.

Message	Girls' Avg. Score 1-7	Boys' Avg. Score 1-7	Total Avg. Score 1-7	# Chosen as top msg.
i) I want to experience life clearly and fully . Some teens think marijuana helps them unplug and deal with stress – but I think it makes you less present, less yourself. It lets life pass you by when you could be really experiencing it, however exciting, hard, intimidating, or hopeful it might be. That's not the kind of stress relief I need.	5.3	5.7	5.5	14

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Less effective messages: social norms.

The “social norms” message below does worst among teens – most are skeptical of the statistic and think the percentage of teenagers who use is actually much higher. Others do not think the “going with the crowd” argument is a good reason to do anything.

Message	Girls' Avg. Score 1-7	Boys' Avg. Score 1-7	Total Avg. Score 1-7	# Chosen as top msg.
f) I'm not doing it, and most other teens aren't either. Marijuana may be in music and movies, but the truth is that it's just not that common in real life. In fact, the vast majority of teens in Washington don't use marijuana – nearly 80% of them don't. On this one, I'm going to stick with me and the crowd.	3.7	3.3	3.5	5

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Less effective messages: legality.

The “legality” message holds some weight with a few younger teens (and with some parents). However, most teens believe if someone wants to use marijuana they will, regardless of whether it is legal or not. Some also think it makes it seem like marijuana is not that bad since it is legal for older adults (they disagree with this perception).

Message	Girls' Avg. Score 1-7	Boys' Avg. Score 1-7	Total Avg. Score 1-7	# Chosen as top msg.
d) Plain and simple: It's against the law. Marijuana is illegal in Washington State for people under 21, and if I get caught I could lose my driver's license or my job. It's illegal for a reason – and it can wait.	4.6	4.0	4.3	14

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Less effective messages: experiments.

The “experiment” message below is unclear to many teens and so does not receive a high rating. While girls gave it a higher rating than boys, most were confused by it. One reason is that many teens feel they know enough already about potential bad effects of marijuana not to use it – so it did not seem to be a credible message.

Message	Girls' Avg. Score 1-7	Boys' Avg. Score 1-7	Total Avg. Score 1-7	# Chosen as top msg.
g) I don't want to be an experiment. The truth is that we don't know all of marijuana's health impacts. But we do know what marijuana has specific health impacts on teenagers – like the fact that it can change brain development. I want to have experiences in life, but I don't want to be an experiment.	5.2	3.6	4.4	13

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Messengers.

According to teens, the best messenger on this issue (other than their parents) is:

- Someone who has personal experience with marijuana. Teens want to learn vicariously through others. This does not need to be a user but someone who is close to marijuana and seen real impacts.
- Someone they have a strong personal relationship with. This could be a coach if they play sports or a teacher they like or an older sibling.
- A doctor or health teacher, but one they know and feel comfortable with.

People They Do Not Want as Messengers

- Uninformed adults just expressing their opinions.
- Anyone who just tells them: "Don't use marijuana."

Messengers with Mixed Reactions

- Someone who has no experience with marijuana – teens are skeptical of their intentions and knowledge. A few younger teens are more open to this person as a messenger.
- Older teen – depends on their motivations – many feel they need to have had experience with marijuana to be effective.
- Celebrities – some could be bad influences, not relatable, or make it seem like marijuana will not get in the way of achieving goals.
- Kids their age – some are skeptical of their ability to really be informed about this issue.

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How to reach them.

Schools are important venues for these teens to learn more about marijuana – in health class, interactive videos and discussions in the classroom, assemblies, guest speakers. Particularly in 8th grade.

Most – especially older teens – say this is already happening, and they have found it useful.

Still, teens acknowledge information in school needs to be presented in an interesting way or they might ignore it.



There are some mixed responses on how best to reach teens for a campaign.

Teens say they use all of the social media above. But more importantly, all say they are **online**: on their computers, using smartphones. Reach them through these methods.

Still, many acknowledge they might skip through ads or videos. So, these ads will need to stick out, and hold their attention.



Role of TV

TV can also play an important role in reaching teens. Some bring up drug, alcohol, or tobacco prevention ads they liked. The ads that stand out are usually funny or graphic in regards to health risks (i.e. smoker who talks through a hole in his throat).

If done well, teens remember TV ads that focus on these issues. One Seattle boys' group even acted out a drunk-driving ad where cops blended into the background.

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Campaign.

Teens say they want:

- Accurate information about health risks, developmental issues (brain), and other consequences regarding their long-term future.
- Reality based messaging – real impacts of using, the voice of experience and knowledge.
- Ads need to be informative, eye-catching, and interesting. But they may also be humorous to keep their attention and be memorable. (One group of boys loved a drunk driving ad where police blended into the wall)

What They Don't Want

- A negative tone.
- Marijuana use being attacked or condemned – they've seen that kind of campaign before, and it is not taken seriously.
- Scare tactics – they just want the facts.
- D.A.R.E.-type campaigns.
- Directives – people telling them what to do or how to think.
- Messages that focus on the law – telling them it is illegal.
- Being told to behave like the rest of the crowd.

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Findings:
parents.

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Their focus.

All are focused on helping their children succeed. They do this by:

- Having good and frequent communication.
- Being supportive.
- Knowing their kids' friends.
- Being involved in their kids' daily life.
- Doing activities with their kids to keep them busy.
- Letting them know their expectations.

Parents' Top Worries

- Drugs
- Sex
- Alcohol
- Bullying
- Stress
- Bad friends

Marijuana Use

While many of these parents say they are worried about their children using marijuana, it seems only one of many concerns. Those parents who have family members who struggled with addiction are most worried about this issue.

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Talking with children.

Most of these parents feel connected with their children – they say they talk to their children about important issues, including marijuana. But it is unclear *how* the parents are talking to their children, i.e. whether it is effective or frequent. Some might just be saying “don’t do this.” Obstacles to talking about marijuana with their children:

- Lack of time
- Busy lives
- Catching their kids at the right moment
- Other responsibilities getting in the way
- Think their kids are still too young to be tempted by drugs

Opportunity

Most of the conversations they have with their children are opportunistic – i.e. in reaction to something their child says, something they see on TV, an incident with some other student at their school. Parents need to be ready for these opportunities.



Question-asking seems to be a successful approach some parents use to engage their children in this topic. Parents may want help having these conversations – they want to know the questions they should be asking.

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We should be careful about bad feelings toward the law spilling over onto how parents might view this campaign. We need to explain that the DOH campaign is preventive – some in Spokane believed the state would launch a pro-marijuana campaign and were surprised that it was preventive.

Some also have questions about funding for this campaign – where is the money coming from and is this a good use of resources? However, when the law and prevention campaign are explained, most are in favor of it. An idea is to use a tagline along the lines of, “Paid for by the passing of I-502.”

The law.

These parents are torn on the law: some were for it but most were against. Many are missing basic information – about the legal age, if you can use in public. They need more information – although a few do not think that is necessary (i.e., “It’s not going to change what I say to my kids”). Concerns about the law include:

- It sends mixed messages to their children telling them using marijuana is okay.
- Their kids are more aware now – it is on the news, on clothing, on billboards, there are advertisements for medical marijuana, you can smell it walking in the park, etc.
- Now they have to be concerned about the parents of their kids’ friends – are they using marijuana in front of their children?
- It makes marijuana more easily accessible for teens.

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“It’s around and it’s in their music. It’s in their literature. It’s in their fashion.”
– Seattle parent

““[Marijuana] is [in the school]. It’s so there that we had a parent meeting and the parents were going to staff to talk about what they could do to create a barrier and have some control over the kids.”
– Seattle parent

Parent voices.

““ [It’s important to talk to your children] because they’ll see whether you accept it, tolerate it or if you don’t tolerate it. And they’ll be more open and inclined to talk to you and ask you the questions that they would have in their mind but would be too scared to ask you.
– Seattle parent

”

“I would say you are their biggest role model in life. Take the opportunity to communicate and talk the talk.”
– Seattle parent

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Parents are most receptive to messages that focus on the important role of parents in teen lives; how marijuana can mess up their futures or health; and also the prospects of a criminal record and how it affects college and job prospects.

Top reasons to talk with their kids.

Reason	Average Score 1-7	# of Stars
a) Parents are a huge influence in their children's lives when it comes to making good decisions.	6.6	7
d) Marijuana can mess up my children's future.	6.4	2
h) Using marijuana impacts memory, motivation, and learning.	6.2	2
i) Marijuana is still illegal for people under 21, and I don't want my children to get a criminal record, which could hurt their college/career prospects.	6.2	5
b) Using marijuana impacts kids' brains differently than adults' because they are still developing.	6.1	2
c) Marijuana use increases the risk of lower grades and dropping out of school.	6.1	1

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In terms of a teen awareness campaign, some parents think a message about lost opportunity and putting their future at risk would be the most effective with their children. A few like the legality aspects too (though teens feel this is not a good message for a campaign).

Less effective reasons.

Reason	Average Score 1-7	# of Stars
j) Youth who use marijuana are more likely than adults to become addicted. Seventeen percent of individuals who begin using marijuana in adolescence will become addicted	5.5	0
e) Marijuana is a gateway to other drugs	5.5	0
f) The long-term health effects of marijuana are not well known. I don't want my children to be "lab rats" for this drug.	5.4	1
g) If I don't talk with my children, they will go online or get incorrect information from other sources.	5.1	1

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How to reach them.

Many parents say they would go to a website to get information about marijuana and how it could affect their children. They want this information in Question/Answer format. They want new resources on this issue. However, the challenge is getting to these parents – they live busy, chaotic lives. They say the best ways to reach them are:

- TV ads/commercials
- Parent meetings at school
- Facebook ads
- Flyers/newsletters sent home from school
- Radio ads (ones that stand out in tone)

These parents do not want a boring campaign – they want something that grabs their attention. They admit they are busy and do not pay attention unless something catches them in the first few seconds.

Some call for the ads to have a real sense of urgency in tone if they are to stand out from other radio/TV ads.

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Messengers.

Parents welcome many messengers on this issue. Their top preferences are pediatricians, teachers, coaches, mental health providers, police, and social workers. Some parents were more focused on messengers they thought would be effective for their teens – which is likely why coaches rose to the top.

Parents are interested in knowing more than just basic information about marijuana; they want to know “why” teens use. They think mental health specialists and social workers could be particularly valuable for this.

Elected officials are seen as the least trusted messengers.

Messengers	# who say would be effective
l) Coaches	15
c) Pediatricians	14
a) Teachers	14
b) Police	13
d) Mental Health Specialists	13
e) Social Workers	12
j) Surgeon General	9
h) Washington State Department of Health	8
k) PTA	6
i) Marijuana advocates	5
g) National elected officials	2
f) Local elected officials	1

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“ It asked if you thought about it because it's putting thoughts into the parent's mind. 'Hey, did you...?' Well maybe I should talk about this with my kid.”
- Seattle parent

Dr. Walker radio ad.

The Dr. Walker radio ad was tested at the conclusion of both parent focus groups. Reactions were mixed. Most felt Dr. Walker was an effective and trusted messenger but some also found the ad “boring.”

Some felt they would have ignored it if they heard it on the radio; they want an ad that showed more urgency. Still, many responded positively to the information it provided, and the web address at the ad's conclusion.

This spurred some parents to ask the state to consider a more interesting campaign on this issue – nothing too conservative or safe. They want something that stands out.

“ If somebody put [the radio ad] on in the car, I would've heard blah, blah, blah, marijuana, blah, blah, blah.”
- Spokane parent

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Recommendations.

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For teens...

- 1 Further explore the three lines of messaging emerging from this assessment.** These include marijuana's effects on: 1) future goals and opportunities; 2) health and brain development; and 3) how teens experience life. These show the most potential.
- 2 Target by age groups.** Younger teens – 7th and 8th graders – are different in their approach to messaging than 9th and 10th graders. Middle school teens are more focused on health effects and hearing the facts. Older teens will scrutinize messages more and want to hear about consequences to their future.
- 3 Keep parents central to this effort.** Teens want to hear from their parents/guardians on this issue.
- 4 Partner with schools.** Most of what these teens are hearing about marijuana is coming from school – teachers and classmates. Most want to be reached with messages through schools. Eighth grade is a good intervention point.
- 5 Ads should grab their attention.** They will need to stand out for teens to take notice and it might help to incorporate humor. Teens say they will dismiss a boring ad or one that just says, "Don't use marijuana."
- 6 Provide simple, clear information about the law.** Teens still do not know the details. Perhaps work with schools to get the facts out.

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For parents...

- 1 Encourage parents to talk with their children because teens should hear from them first.** Parents found it compelling to be reminded that they are the first and best messengers on serious issues like marijuana.
- 2 Help parents with this conversation.** Parents feel they are talking to their teens but these conversations may not always be effective, fact-based, or frequent enough. Parents seem open to receiving help with this (such as a website with sample Q + As).
- 3 Keep in mind that parents support messages for teens that focus on long-term consequences.** Parents may be looking for messages that get teens to think about how marijuana can negatively affect their future.
- 4 Use multiple messengers.** Parents see a role for a diverse set of messengers: mental health specialists, coaches, pediatricians, and police.
- 5 Make ads interesting.** Like teens, they are too busy to pay attention to boring ads. Parents recommend the DOH not do a “typical government campaign” and really make these ads interesting.
- 6 Be ready to explain the purposes and funding of this campaign.** Parents need to hear that this is a marijuana prevention campaign, mandated by the law, and funded directly from the sale of marijuana (not a new tax on them). This will build support for the effort.
- 7 Educate parents about the law.** They are missing basic facts.

If you have comments or questions about this report,
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