

“Parents Can Help Teen Drivers Steer Clear of Pot”

For the estimated three million new teen drivers each year, getting their license is the easy part. Earning the keys to safe driving is a bigger challenge. Parents can help keep their teens safe by preparing them to make responsible decisions, especially behind the wheel.

Unfortunately, many parents and young drivers don't understand the risks associated with marijuana use. In fact, driving-age teens are nearly four times more likely to use marijuana than younger adolescents. To make matters worse, too many teen drivers don't understand the risks associated with marijuana and driving. Approximately one in six high school seniors in the U.S. report driving under the influence of marijuana.

Marijuana is addictive and can lead to a host of health, social and behavioral problems at a crucial time in kids' lives. Teens using marijuana are also more likely to take risks, such as driving while high or riding with someone who is driving under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs. Research shows that smoking pot affects concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time, many of the skills required for safe driving – and these effects can last up to 24 hours.

Combining drug use with teens' inexperience and risk-taking behavior can lead to disaster on the road. Nearly one in five 16-year-old drivers is involved in a collision in their first year of driving. And crashes are the leading cause of death for young people age 15-20, causing roughly one-third of fatalities.

A wrong turn at this important crossroad for teens could have deadly consequences. In 2001, an estimated 38,000 high school seniors in the U.S. crashed after driving under the influence of marijuana and 46,000 crashed after driving under the influence of alcohol.

Parents make a difference when it comes to marijuana use and other risky behaviors. Greater parent involvement, setting clear rules and knowing where your teen is and who they are with are linked to safer driving and less marijuana use. Crashes were one-seventh as likely to occur among teens with strong parental monitoring; and two-thirds of youth ages 13-17 say that upsetting their parents or losing the respect of family and friends is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs.

This article is brought to you by the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. For more information on marijuana and keeping your teen drug-free, visit www.TheAntiDrug.com. The site also offers a free pamphlet called “Wake Up to the Risks of Marijuana: A Guide for Parents.” The pamphlet can also be ordered by calling 1-800-788-2800.