



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
CHILD & ADOLESCENT
PSYCHIATRY
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AACAP Marijuana Legalization Policy Statement

By the Substance Abuse and Addiction Committee

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) advocates for careful consideration of potential direct and downstream effects of marijuana policy changes on children and adolescents, and involvement of the medical and research community in policy-related discussions. Legalization of marijuana for medicinal or recreational purposes, even if restricted to adults, is likely to be associated with **(a) decreased adolescent perceptions of marijuana's harmful effects, (b) increased marijuana use among parents and caretakers, and (c) increased adolescent access to marijuana, all of which reliably predict increased rates of adolescent marijuana use and associated problems.** Marijuana use during pregnancy raises additional concerns regarding child and adolescent development.

AACAP is aware that, among hundreds of chemical constituents, marijuana contains select individual compounds that, if safely administered in reliable doses, may potentially convey therapeutic effects for specific conditions in specific populations. Advocacy regarding potential cannabinoid therapeutics, alongside social justice, public policy, and economic concerns, have contributed to marijuana policy changes. Amid these factors, AACAP remains focused on the specific issue of marijuana use in adolescence, a critical period of ongoing brain maturation.

Marijuana use is not benign, and adolescents are especially vulnerable to its many known adverse effects. **One in six adolescent marijuana users develop cannabis use disorder, a well characterized syndrome involving tolerance, withdrawal, and continued use despite significant associated impairments. Heavy use during adolescence is associated with increased incidence and worsened course of psychotic, mood, anxiety, and substance use disorders across the lifespan. Furthermore, marijuana's deleterious effects on adolescent brain development, cognition, and social functioning may have immediate and long-term implications, including increased risk of motor vehicle accidents, sexual victimization, academic failure, lasting decline in intelligence measures, psychopathology, addiction, and psychosocial and occupational impairment.**

As child and adolescent mental health advocates, AACAP (a) opposes efforts to legalize marijuana, (b) supports initiatives to increase awareness of marijuana's harmful effects on adolescents, (c) supports improved access to evidence-based treatment, rather than emphasis on criminal charges, for adolescents with cannabis use disorder, and (d) supports careful monitoring of the effects of marijuana-related policy changes on child and adolescent mental health.

<http://goo.gl/jeBwVH>

— The AMA and most major health organizations
oppose the legalization and medicalization of marijuana —



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