

# What do you need to know about **CANNABIS**



*Answers to some of your questions...*

[www.nwdrugtaskforce.ie](http://www.nwdrugtaskforce.ie)

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This leaflet is intended to provide some useful information for parents and families concerned about cannabis use or experimentation. It is a result of collaboration on the North West Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force (NWRDATF) - Prevention and Education Sub-Group and has been co-financed by Parentstop Ltd, the Co Donegal support service for parents, and the NWRDATF.



# Introduction

This leaflet attempts to answer some of the questions you might have as a parent or family member. It is designed to provide an initial response to questions you may have about Cannabis.

**What is Cannabis?** Cannabis is a plant based product. Today's drug is much more potent than that grown in the past. The increased strength is due to it being force grown which releases higher levels of THC which can be harmful and can lead to psychotic episodes.

**What does it look like?** **Resin** – a brown/black lump, known as ganja, hashish. **Herbal cannabis** – made up of the dried flowering tops and variable amounts of dried leaves - known as grass, marijuana, weed, hash, as well as blow, pot, dope, black and draw (to name but a few). It is commonly smoked in a joint/spliff.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## QUESTION: Is Cannabis harmless?



**ANSWER:** Cannabis is not risk free.

Regular use has been associated with long term problems, memory loss and lung cancer.

To a developing teenage brain it can be toxic, leading to panic attacks, depression and poor mental health.

## QUESTION: Is Cannabis addictive?



**ANSWER:** The desire for Cannabis can have a powerful pull over someone, like smoking cigarettes it can be hard to quit.

Cannabis is addictive.

Tolerance levels go up hence a need to get more of it.

Withdrawal symptoms can also occur.

## QUESTION: Is driving while high on Cannabis safer than driving while drunk?



**ANSWER:** Even a moderate dose of Cannabis can impair driving performance.

It affects alertness, concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time.



# More FAQs

**QUESTION: Can I smoke Cannabis and still do well at school?**



**ANSWER:** Research has found that heavy Cannabis use may be problematic during peak learning years.

The brain is still developing in teenage years.

Smoking Cannabis can impair the ability to retain information affecting short term memory.

**QUESTION: Is smoking Cannabis as bad as Cigarettes?**



**ANSWER:** Cannabis contains many of the same cancer causing chemicals found in ordinary tobacco.

Therefore if you smoke cannabis regularly you may experience the same breathing problems as those who smoke cigarettes.

**QUESTION: What can I do as a parent or guardian about stopping children experimenting?**

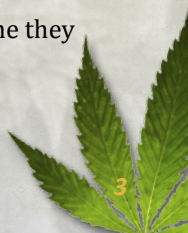


**ANSWER:** The message needs to start with parents and guardians.

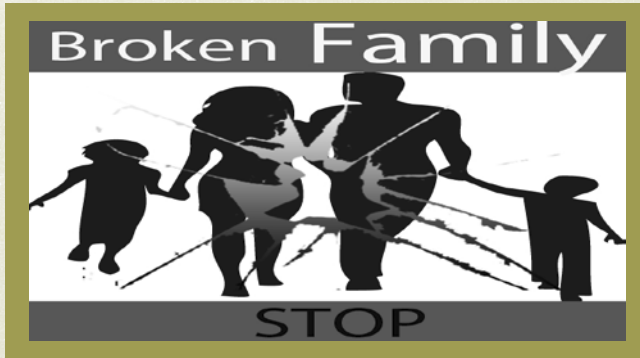
You are the most powerful influence on your children when it comes to drugs.

Children need to hear the risks from someone they trust.

Stay involved in their lives.



# How can Cannabis affect the family?



- **FINANCIALLY:** Cannabis use by a family member can have a significant financial impact on everyone in the household. The amount of money used for recreational drug use or habit could be spent on other things for the family. If you are caught using or carrying Cannabis, you could face jail time, probation, court costs and fines. If your employer becomes aware of your drug use or you fail a drug test at work it could mean job loss.
- **MENTALLY:** Cannabis can have a negative effect on your mental health, as there are certain functions that can become impaired. It can enhance feelings of intense thoughts, anxiety and increase appetite. It can make you sleepy losing your sense of reality in your surroundings. The loss of focus can mean missing out on family time, or not recognising possible dangerous situations in the home.
- **PHYSICALLY:** The main chemical found in Cannabis is called THC which causes the brain cells to change. Therefore you experience changes in sight, smell, touch and taste. If using cannabis when pregnant or breastfeeding this can affect the development of your baby.





# What are the signs and symptoms of use?

The following are some of the signs to look out for:

- More relaxed behavior
- Red or bloodshot eyes
- Use of eye drops or sunglasses at inappropriate times
- Dry Mouth
- Hunger
- Unusual odor on clothes
- Dried plant material
- Ashes or small burn holes
- Cigarette and rolling papers and lighters/pipes
- Lack of money
- Lethargy and loss of interest in other activities
- Unexplainable giddiness or dizziness
- Smoked cannabis has a distinct sweet smell

## Did you know?

- Cannabis can have the effect of a depressant or mild hallucinogen, depending on the amount taken and the strength of the cannabis.
- It is usually smoked, but can be eaten.
- It can be psychologically addictive and long term use can result in respiratory problems similar to smoking cigarettes.
- It can be a contributory factor in the cause of Psychosis. Risk is 2-3 times higher in cannabis users.
- If there is a family background of Schizophrenia, cannabis may increase the risk of developing this.



SOME SHORT TERM EFFECTS	SOME LONG TERM EFFECTS
Loss of coordination Altered time/space perception Slower reflexes Loss of inhibitions Drowsiness Increased appetite Becoming talkative and tendency to laugh easily Sense of well-being	Memory loss May cause cancer Impaired Learning Onset of mental illness
EFFECTS OF USING HIGHER DOSES	
Confusion and anxiety Mood Changes Fragmented thoughts Image distortion Fluctuating emotions	Detached from reality Hallucinations Paranoia Panic Attacks Restlessness

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*“smoking cannabis leads to some changes in the brain similar to those caused by cocaine, heroin and alcohol.”*

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This information leaflet is intended to support parents concerned about cannabis use and experimentation and to signpost where to get initial support and advice to meet your concerns and needs.

## Where to get more information



Northwest Regional  
Drug & Alcohol Task Force

Across the North West there are projects funded by the North West Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force. Go to [www.nwdrugtaskforce.ie](http://www.nwdrugtaskforce.ie) for information and help.