

MARIJUANA MAZE



A Christ-Centered 12-Step Recovery Group
addressing addictions and those affected by them

MARIJUANA MAZE

This pamphlet is based on an article written in the 1990's that used American statistics from that day but, sadly, Canada is no better today.

Marijuana is back, more available and acceptable than ever before. The sad part is that by the 90's, marijuana had become twice as potent as it was in the 70's and 80's, and thus it often gives people much more than they bargain for. Thanks to sophisticated cloning and genetic manipulation the THC (primary psychoactive chemical of pot) has doubled since the 1980's. Also disturbing is the fact that marijuana has become a huge cash crop, making it easily accessible.

The Partnership for a Drug Free America tracked attitudes toward drugs among thousands of children and parents across the U.S. and found that many people, and particularly teenagers, have become more tolerant of marijuana and drugs in general. This attitude was attributed, in part, to the glamorization of drugs in pop music, movies and TV shows and to an absence of national and community leadership in discouraging experimentation with drugs. Many teens think pot is more or less endorsed by a majority of adults, and point to success stories of the famous, even elected officials.

PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS

Pot is not pure anymore; these days it's laced with other substances like chemicals that can pose major health hazards, affecting the brain, heart and lungs as well as the immune and respiratory systems. Marijuana use has been linked to irregular heart rhythms and disruption of the endocrine and reproductive systems. It affects coordination and reflexes, resulting in the inability to measure distance, speed and time. It can disrupt the brain's ability to concentrate, thus producing impaired judgement and motor skills. It can cause deep depression and short-term memory loss. In addition, there are risks of cancer, because a pot smoker is exposed to six times as many carcinogens as a tobacco smoker. Puff for puff, there are more pollutants and toxic chemicals in marijuana than in cigarettes, and since pot users tend to hold smoke in their lungs longer than cigarette smokers, research suggests a greater potential for damage. Anyone under the influence of marijuana will experience a lowering of inhibitions, so that a person takes risks they wouldn't normally take, resulting in bizarre behaviour, accidents and even criminal activity.

TEENAGE USE ON THE RISE

According to surveys, the use of marijuana by adolescents has increased and parents (many of whom once tried drugs themselves) may not have a clue that their own children are experimenting. With marijuana being openly promoted at concerts, on CD's and blatantly displayed on clothing items, an unmistakable message of social acceptance is being sent out, and that is alarming.

Marijuana users are starting at a younger age and are smoking larger amounts than their elders did. Because of "blunts" (short cigars hollowed out and restuffed with pot or a pot/tobacco mix) more kids are smoking pot because it's cheap and easier to obtain than alcohol. Though some teens have been scared off of harder drugs, many of them see marijuana as the lesser of 2 evils. Others see it as a harmless, even healthy alternative to cigarettes and alcohol. Some teens do believe that smoking pot regularly can really be harmful, but an increasing percentage of high schoolers are using marijuana on a regular basis and thinking nothing of it. They are more likely to believe that drug use is widespread and tolerated, and will feel more pressure to try illegal drugs than teens did in the past. It's believed that most college graduates will have experimented with drugs at one time or another before they graduate.

While most marijuana users do not move on to harder drugs, smoking pot does increase a person's chances of exposure to other drugs. Even though many people dismiss the idea that pot is a "gateway" drug leading toward more lethal substances, often teens who use pot by age 18 will likely move on to cocaine and other hard drugs.

While the use of marijuana can be hazardous to persons of any age, it must be noted that any drug used by a teenager can have serious lifelong consequences. In the teen years, social, educational and physical development is taking place at the fastest rate ever, except for a child's first year. Pot completely messes up a teen's reality testing; it makes kids less interested in school, sports and other activities and sets the tone and attitude for their future.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- A dried green leafy substance with stalks and seeds that is usually packaged in a plastic bag – a common amount would be a "lid" or about one ounce.
- Cigarette papers, pipes or glass water pipes ("bong") that are used to smoke marijuana.
- Unexplained changes in the individual's personality, involving school, grades or extracurricular activities.
- Defensiveness about the topic of drugs and drug use.
- Personal possessions missing from home – valuables like electronics, jewelry, etc.
- Changes in a person's circle of friends.
- Noticeable changes in weight, appetite, sleeping habits or other health-related fluctuations.
- Trouble with school authorities or police.
- Isolation from family and increased secrecy.

HOW A FAMILY MEMBER CAN HELP

- Learn all you can about marijuana addiction.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Talking with your child often about difficult issues, like drugs, helps them to make positive decisions on their own.
- If you must confront, avoid being accusatory. Look for an opening for conversation and then speak calmly and directly to your loved one within a caring environment. The key is to have open and honest communication.
- Seek help from a knowledgeable pastor, school counselor, athletic coach, family doctor or other adult the person trusts.
- Make a decision to attend 12-Step support groups for affected family members. Overcomers Outreach groups, Al-Anon and other meetings will be a tremendous help to you and your family.
- If the problem is critical, consult a professional who can intervene and investigate treatment options.

MARIJUANA USE IN THE CHURCH

In the same way that there are "sipping saints" of all ages socially indulging in alcoholic beverages, many of the younger generation consider it normal and even "cool" to smoke pot for relaxation and socialization. Unfortunately, some of these people may eventually find themselves addicted, when the drug no longer produces the "high" they had experienced in the past. In order to find that same level of intoxication, they may begin experimenting with harder substances.

Disclosing their pain of addiction in a church setting can sometimes be humiliating and can be misunderstood by well-meaning Christian friends. Thus, the drug use may secretly continue unabated until a safe place to share can be located. Christ-centered Overcomers Outreach support groups can be that place.

IF I'M THE ONE ADDICTED

There are 12-Step support groups in every community that address drug addiction. Help is available – consult a telephone directory for meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. You can also contact Overcomers Outreach to talk to people who understand, because they have been there. Individuals involved in these 12-Step groups know exactly where you're coming from. They will know you only by your first name and will never judge you. They will offer only their experience and hope, along with some answers that really work. Now is the time to get help, before addiction gets a firmer grip on you and takes its toll on your life.

For more information or to find a meeting, contact us:

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