

October 17, 2018

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Over many months, Ottawa Public Health (OPH) has been preparing for cannabis legalization. OPH recognizes that children are looking to their parents for information.

We also recognize that you may have questions about how to talk to your kids about drugs. You may also have questions about where to go for help if your child is using drugs. OPH encourages you to look for opportunities to talk to your children. We also encourage you to listen to what they have to say, talk often, and start young.

You can visit [www.ParentingInOttawa.ca/TalkCannabis](http://www.ParentingInOttawa.ca/TalkCannabis) to download the FREE Cannabis Talk Kit from Drug Free Kids Canada.

OPH also has information available for you, and your children. This information includes the health effects of Cannabis and safer ways of consuming. OPH talks about many other topics that parents of teenagers might find helpful.

In Ottawa, the majority of children report not using cannabis, and 18% in grade 7 – 12 report using cannabis. So, our messages talk about preventing drug use, and where to find help if there is problematic use in the family.

Some key points that can be helpful for you to consider when you talk to your children are:

- Not using cannabis is the best way to avoid the health effects.
- Using cannabis at an early age and often can change the way your brain grows and develops.
- Even though the legal age in Ontario is 19 years old, you should delay using Cannabis until age 25. This is because the brain continues to grow and develop until about that age.
- There is a chance of experiencing psychosis and schizophrenia. Especially if you have a family history, and with frequent use.
- Cannabis use in the teen years does increase the chance of addiction. Some people believe the MYTH that cannabis is NOT addictive. But, cannabis can be addictive and can lead to both a psychological and a physical dependence. About 5-9% of users will become dependent, which jumps to 17% when the use of cannabis begins as a teen.

Your child may decide that they will use cannabis. If so, visit [TheLINK.ca](http://TheLINK.ca) for information on safer ways of consuming. Please share this youth website with your child.

If you think that your child is using, talk to a health care provider, or call Rideauwood at 613-724-4881.

Some signs that your teen may have a cannabis or other substances use problem include:

- Ignoring responsibilities at work, school, or home.
- Giving up activities that they used to find important or enjoyable.
- Using more cannabis, more often.
- Feeling unable to cut down or control cannabis use.
- Changes in mood (e.g., feeling irritable and paranoid).
- Changing friends.
- Having difficulties with family members.
- Being secretive or dishonest.
- Changing sleep habits, appetite, or other behaviors.
- Borrowing money or having more money than usual.

For more information, please visit:

[ParentinginOttawa.ca](http://ParentinginOttawa.ca)

[TheLinkOttawa.ca](http://TheLinkOttawa.ca)

[OttawaPublicHealth.ca](http://OttawaPublicHealth.ca)

Please join us at one of our upcoming parent information session nights. The schedule is on the [Parenting in Ottawa](http://Parenting in Ottawa) website.

We look forward to continuing the conversation and supporting you.

Sincerely,

Marino Francispillai  
Program Manager  
School and Community Mental Health & Wellness