Preventing Youth Marijuana Use in Colorado: Information for Schools

How do we educate our students about the dangers of marijuana use when their parents might be using at home? How do we address these issues without offending and alienating parents?

- Social Norming
  - The social norms approach to preventing problem behavior and promoting and reinforcing positive behavior, put simply, is to dispel the myths about the problem being the norm among peers. It starts with gathering credible data from a population and identifying the actual norms regarding the attitudes and behavior of concern. Then a social norms intervention intensively communicates the truth through media campaigns, interactive programs, personalized normative feedback, and other educational venues. Evidence has shown youth and adults responding to these initiatives with more realistic perceptions of positive peer norms lead to decreases in problem behavior and increases in positive behavior in the population.
  - MOST of Us – http://www.mostofus.org/
    - MOST of Us is an interdisciplinary center at Montana State University that conducts, exchanges, and applies research in order to improve health and safety by understanding and cultivating cultural transformation.
    - Thus far, MOST of Us Campaigns using the Montana Model of Social Norms Marketing have proven effective in areas such as preventing tobacco use, increasing seat belt use, and preventing drinking and driving among other issues.
  - National Social Norms Institute (NSNI) – http://socialnorms.org/
    - The National Social Norms Institute opened its doors in 2006 at the University of Virginia. The mission includes research, evaluation, and dissemination of information on the social norms approach to the field. The goals are to demonstrate and facilitate the extension of the methodology to other health issues and other populations. The NSNI advisory board consists of prominent researchers and academicians in the field.
    - Look here for information about best practices, guidance on how to start a campaign, and to access national data from college health centers.
  - National Social Norms Resource Center – http://www.socialnormsresources.org/
    - This site is a collection of research and resources to support the application of the social norms approach in a variety of settings. It was created and is maintained by faculty at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in collaboration with other professionals nationwide.
    - A Guide to Marketing Social Norms for Health Promotion in Schools and Communities, published 2005 – http://www.socialnormsresources.org/Guidebook/guidebook.php
    - Access Social Norm Surveys to find online survey tools for implementing and evaluating social norms interventions. – http://www.socialnormsurveys.org/
- Drug abuse and marijuana are included in CDE's Comprehensive Health Education Standards. There are standards for student success for each grade level regarding substance abuse including knowledge of the physical, psychological, academic, and social impacts of drug use. http://www.cde.state.co.us/healthandwellness/marijuana
- Currently there are 2 Comprehensive Health Education Instructional Unit Samples available that address drug abuse prevention.
  - Setting and Respecting Personal Boundaries (8th Grade) - http://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/instructionalunits-comphealth#eight

  - Media Messages and Your Health (6th Grade) - http://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/instructionalunits-comphealth#six
- CDC provides a Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool to help schools and districts create a curriculum that appropriately and effectively teaches prevention of alcohol and other drug use. http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/hecat/pdf/HECAT_Module_AOD.pdf
- Schools can talk to students about not using substances that their parents currently use by:
  - Explaining that parents use substances like alcohol and marijuana legally for a reason like enhancing a good meal, sharing good times with friends, or celebrating a special occasion, but they use those substances in moderation.
  - Explaining that adults have fully grown bodies and brains that are able to handle alcohol and marijuana use. Youth have bodies and brains that are still developing and are more severely impacted by alcohol and marijuana use.
  - Marijuana use is against the law for people under 21 to protect young people's growing bodies and brains from the deleterious effects of use.
  - All these suggestions are from SpeakNow Colorado https://www.speaknowcolorado.org/talk-with-your-kids/talk-with-your-kids-overview/
  - SpeakNow is also available in Spanish - http://hableahoracolorado.org/
- Schools can talk to students about marijuana use by:
  - Sharing that marijuana can be addictive.
  - Explaining that marijuana use is unsafe while driving and doubles the chances of being involved in an accident.
  - Explaining that marijuana use is associated with poor academic performance.
  - Explaining that marijuana use can cause psychosis or panic attacks.
  - All these suggestions are from NIDA's *Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know: Talking to Your Kids* http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/marijuana-facts-parents-need-to-know/talking-to-your-kids-communicating-risks
- NIDA provides teaching guides, lessons & quizzes for class, statistics, and free materials to support substance abuse education.
  - The NIDA for Teens page links to all the resources for educators. http://teens.drugabuse.gov/educators
  - The Brain Power Challenge curricula are available for grades k-9 to provide science-based drug abuse information for students. These materials teach students about drug abuse, including marijuana, and include parent newsletters and materials to send home to parents. - http://drugpubs.drugabuse.gov/publication-series/brain-power
  - NIDA also provides a wealth of information about marijuana use and the effects of marijuana on people who use it. This page contains videos, handouts, statistics, and research that can be used to support classroom education and to engage parents. - http://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/marijuana
  - NIDA translates most of their information into Spanish. - http://www.drugabuse.gov/es/publications/que-preguntar-al-buscar-tratamiento-para-la-drogadiccion/introduccion
- SAMHSA recently released the "Talk. They Hear You." campaign for parents to prevent underage drinking. The tool can be used to help prevent underage marijuana use in Colorado as well since it is a substance that is legal for adults but not youth to use. https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Underage-Drinking-Myths-vs-Facts/sma18-4299
  - The campaign includes a simulation video game where parents can try different tactics for talking with kids about underage drinking (or marijuana use) to find an approach that will work for them. https://blog.samhsa.gov/category/underage-drinking

  - Schools can talk to students about alcohol (marijuana use) by:
    - Explaining that parents use substances like alcohol and marijuana legally for a reason like enhancing a good meal, sharing good times with friends, or celebrating a special occasion, but they use those substances in moderation.
    - Explaining that adults have fully grown bodies and brains that are able to handle alcohol and marijuana use. Youth have bodies and brains that are still developing and are more severely impacted by alcohol and marijuana use.
    - Marijuana use is against the law for people under 21 to protect young people's growing bodies and brains from the deleterious effects of use.
    - Explaining that we know more now about the risks associated with underage marijuana use than we used to know.
    - All these suggestions are from SAMHSA's Answering Your Child's Tough Questions about Alcohol page. http://beta.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources/answering-your-childs-tough-questions-about
- The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychology recommends teaching children about the effects of marijuana including:
  - School difficulties
  - Problems with memory and concentration
  - Increased aggression
  - Car accidents
  - Use of other drugs or alcohol
  - Risky sexual behaviors
  - Increased risk of suicide
  - Increased risk of psychosis
  - The same breathing problems as come from smoking cigarettes
  - Decreased motivation or interest
  - Lower intelligence
  - Mental health problems like depression, anxiety, anger, moodiness, psychosis
  - Decreased or lack of response to mental health medication
  - Increased risk of side effects from mental health medication

- A group of experts in Washington from the Seattle Children's Hospital and Social Development Research Group recommends reminding youth that most youth are not using marijuana and that they do not need to feel pressure to use it to fit in with their peers. This is in "A Parent's Guide to Preventing Underage Marijuana Use," which is also available in Spanish.
  - http://learnaboutmarijuanawa.org/parentpreventionbooklet2014.pdf
  - http://learnaboutmarijuanawa.org/padresprevencion2014.pdf
- There has been a reduction in tobacco use since 1991, which has a similar profile in that tobacco is legal for adults to use and some students' parents may be using it.
  - Modelling a youth prevention approach on the approach used for tobacco could be successful.

How do changes in the law affect how we deal with marijuana use in teens, young adults?

- Only adults over age 21 may buy, possess, or use marijuana legally. – Colorado.gov/marijuana https://www.colorado.gov/marijuana
- It is illegal for people under age 21 to buy, possess, or use marijuana. It is illegal for adults to give marijuana to someone underage, and retail outlets can lose their license for selling marijuana to someone underage. – Colorado.gov/marijuana
- Driving under the influence of marijuana is illegal. – Colorado.gov/marijuana

- Marijuana is still illegal under federal law. Students with a past conviction of any controlled substance, including marijuana, are not eligible for federal financial aid. – Colorado.gov/marijuana
- The Colorado Judicial Branch provides a list of the applicable statutes and penalties under the "Drugs and Youth" section of their Youth and the Law page. http://www.courts.state.co.us/Courts/Education/Youth/Laws.cfm

What restorative practices can schools utilize to avoid long suspensions and expulsions?

- N-O-T, Not On Tobacco, is an evidence-based program that is implemented in Colorado by the American Lung Association that is successful at reducing youth tobacco use. http://www.lung.org/associations/states/colorado/tobacco/not-on-tobacco/
    - Although there are differences in the ways that the chemicals in tobacco and marijuana affect a person's body, the program could be used as a model for marijuana cessation. Schools can also incorporate discussion of marijuana in their N-O-T curriculum.
    - N-O-T is based on social cognitive theory and incorporates training on self-management, social skills, stress management, techniques to manage withdrawal, and family and peer pressure.
    - ALA in Colorado is looking at how to add a marijuana component to the program and is currently starting to work with schools to make that happen.

What help is available in Colorado?

- The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment: Retail Marijuana Public Health Advisory Committee was tasked with performing an intense scientific literature review of current studies on the health effects of marijuana use, gathering the information, prioritizing future surveillance activities, and creating public health statements. The committee has released statements and finding summaries on Marijuana use during pregnancy and breastfeeding and Marijuana use and mental health. **Future statements include potential health effects on youth** and unintentional poisonings, Marijuana dose and drug interactions, injuries, and respiratory effects including lung cancer. - https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/retail-marijuana-public-health-advisory-committee
- Statewide youth prevention efforts are coordinated at the Retail Marijuana Technical Assistance site, which includes educational and campaign resources. - https://www.colorado.gov/cdphe/RetailMarijuanaTA
- For youth prevention technical assistance, please contact, Retail Marijuana Education and Youth Prevention Coordinator, https://retailmjeducation.freshdesk.com/support/tickets/new