



Get Ahead Prevention and Early Intervention Toolkit

Youth Cannabis Prevention & Early Intervention

(For School Staff & Prevention Partners)

About This Toolkit

Supporting student health and well-being takes a whole community, and schools are at the center of that effort. This toolkit provides practical resources to strengthen cannabis prevention in classrooms and across the school community. Materials emphasize consistent messaging and meaningful engagement—whether you’re working one-on-one with a student, facilitating a group, responding in a crisis, or teaching a prevention lesson.

Who This Toolkit Is For

This toolkit is designed for school staff and prevention partners, including counselors, Student Assistance Program (SAP) coordinators, teachers, administrators, and community organizations that support youth. Our goal is to make prevention planning easier and more effective by giving you tools you can put into action right away.

Objectives

- Provide school staff and prevention partners with practical cannabis prevention and early intervention resources.
- Increase referrals to Student Assistance Program Coordinators and others.

What’s Inside

- Background information and current youth cannabis use data
- Policy and early intervention strategies schools can implement
- “5 Things Adults Need to Know About Cannabis” overview
- Ready-to-use resources, curricula, and fact sheets
- Sample communications for staff and caregivers
- Videos, discussion prompts, and family engagement tools
- Local and national resources for schools, families, and students



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Background

Prevention isn't a one-time event. It's an ongoing, collaborative effort that requires thoughtful planning at every level. Effective prevention relies on consistent communication and engagement with students, families, and school staff. It also extends into the broader community, where environmental strategies—such as limiting youth access and reducing targeted marketing—help safeguard well-being. Every action counts. Start small, and build momentum.

In New Hampshire, cannabis is one of the most commonly used substances among youth. Its widespread availability and perception as “harmless” contribute to early use. Research shows that when young people believe cannabis use carries little risk, rates of use increase. At the same time, informed conversations with caring adults make a significant difference—shaping attitudes, delaying first use, and preventing downstream problems.

2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) Cannabis Use Data

- 19.8% of high school students reported using marijuana in the past 30 days (up from 17.8% in 2021; down from 26.1% in 2019).
- 4.6% tried marijuana before age 13 (4.3% in 2021; 4.7% in 2019).
- 27.1% said it would be very easy to get marijuana if they wanted (24.4% in 2021; 39.0% in 2019).
- 9.6% reported ever using synthetic marijuana (Spice, K2, fake weed, Black Mamba).
- 45.5% said their friends feel it would be wrong or very wrong for them to smoke marijuana.
- 77.8% said their parents feel it would be wrong or very wrong for them to smoke marijuana.

Perception of Harm

Cannabis is widely used among New Hampshire youth and is often seen as harmless because it's so accessible. Research shows that when teens and adults believe cannabis use carries little risk, rates of use go up. In fact, the percentage of NH youth who viewed cannabis use as harmful dropped from 21.7% in 2013 to just 10.3% in 2019.

At the same time, caring, informed conversations make a difference. When trusted adults talk openly about the real risks of cannabis, they can shape young people's attitudes, delay initiation, and prevent future problems.



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Policy and Early Intervention

Prevention and early intervention are essential, but schools also need progressive policies that address substance use without pushing students out of the learning environment. A disciplinary approach that emphasizes alternatives to suspension keeps students in school, helps address the root causes of risky behavior, and supports long-term cessation.

Action Step: Watch and share this video [Moving Beyond Suspension – A Better Approach to Discipline](#) with your partners to build awareness and encourage alternatives to suspension in your school.

Every interaction is an opportunity to reinforce and promote your Student Assistance Program (SAP). To save you time, we've compiled recommended fact sheets, videos, and curricula—all available in the password-protected SAP-C Google folder.

Reminder: Always get approval from your administration before sharing materials.

5 Things Adults Need To Know About Cannabis

1. Cannabis and brain development:

- The brain is not fully developed until about age 25.
- Cannabis use during adolescence can affect executive function, learning, memory, and emotional regulation.
- Early use increases the likelihood of developing a substance use disorder.
- Prenatal exposure is linked to later learning and behavior challenges, including ADHD.

2. Cannabis is addictive:

- Not everyone develops dependence, but youth are especially vulnerable because their brains and bodies are still developing.
- Starting before age 18 significantly increases the risk of dependence.

3. Potency matters:

- Today's cannabis products are far more potent than in the past.
- High-THC concentrates (used for “dabbing”) and vaping products deliver large amounts of THC, leading to ER visits, psychotic episodes, and other health risks.
- Higher potency products are linked to increased risk of dependence, mental health crises, and car crashes.

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4. Mental health:

- Regular cannabis use during adolescence can interfere with communication, learning, mood regulation, and problem-solving.
- Potential short-term effects include distorted perception, poor motor coordination, increased heart rate, and anxiety.
- Youth with a family history of mental health issues are especially vulnerable.
- Studies show a growing relationship between cannabis use and suicide, particularly with high-potency products.

5. Legal Consequences:

- Underage possession is typically handled in the juvenile justice system and can lead to fines, suspension, service hours, or criminal charges.
- Even in states where cannabis is legal for adults 21+, it remains illegal at the federal level.
- Youth convictions can result in loss of federal financial aid for college, including loans, grants, and work-study programs.

Cannabis Prevention and Early Intervention Resources for Prevention Partners

Bulletin Board content: View, download and print these foldable “test your knowledge” questions for school bulletin boards.



One Choice Prevention: Data, messaging, and prevention resources for caregivers and prevention parents.

Truth Initiative: *Vaping: Know the truth:* is a newly created digital course that gives today's students core knowledge around the health effects associated with using vaping products (nicotine, cannabis, or co-use) and offers resources to help young people quit if they already vape. It was created by Truth Initiative, the public health organization behind truth®, the



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nationally recognized youth tobacco prevention and education campaign, and Kaiser Permanente, in collaboration with the American Heart Association. The course has been updated with two new lessons that address the health risks and consequences of short- and long-term cannabis use.

eLearning Module: Motivational Conversations with Youth: Learn techniques and skills for engaging youth in nonjudgmental conversations that motivate them to quit or cut back on vaping and other risky behaviors. This eLearning module is designed for SAPs, school nurses, school counselors and others who regularly counsel youth in schools.

Stanford Medicine: Collection of curriculums, lessons, programs, factsheets, and resources addressing cannabis prevention and early intervention for grade, middle and high school students. This short youth-facing [video](#) is a great supplemental tool that highlights the importance of delaying substance. It can be used during your one-on-one sessions or in a classroom presentation, followed by a brief conversation.

The Partnership to End Addiction: Resources for families and professionals—including a toolkit with everything a caregiver needs to know about marijuana use. Topics range from tips on “what to say” and “what not to say”, to the short and long-term risks of use and the types of products available. Caregivers can also sign up for a free and confidential personalized text messaging program designed to help them support their loved one dealing with misuse or addiction.

Johnny’s Ambassadors: A suite of marijuana prevention resources, including short age-appropriate [videos](#) about the impact of use on the developing adolescent brain; longer educational videos for youth and caregivers, educator’s powerpoint slides and notes, and factsheets for middle, high school and college-aged students and caregivers.

Developed by the Partnership @drugfreeNH, the [Stronger Than You Think](#) and the [Talk, They Hear You](#) campaigns supports open conversations between parents, caregivers, and adults who have strong relationships with youth, and the young people in their lives. The campaign highlights the importance of having conversations about:

- Expectations around using substances
- Setting age-appropriate boundaries
- Planning safe activities and accountability
- Educating about the risks and consequences of using any substance

Empower families and caregivers to have these conversations. Order campaign materials [here](#).



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Explainer videos about the impact of cannabis use on the adolescent brain:

- Ask, Listen, Learn: [How Marijuana Affects Your Developing Brain](#)
- Ask, Listen, Learn: [The Impact of Alcohol and Marijuana on Kids' Mental Health](#)
- BrainFacts.org: [The Workings of the Adolescent Brain](#)
- The Prevention Connection: [Let's Talk About Cannabis and Teens](#)
- Stanford Medicine: [Drugs and the Brain: Why Waiting Matters](#)
- Jhony's Ambassadors: [Impact of Marijuana on the Brain](#)
- NIDA: [Mind Matters: How Does Marijuana Affect Your Brain and Body?](#)
- Positive Choices: [The Effects of Cannabis on the Teenage Brain](#)

Facilitated discussion - sample questions using motivational interviewing techniques

- Now that you've watched the video, what new things did you learn?
- Can you share a little bit with me about yourself, so I can learn more about you? What are some things that are important to you (hobbies, hopes, future plans)? What do you look forward to most in the coming year (or after you graduate, or beyond)? Why?
- Thank you for agreeing to chat a bit more about what's going on with your marijuana use. Do you mind if we spend a few minutes talking about why you're using it?
- I understand you were using marijuana at school. Can you tell me what happened? What's going on?
- My next question might catch you off guard, but I'd like to know the things that you like about using marijuana or the good things? Thanks for sharing what you like about using. What about the other side? What are the not so good things that you've experienced?
- What are concerns you have with using marijuana? How do you think it's impacting you i.e. school, family?
- Use the readiness ruler to talk about the youth's readiness to change.

Introduce the readiness ruler.

For the Readiness Ruler: On a scale of zero to 10, how ready or motivated are you to make a change? Then ask, "Why" are you <<selected #>> instead of << a lower #>>?"

Then ask, "What do you think it would take to get yourself up to a << a couple #s higher than the selected #>>?"

Ask follow up questions.

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READINESS RULER
www.sbirtnh.org

How **CONFIDENT** are you about making this change?
 How **IMPORTANT** is this change to you right now?

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

← NOT
SOMEWHAT
→ VERY

The following statements are messages about the harmful consequences of use that have been tested and shown to resonate with young people. These statements can help tie the conversation back to what is important to the youth and set the stage for an authentic interaction. Make sure to ask for permission before sharing this information.

- Drugs and alcohol are not just illegal for people your age, they're expensive. And they cost money you could be saving or spending on other things you want, need or enjoy.
- Marijuana use directly affects the brain, especially at your age when your brain is still developing.
- It can make it harder to pay attention, remember things and learn.
- Marijuana use can affect your ability to do things that require concentration or coordination, such as studying, driving a car or exercising.
- Using drugs and alcohol changes parts of your brain that impacts how you think and act. The more you use them, the harder it can be to stop even if you want to.
- Marijuana can have a major impact on your mental health because of the way it impacts your brain.
- It can alter your mood, energy or memory, and increase anxiety or depression.
- Marijuana can impact your mental health — sometimes causing you to see and hear things that aren't real, have scattered thoughts or become easily confused, or increase feelings of anxiety, fear and mistrust.

Source: [Getting Candid: Framing the Conversation Around Youth Substance Use Prevention](#)

Sample Communications to Families and Staff

Email to caregivers and families about marijuana prevention

The use of vaping and marijuana use among young people is concerning. Longstanding surveys show that attitudes about cannabis are changing, influenced by easier access as neighboring states have commercialized it. Fewer adults now perceive it as a harmful substance.



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- While cannabis use may be okay for adults, it has serious consequences for youth, including emergency room visits due to overdose, mental health challenges, and addiction. The potency of today's products is especially concerning for our youth because their brains are still developing. Regular use during teen years and early 20s may lead to lasting physical changes in the brain.

HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD

- **Stress your main concern is their health and safety**, and let them know you are available to help if needed.
- **Never underestimate the influence you have** over your child's actions and attitudes. As a caregiver, one of the best things you can do is talk to your child about cannabis use and share your concerns.
- **Talk regularly and openly about not using substances** unless prescribed by a health care professional for a physical or behavioral health issue.
- **Explore with your child why their peers and other young people use cannabis.** Share the consequences and your expectations. Stay calm and avoid lecturing during these conversations.
- **Talk with your child about healthy ways to cope.** Many young people say they use cannabis to relieve stress and anxiety.
- **Explain to your child that the marketing** of cannabis use in movies, media and music is not an accurate depiction of the harm it can cause.
- **Learn more about the risks** so you can provide honest, direct answers about cannabis use.

To learn more, check out the resources at the national campaign [Talk, They Hear You](#). Also, check out the factsheet *Cannabis Use Among Young People: What Parents and Caregivers Can Do* by the [Partnership @drugfreeNH](#)

If you are concerned about your child's potential use, we want you to know, we are here to help. Please reach out to the Student Assistance Program. **Early intervention is key.** Working together, we can find resources and support that meet your child's needs. With your permission and support, the Student Assistant Program Coordinator can make a plan to address your child's behavioral health needs to get the most out of this school's year.

We recognize that when it comes to your child's health, parents and caregivers are the most important influence. Your guidance and support help your child navigate the challenges of growing up— including peer pressure and making healthy choices about substance use.



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The use of vaping and marijuana is a growing concern for communities everywhere, including our own. At <<**insert name of school**>> we are committed to providing a safe and healthy environment by empowering our students with the knowledge and skills to make healthy decisions. We know our efforts are most effective when we work together in partnership with you.

We've included material from the [Talk. They Hear You](#) campaign to support you in having these important conversations at home about the [risks of marijuana use](#). These resources can help you talk openly about the harms of all substance use, including marijuana.

Most importantly, if you have concerns about your child, please know that you are not alone. Our Student Assistance Program is here to offer confidential support and connect you with resources. By working together, we can make sure our students– and your child– get what they need to succeed. With your permission and support, the Student Assistant Program Coordinator will help develop a plan that supports your child's health and well-being.

Email to staff about cannabis use

As you know, the use of vaping devices and cannabis use among students is a growing concern. We're seeing more devices that look like ordinary school supplies– such as highlighters, pens and clothing that make it difficult to detect use during the school day.

If you are concerned about a student's potential vape or cannabis use, please reach out to me directly. **Early intervention is key and every action counts.** We want to proactively support students by connecting them to healthy activities and support networks that help them succeed in school. By linking students with supportive resources before disciplinary action, we can help youth explore strategies to quit or at least avoid use while at school. Please don't wait to make a referral - reach out today.

Where to Get Help

- Your school's **Student Assistance Program (SAP) coordinator**: SAP coordinators are part of the school's mental health team. They help create a supportive culture so teachers don't have to act as counselors and families can build resilience at home. SAPs meet with students individually or in small groups, teach coping skills, and connect families to community services. With parent permission, support is confidential and free. Watch this 5 - minute video (waiting for approval) to learn more about Student Assistance Programs.
- Your pediatrician or a mental health provider.
- The Doorway (thedoorway.nh.gov or call 2-1-1 (or 1-866-444-4211): A statewide service



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that supports any NH resident, of any age, with a substance or alcohol concern or issue.

Additional Resources

Resources to Move Forward:

- Listen to this [podcast interview](#) to learn how cannabis impacts the adolescent brain and their mental health.
- Visit the [Partnership @drugFreeNH](#) cannabis prevention page to learn what you can do to prevent youth use in New Hampshire.
- Learn how to talk with your child about cannabis use at [Stronger Than You Think](#).