

# Parenteen

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## Dealing with Drugs and Alcohol: How Parents Can Help

The Parents' Coalition recently assembled a group of its teen consultants to discuss an issue of concern to both parents and kids: drinking and drugs. Here's what the students had to say about how parents can be most helpful as their kids deal with these issues.

Maybe you could start by telling us some ways in which parents are unhelpful.

- I have a friend who got really into drinking and using, and her parents basically gave up on her. They said they wouldn't pay for her education anymore; they threatened to send her away. She had a big problem, and her parents gave up on her. That's really sad.
- Another big mistake is when parents are constantly looking for the "warning signs" that their kids are drinking or using. Parents should just be willing to talk with their kids.
- If parents come on too judgmental, kids won't want to talk to them.

- Sometimes if parents make a major issue about something, kids will react by feeling defiant and doing it just to get back at them.
- It would be nice if your parents could be like your friends and just listen to you without judging you. My parents are always trying to fix my problems — that discourages me from talking to them.

Why do kids drink and do drugs?

- I have a friend who got into speed after smoking pot — he got bored with pot and wondered what was next. After a while, you just want to try something else. His whole group did it — it was fun when you went to raves, to be able to go and stay awake all night.

- It's the nature of teens to be curious — to wonder what happens if I try this. Parents have to be open to the fact that their kids might not be perfect angels. They shouldn't get angry — it's not our fault that we live in a world where drugs are there.
- It's just so easy to get — even people who are absolutely clueless can get it. All you have to do is walk down Haight, Market Street, in the Tenderloin — people are always walking around saying "Buds, buds" or "X, X" for Ecstasy — it's just there. It's easier to get pot and mushrooms than alcohol. But the solution is *not* to forbid your kids to go to Haight Street.
- One thing that's really frustrating is that a lot of parties center around drinking. I've had good friends not invite me

to parties because of that, because they know I'm not down with that scene.

- Smoking marijuana is not all that damaging — smoking cigarettes is so much worse. I wish there was more education about cigarettes, instead of about marijuana.

How can parents be helpful?

- Parents should realize that kids are going to experiment, and do what they want, regardless of what the parents want. But it's great if parents can stay open to their kids in case the kids want to talk. Parents need to be there, and create an environment where it's safe for kids to talk.
- You have to trust your kids to make

the right choice. My parents have faith that they raised me the right way. They

*It would be nice if your parents could just listen without judging you.*

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know that I know that my actions have repercussions.

- The best way to learn is from your mistakes, not just by being taught. You learn it better that way. I consider myself a straight-edge, meaning I don't drink or do drugs. But I learned that by trying it and figuring out that I can't handle it — I get sick.
- The best message parents could give their kids is this: "I acknowledge you're going to try stuff and I don't support it, but I hope you'll have the good sense to be careful. Know your limits."

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## Fighting Drinking and Drugs with a Message of Love

By Sue Adams  
Parent, Lick-Wilmerding

Why do kids use drugs and alcohol? For all the right reasons, says Paula Hekimian, director of drug and alcohol programs for San Mateo County. Wait — make that for many of the same reasons adults do. Kids do it to relieve stress, because they think it will help them loosen up and have fun, as a

shared social experience with their friends, Hekimian said. But in the end, she said, it proves to be a rip-off. It doesn't solve any problems, it can rob them of their personalities, it interferes with their ability to learn the social skills they need, and at worst it can endanger their lives. If parents want to deter kids from using, they need to make a very clear statement of their feelings about the issue — and perhaps take a hard look at

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### How Parents Can Help (continued from page 1)

What about all the education kids get nowadays on drugs and alcohol — does that influence their behavior?

- Education works when you're talking about the harder drugs, like heroin and cocaine. They really sound scary.
- But marijuana and mushrooms don't seem so scary, and they're so available. You see your friends do it and you see they're not getting really messed up, so you think maybe it's OK to try it.

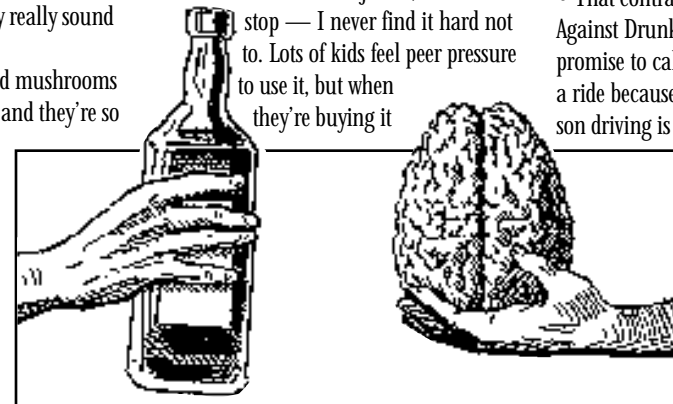
What about drinking and driving — do you think most kids have gotten the message on that?

- Absolutely — that's one area where education has really been effective. Everyone sees that gory movie, "Blood on the Asphalt," when they take driver's ed.
- About four years ago there were two kids at S.I. who died while driving drunk. But there are still some stupid people who do it, who get in a car with someone drunk or who say, "I've only had one beer, I'm OK."
- I never hesitate to take keys away from friends who've been drinking.
- Even when I'm drunk, I know I shouldn't drive.
- We always have a designated driver. And at parties, you're always kind of keeping an eye on the designated driver. It's easy to resist peer pressure by saying, "I'm driving tonight."
- When my parents let my sister drive the car, they're trusting her — they're trusting that she won't wreck it.

- Sometimes parents need to learn when to let up on their kids, but drunk driving is definitely something to be strict about.

How do you know when kids have a problem with drugs or drinking?

- There have been periods when I've done a lot of marijuana, but I can stop — I never find it hard not to. Lots of kids feel peer pressure to use it, but when they're buying it



*Kids would be happier if their parents said, "We know there's drinking going on, but we trust you."*

- just for themselves and doing it alone, they've got a problem.
- I've got some friends, and every time we get together, we drink. But once we were all going to be driving, so no one drank, and it was so much fun. I'm not sure they all realized why it was better, though.

How can parents be helpful if they think their child has a problem?

- Just talk to them. Say, "I'm worried about you." It might feel awkward, but that's OK — it's still worth trying to talk. More often than not it will help.
- Lots of times when parents find out, kids will modify their behavior. Most kids really still want to please their parents.
- If it's gone too far, parents need to

get their kids out of the situation — like find them a new school. That should be an option if it gets really bad.

What else helps?

- One thing that really helps is when your friends confront you. All kids are really concerned about what their friends think of them. If your friends say you have to change, that really works. No one wants to lose their friends.
- That contract inspired by Mothers Against Drunk Driving is great — kids promise to call their parents if they need a ride because they're drunk or the person driving is drunk, and parents promise to go get them, no questions asked — at least until the next morning. That's the most valuable thing in the world.
- Parents also can leave money at home in case kids need to take a cab home. My dad gives me cab money when I go out, just in case.

How important is it to feel that your parents trust you?

- My mom always pokes her head into my room after I've been out, to say goodnight, but I know she's checking to see if I'm OK. It probably gives her peace of mind, but it makes me feel like she doesn't trust me, and then that doesn't make me feel too great about myself.
- My parents know I'm straight but still they say they don't want me to go to certain places, certain parties. That makes me feel like, why bother? Talk is cheap, but it's actions that count.
- I drink when I go out and my parents know that. They trust that I won't take it too far. They do want to know where I am, and that I'm safe.
- My parents want me to call so they know where I am. Last year I felt like a real loser doing that, but now I don't mind — it's just common courtesy.

• Sometimes the rules put kids in a position where we feel we have no choice but to lie to our parents, and we hate that. Most of us are responsible and know our limits. You can trust us.

- Lots of times if you have a really good relationship with your parents, you don't want to do things that will mess it up. You don't want to risk it, because it's the most important thing in the world.
- Kids would be so much happier if their parents said, "We know there might be drinking going on there, but we trust you."
- My parents know I'm going to drink, so why won't they let me drink at home, in the safest place possible? That confuses me. If they really want me to be safe, why are they forcing me to leave the safest place there is — my home — and go somewhere else to do it? We talk about this, but they just say no and I don't understand it.

What about your parents' own drinking? How does that affect you?

- Sometimes my dad will get in the car after drinking. It's kind of hypocritical, but...
- My dad never gets out of control, but he'll have a couple of glasses of wine and then drive us home. I know he's responsible — he's been doing all of this for a long time — but my friends might see it a different way. It's kind of weird. I really don't want him to drive if he's been drinking, so I volunteer to drive.
- My dad likes a couple of glasses of wine, but then my mom drives home, because she doesn't drink and she doesn't want him to do it.
- My friend had to drive home on Thanksgiving with her parents practically passed out in the back seat.
- I think it would be gross to see my parents stumbling around. I don't want to see that.
- My parents drink socially, but there's one major thing that's different — for them it's legal. If they drink too much... no one's perfect, not even parents. \*

# When Communication Is Theatrical

"Dad treats me like a baby. He doesn't want to hear what's happening. He gives me no choices (but to lie). He just makes assumptions. If he asked with respect, I'd tell him what is going on. He just thinks I do all these things (get drunk, stay out all night, have sex). He doesn't think I make good choices."

These are some of the statements made by the 15-year-old daughter in a skit put on by Life Theater in the Coalition's fall event.

"Communication on the Cutting Edge." The girl's response is to her father's "what I say goes" attitude and his anger when he finds a note from her girlfriend which hints at drinking and sexual activity.

The Life Theater event was the result of the Coalition's search for innovative ways to help parents talk with their teens. The evening was moderated by Life Theater Director Cynthia Cristilli, whose introduction began with the idea that conflict can be positive in that it can help us grow.

Her tips were to collaborate and reach a creative solution in which parent and teen both feel they win. (See box)

In the Life Theater format, audience responses shape the evening. Parents and students from 12 Bay Area high schools talked to the actors and actresses, who remained in their roles, and commented on what they saw happening in the skits. Although the audience focused on teens' use of alcohol, some parents commented about possible deeper sources for the conflict in this imaginary family.

Stuck families like this should make up their rules together beforehand and write them down, the audience agreed. \*

## Message of Love (continued from page 1)

their own usage patterns.

Speaking at a Parents' Coalition meeting last fall, Hekimian urged parents to abandon ineffective scare tactics and instead tell their kids they shouldn't drink or use drugs for one simple reason: "Because we need you in this family; we can't afford to lose you."

"Telling kids to 'just say no' doesn't work after about second grade," Hekimian said.

"And neither does trying to scare kids by telling them that drugs and alcohol are bad. They see you doing it, so how bad can it be?"

Teenagers feel a natural urge to rebel and experiment with new things, take risks and bond with their peers. Kids might think drinking and using can fill those needs — but part of the job of being a parent is to steer kids toward healthier alternatives, Hekimian noted. For risks, try rock climbing. For an altered state of mind, how about meditation?

Simply educating kids about drugs and alcohol is not enough, she added. Most teens these days are well educated on the issue, yet usage is on the rise. Instead, parents need to think carefully about their own use, and make sure their behavior, as well as their words, sends a very clear message to their kids.

"Do as I say, not as I do" was stupid when our parents said it to us and it's stupid now," Hekimian said. "What do you do after a hard day at work? Go straight for the wine? How do you celebrate — always with alcohol?"

"If you do drink," she said, "you need to be sure you model responsible

drinking — and this doesn't mean having just one or two drinks and then driving. Even if you're just a teeny weeny bit impaired, you can still kill someone."

Hekimian offered a number of tips for parents trying to deal with teen usage, whether real or potential:

- Trying to figure out if your child has a problem? Using once or twice is experimentation; more often than that and it's social use.

- If you feel the need to confront your children about using, say to them, "These are some of the things that make me think something's going on," then follow with concrete reasons for your worries.

- If you don't have an extended family nearby, build one out of friends and neighbors, and use each other as resources.

- Gifted kids are often among those most at risk, because they're able to keep

it together longer — and thus do themselves more damage — before their problem comes to light.

Perhaps the most effective way to reach teens on this issue, said Hekimian, is to tell them you won't accept their drinking or using, simply because they're too important to you.

"The most important message you can send is that you love them and want them to remain part of the family," she said. "Our kids don't feel needed today, and they need to know they have a purpose here."

"We need to tell our kids, 'I'll do whatever it takes to keep you safe. That's my job.'"

When it comes to drugs and alcohol, Hekimian said, "It's not a question of trust, it's a question of safety." \*



*Gifted kids are often among those most at risk, because they're able to keep it together longer — and thus do themselves more damage.*

## Tips for Resolving Conflict

- ✓ Know and keep control of your own emotional hot-buttons.
- ✓ Listen and try to understand.
- ✓ Don't be reactive when listening.
- ✓ Acknowledge the other person's feeling before stating your view.
- ✓ Tell how the other person's behavior made you feel (no judgments).
- ✓ Keep as your goal a win/win outcome, not a compromise.



R E V I E W

# Resolving Conflict with Kids

By Marsha Torkelson, MFCC

*'m On Your Side* — the original title of the book *Positive Discipline for Teenagers: Resolving Conflict with Your Teenage Son or Daughter*, by Jane Nelson and Lynn Lott — is a key idea to hold onto when difficulties arise. Both the authors are parents (of 11 total!) and work in the field of educating and counseling parents of teenagers. The emphasis in the book is on maintaining a relationship of dignity with your child no matter what.

Here's an excerpt that offers an example of what this might look like when dealing with the problem of drug and alcohol use:

"Our teens' responses to us give us the best indicator we have of whether we are being emotionally honest. An activity from our workshop on empowering teens demonstrated this to the participants. One group played teenagers, using as many drug words as they could think of while they walked toward the other group, who played parents.

"The parents' instructions were to take an attitude of control and to tell themselves, 'I'm the parent, so they should do what I say.' In this simulation of parent-child communications, the parents lectured, ordered, yelled and threatened as the teens got closer to them. When the parents were close enough, they made remarks such as, 'You will not use drugs. I'll search your room. You'll be grounded. I'll take away your allowance.'

"After experiencing this interaction for a few minutes, the group was asked to share their feelings. Those who played the teenagers said they were feeling excited and challenged, and that they would think about sneakier ways of doing whatever their parents were saying not to do. They also felt that their parents didn't understand and were stupid.

"The parents were feeling upset, stressed, angry, afraid, irritated and panicky. Their thoughts were, 'How am I ever going to be vigilant enough? How am I ever going to stop this kid? I have to control him. How did I go wrong? What will people think?' During the discussion, they were able to see that control is not the road to emotional honesty but rather the road to frustration and despair.

"Next, the parents were asked to turn their backs on the approaching teens to simulate denial. They were to stick their heads in the sand, pretending the problem didn't exist. This time, the teens felt panic-stricken, abandoned, unloved, uncared for, rejected and scared; they wanted to run away from home. During the discussion, they said they preferred control to neglect.

"Those who played the parents said they felt irresponsible (some felt relieved) and scared. For most of them, it was so uncomfortable they wanted to run away and make the denial complete. Again, it's often easier for us to ignore or to hide from a problem than to be emotionally honest. But denial doesn't make the problem go away, and it clearly doesn't help our kids deal effectively with their drug issues.

"Finally, we directed the role-play to simulate an atmosphere where emotional honesty could take place. When the teens walked toward the parents saying drug words, the parents put their arms around the teens' shoulders and began walking in stride with them, saying, 'Listen, I'm not into this. I don't really know much about it, and I don't really like it. I don't think I approve of it. But I want to know what it's like for you. I want you to help me understand what it means to you.'

"Now, there was contact without control. The parents were curious to learn about and understand their kids' thoughts and feelings. They were also letting their kids know how it was for them. By making contact in this loving, non-judgmental way, parents were beginning a relationship with their teens rather than ending one.

"The parents felt relieved. The stress was gone. They felt curious, interested, nervous, uncomfortable — but close to their teens, part of their lives. They were thinking, 'This is very scary, because I'm not sure I know how to handle this, but I'm glad I'm here.'

"The teens were thinking, 'I'm going



*"They would think of sneakier ways of doing whatever their parents were saying not to do."*



## Very Important Dates

Upcoming Parents'Coalition meetings  
All meetings are 7:15 - 8:15 p.m. at San Francisco Day School, 350 Masonic Ave. (at Golden Gate Avenue)

Feb. 10 Teen consultants. "What Teenagers Would Like Their Parents to Know"

April 7 Panel of school counselors

Special Coalition Event

April 29, (Tuesday) 7:30-9:30p.m. in the auditorium at the UCSF Laurel

Heights campus, 3333 California St. "The Hidden Logic of Teenagers" — a conversation with Mike Riera, dean of students at Marin Academy and author of *Uncommon Sense for Parents with Teenagers*

to be in trouble. I'm really not sure that what I'm doing is okay. I'm feeling very uncomfortable because my parents aren't giving me a hard time. When I think about my behavior, I feel bad about what I'm doing to myself. All the things parents want their kids to feel and think happened when they walked in stride.

"The parents who participated in this activity invited closeness and emotional honesty. Relating to our teens in this way takes awareness, skill and practice. Fear and lack of practice might tempt us to slip into our old controlling or neglectful behavior, but faith in ourselves and our kids plus practice can help us make emotional honesty part of our lives." \*

The book is put out by Prima Publishing. (800) 632-8676. Anyone interested in receiving guidelines or information on the authors can call Empowering People at (800)456-7770.

Parents'Coalition Mission  
To support and inspire parents of adolescents through education and communication in order to promote the health and safety of our youth.

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Representatives are selected by the parent associations of their schools. If your school is not listed and you have comments or questions, please call Roger Torkelson at (415) 664-6641. Readers are encouraged to submit letters to the editor, ideas for articles or articles themselves. Call (415) 731-7217 for more information.

# What They're Saying...

## ... About Tobacco:

"Each cigarette . . . contains more than 4,700 chemical compounds; 43 of those are known to cause cancer and another 401 are poisons."

— *Petaluma Argus-Courier*, Nov. 21, 1995.

"Although smokers claim that smoking relaxes them, nicotine actually causes palpitations and a generalized feeling of anxiety."

— Dr. James Balch

"Of the 3,000 children who smoke their first cigarette, 23 will be murdered, 30 will die in traffic accidents and nearly 750 will be killed by smoking-related diseases."

— Smoke-Free Class of 2000, August 1994

## ... About Drugs and Alcohol:

"There is a strong association between smoking and alcohol, as well as smoking and drug abuse in general, and certain mental health problems, such as depression."

— *The New York Times*, Feb. 22, 1996

"We're throwing our kids into a sea of drugs without teaching them how to swim."

— Joseph Califano, Director, Columbia University Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse

## ... About Addiction:

"Fine-grained studies of brain cells reveal that repeatedly dosing the brain with addictive drugs (including nicotine) is akin to a chemical assault that alters the very structure of the neurons in the circuitry for pleasure. These changes starve brain cells of dopamine, triggering the craving for the addictive drugs that will once again swamp the brain with it . . . Once these cellular changes occur . . . addicts will take a drug just to feel right, not for a high."

— Daniel Goleman, *The New York Times*, Aug. 13, 1996

"After 15 years of recreational marijuana use, I find myself in the uncomfortable position of declaring that, overall, pot has been a negative influence in my life. My short-term memory is *very* short term. Learning anything can be a true chore, and my apathy grows steadily. Do I regret having started? Yes, I do. But is it the government's place to tell us what we can and cannot do to ourselves? Absolutely not."

— Letter to the Editor, *Time* magazine, Dec. 30, 1996.

## ... About Relationships:

"Kids really want to learn about important things in life from their parents."

— Paula Hekimian, director of drug and alcohol programs for San Mateo County

"Humans of all ages have an infinite capacity to do what is best for themselves when given the freedom of choice, the safety of choice, and the faith to learn from their own mistakes."

— Jane Nelson and Lynn Lott, *Positive Discipline for Teenagers: Resolving Conflict with Your Teenage Son or Daughter*



# Marijuana: Just the Facts

**M**arijuana has become the vogue. Use among teenagers is on the rise: according to a study cited in the *San Francisco Chronicle* last August, 43 percent of high school juniors said they had smoked marijuana in the past six months, compared with 29.4 percent in 1992.

It's easier for teens to buy marijuana than cigarettes — and young people's perception of marijuana and beer often is that they are non-problematic. Part of the reason for this, according to Darryl Inaba, Pharm. D., director of the Haight Ashbury Drug Detoxification, Rehabilitation and Aftercare Program, is that funding for national prevention programs has declined. In addition, today's teens' parents did their own share of pot-smoking. Here is some information on this drug:

## The Basics

- Today's marijuana contains from 8 percent to as much as 24 percent THC, the main psychoactive ingredient, compared to 2 percent in the 1960s and early '70s, when the leading studies were made on its effects. One joint of the 1990's can equal 14 1/2 joints of the '60s. A group of kids today sharing just one joint can "get really plastered," *The New York Times* reported in November.

- A single joint contains the same amount of tar and other noxious substances as approximately 14 to 16 filtered cigarettes.

- The marijuana plant actually contains more than 400 separate known chemicals, 60 percent of which are related to THC. When smoked, a joint produces more than 2,000 identifiable substances, some known to cause cancer in animals. (Most other drugs of abuse, including alcohol, involve single chemicals.)

- Marijuana smoke contains more cancer-causing agents than tobacco and is almost four times more deadly than cigarette smoking, cigarette for cigarette. Studies show smoking five joints a week may be equal to smoking a pack of cigarettes daily.

- Pot is a street drug and therefore inconsistent in its content and subject to contamination. Unlike cigarettes, no

filters are used. (A 1989 study reported some marijuana contains residues of insecticides.)

- It takes 30 days for all the cannabinoids in just one joint to clear from the body. In regular users, it can take from three to six months.

## The Effects

### Mental Effects

- Short-term memory is impaired for at least six weeks after discontinuing marijuana use. Abstract thinking suffers the most. Poorer students who cram and those with learning disabilities are at particular risk.

- For motor skills such as driving, reaction time is reduced by 41 percent after smoking just one joint and by 63 percent after smoking two. The effects can last for eight hours after smoking.

- In a Stanford University study, the ability of airplane pilots to land on the center of a runway a full day after smoking one marijuana joint was dramatically impaired, even though the pilots looked fine and thought they were performing well.

- Marijuana greatly impairs an individual's ability to follow a moving object with his eyes. Users also report a trailing phenomenon in which vision is distorted, resulting in seeing things in frames or as if under a strobe light.

- A study of teenagers who smoked pot at least six times a month found them more than twice as likely to be involved in accidents than those who did not smoke marijuana.

### Physical Effects

- The destructive consequences to the lungs and bronchial tissue (including ulcers, cancer and emphysema) should be of special concern to pre-teens and adolescents, because their young lungs are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the drug.

- Smoking pot causes a temporary disruption in the delivery of the male hormone testosterone and slightly decreased organ size in males.

- Heavy use lowers sperm count, decreases the level of sex hormones and decreases sex drive and fertility.

- Marijuana increases the heart rate by as much as 50 percent and suppresses the immune system. Long-term use can damage the immune system and affect the genetic structure of new cells.

### Emotional Effects

- Marijuana's increasing potency and frequent association with other mood-altering drugs (predominantly alcohol) numb feelings, thus preventing teens who use it from maturing emotionally and socially. They tend to have difficulty facing challenges, postponing gratification and experiencing the joy of personal achievements.

- After smoking a joint, the body's endorphins (hormones that enable us to deal with stress) decrease to a level lower than before smoking. That means that if you're depressed beforehand, you'll feel even worse after the high ends.

*Marijuana numbs feelings, preventing teens who use it from maturing emotionally and socially.*



- A subtle build-up in the body of the chemicals in marijuana may cause permanent personality and behavioral changes.

- The latest scientific research has shown marijuana to be addictive, with definite withdrawal symptoms. Unlike other drugs, however, these are delayed for three to six weeks after a person quits using. Further, even users who aren't physically addicted might not be fully aware of the drug's effects on their behavior until up to three months after they quit, when the drug has finally left their systems.

## Signs of Use

- Physical symptoms can include an irritating cough, chronic sore throat, changing sleep patterns or constant tiredness, need for munchies, red eyes, neglect of personal appearance.

- Emotional signs can be a strong overreaction to mild criticism, a reduced sensitivity to the feelings of friends and family, apathy, low tolerance for frustration, irritability and hostility, sudden mood shifts, depression, escapism and withdrawal from family, often due to guilt.

- Mental indications can include an impaired ability to communicate clearly, reduced attention span, significant drop in quality of schoolwork, loss of ability to focus attention and harness energy, secretiveness about money, vagueness or lying. Some people can experience a paranoid psychotic reaction to today's strong marijuana.

- Urine testing for marijuana can have erratic results. Although heavy, daily use can sometimes be detected up to several months after the user quits, a weekend user often escapes detection. \*

*The main sources for this fact sheet were an interview with Dr. Darryl Inaba, and his book, Uppers, Downers, All Arounders. For a list of additional sources of information, or for an information packet on teens and substance abuse (including an audiotape by Dr. Inaba and Bob Boltuch, LCSW at Kaiser Hospital in San Francisco), call 731-7217.*