

Wouldn't you rather I drink than take drugs?

I would rather you did not use any drug, including alcohol. Alcohol is a drug. Drinking can lead to serious problems, especially at this time in your life. If you choose to drink when you are older, I hope you will do so responsibly.

What's the big deal! I only drink beer.

Some people think that beer is not as harmful as other forms of alcohol. But one beer has the same amount of alcohol in it as a drink of liquor or a glass of wine. It's the amount you drink that affects you. You can definitely get drunk on beer.

What's the difference if I start to drink now or I wait until I'm 19 - it's only a few years difference?

The younger you start, the more inexperienced you are in handling the kinds of problems which often come up when kids get together and there is drinking. Situations you hadn't planned for can easily get out of hand. During these times, you need to rely on your own good sense to take care of yourself and maybe even others. If you're drinking, you just can't think through problems the way you can when you are sober.

I only drink on weekends so what's the problem?

Many people think that they won't have problems with alcohol because they only drink on weekends. But many young people who limit their drinking to the weekend tend to "binge" or drink a lot at that time. There are a lot of problems associated with binge drinking, such as alcohol poisoning, fights, damage to property and regrets about sex. I just need to watch the news or read the paper and I see the serious incidents that occur when teens get together and drink. The number of drivers and passengers killed or seriously injured by drinking drivers on weekends is also very upsetting. I don't want these problems to happen to you. I care about you and I want you to be safe.

You smoke, so how can you tell me not to use drugs?

I don't want to smoke, but I made the mistake of trying cigarettes when I was young. I now realize that tobacco is one of the most addictive drugs and can affect my health. The easiest way to quit is not to start.

Everyone uses marijuana. I don't see why I can't use it too.

Actually that's not true. Most young people or adults do not use marijuana or other illegal drugs. In fact, many teens who try marijuana out of curiosity find that they don't like the effects and don't continue using it. Today's stronger forms of marijuana can cause unpleasant sensations. If most of the young people you know use marijuana, you may need to learn what it is like to make a decision that is different from your friends. Your friends should respect your decision. And you may be surprised that one or two others might follow your example.

You drink, so what's the difference if I use marijuana?

As an adult I have chosen to drink in a way that is safe and responsible for me and the people I care about. I don't feel you can use marijuana in a way that is absolutely safe and healthy. Marijuana affects short-term memory, judgment, co-ordination and driving skills. Recent studies have shown a connection between regular marijuana use and mental health problems and impact on IQ – especially for those who smoke a lot of marijuana during their teen years. Because it is a street drug, you can't be sure exactly what is contained in a joint or how powerful the drug might be.

Marijuana is a natural substance so it can't be that harmful.

Marijuana, like many drugs, does originally come from plants growing in nature. But we know that plants can be dangerous; some can be so poisonous they are deadly. Most drugs which come from plants are changed by a chemical process in some way (like cocaine or heroin). The marijuana you get today has been carefully grown in grow operations using specific techniques to produce exactly what the grower wants and to make the biggest profit for the grower. Not much is left to chance! Growers use pesticides and other chemicals to encourage plant growth and prevent insects and diseases which will damage their crops, and these can be harmful to the user.

Doctors give marijuana to people who are sick, so that proves that it's not unhealthy.

It's true that some people who are seriously ill, for example with AIDs or multiple sclerosis or those who are undergoing cancer treatment find that using marijuana helps their symptoms. The majority of doctors recommend other medicines to control these symptoms because they are concerned about the health risks associated with smoking marijuana. Many drugs, whether originally from a plant or produced only in labs, can have some positive helpful benefits in the right situations. But that does not mean these drugs are meant to be used for personal recreation.

I just use marijuana sometimes on weekends with my friends. You know I won't have problems. Why are you worried?

I have a number of concerns about your marijuana use, even if it is occasional. Each time you use marijuana, it is unpredictable. And many young people don't worry about driving a car after using marijuana even though it affects their ability to judge distances and slows reaction time. So I worry that you will drive or ride with someone who is impaired. My other concern is that it's easy for a teen to begin to use more often and in more situations. And that's when it can begin to interfere with your school work and relationships. But by that time it's hard to recognize that these problems are linked to your use of *marijuana*. And at that point it will be much harder for you to stop.

I got the prescription drugs from our own medicine cabinet. What's the harm in trying them once or twice?

These drugs were prescribed for me when I had to deal with a great deal of pain. They can be extremely dangerous when they are used by someone else or even if I were to use them in another situation. They can even be life-threatening if they are used in combination with alcohol or another drug. It is my responsibility to dispose of them safely so they are not around for you or anyone else.

You've never worried about my drinking ice coffees before. What's the big deal now about energy drinks?

I know you have always limited your ice coffee drinking so I don't think they have done you any harm. My concern about energy drinks is that it's easy for you to drink a lot of caffeine and other ingredients that can also act as stimulants. The amount of caffeine you take in can easily add up to much more than is recommended for you at your age.

