

# Keep Your Focus

## CONVERSATION STARTER

The prevalence of cannabinoid use among college students today has increased nationwide. This educational poster addresses the negative effects and consequences these substances can have on a student's academic performance and cognitive abilities.

In this conversation starter, questions to ask and points for facilitators to say are in **bold**. Notes for facilitators are in *italics*.

## INTRODUCTION

*Show the educational poster to the chapter. This can be displayed in a PowerPoint presentation or by showing the physical copy of the poster.*

### **What does cannabinoid mean?**

Cannabinoid is the scientific term for any naturally occurring chemical substance, no matter its form, that has psychoactive properties found in or made from Cannabis plants. Cannabinoids have three primary uses: recreational, medicinal or synthetic. Cannabis – also known as marijuana – is the most common cannabinoid. Cannabis has depressant, stimulant and hallucinogen effects based on its varying potency levels, strands and forms of consumption.

## FACTS AND STATISTICS

Research has shown that marijuana and cannabis use on college campuses is trending upward, reaching higher levels than in previous decades. According to the University of Michigan's 2020 national drug survey:

- 43-44% of students reported using some form of cannabis within the past year.
- 25% of students indicated using cannabis in the past month.
- 7.9% students shared that they used marijuana or cannabis daily.

It is important to also note that the survey found more than 50% of college students reported that they did not use marijuana or cannabis related products in the past year, signifying that it is more common for college student to not use these substances.

### **What do you think about these statistics?**

*Allow responses from participants.*

## CHAPTER DISCUSSION

*Review these discussion questions with the chapter.*

### **Why is marijuana and cannabis prevalent on college campuses?**

Some college students report using these substances as a coping mechanism to relieve their anxiety, depression and stress. Others stated that they use cannabis and marijuana to assist with their sleep patterns, alter their mood, relax or avoid boredom. However, these could be early warning signs of addiction to the substance – also known as cannabis use disorder.

The legalization of cannabis and marijuana in parts of United States has also made the drugs more accessible in recent years as state laws have evolved. At present, 18 states and the District of Columbia have legalized the recreational use of marijuana for adults over the age of 21. Additionally, 38 states, as well as the District of Columbia, have legalized marijuana use for medical purposes. Although legal access to cannabis and marijuana has increased, college and universities are held to federal law. As a result, cannabinoids are still considered illegal substances and prohibited on campuses regardless of state laws.

### **How can cannabis and marijuana negatively impact your GPA?**

Studies have demonstrated that college students who frequently use cannabis or marijuana are more likely to have issues with their attention span and concentration levels as well as their short-term and long-term memory. These findings also indicate other academic achievement risks for marijuana or cannabis users in comparison to those who did not use substances, such as:

- Lower grades
- Lack of motivation
- Greater likelihood of skipping class and dropping out before graduation
- Increased chances of experiencing delays in graduation
- Impaired cognitive thinking and performance up to 24 hours after abstaining from cannabis or marijuana use
- Reduced ability to register, retain and process information
- Decreased problem-solving abilities

The quantity, type and potency of the drug used is a major factor in the types of adverse outcomes a student may experience. With decreased use of marijuana and cannabis, a student can improve their academic performance and reduce negative scholastic effects.

## What are other physical and psychological effects of cannabis and marijuana use?

Prolonged use of these substances or high potency usage of the drugs is associated with a higher risk of experiencing:

- Mental health challenges (hallucinations, paranoia, depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, etc.)
- Long-term breathing issues
- Chronic headaches
- Increased heart rate
- Motor and judgement coordination deficits

## How can we promote safe, legal and healthy behavioral choices within our chapter and community?

- Partner with health and wellness centers, campus counseling centers, or alcohol and drug education centers
- Facilitate evidence-based drug awareness and prevention programming
- Host health and safety speakers or guest lectures
- Coordinate academic workshops and tutoring services
- Organize self-care and stress management initiatives (exercise, meditation, etc.)

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- **What is one potential risk of marijuana or cannabis use you learned about from our discussion?**
- **What is one thing you do to be successful academically that others may also benefit from trying?**

## SOURCES

- [Cannabinoids](#) from the Alcohol and Drug Foundation
- [Daily marijuana use among US college students reaches new 40-year high](#) from the University of Michigan
- [Heavy Marijuana Use Affects Learning and Social Skills](#) from VeryWell Mind
- [How does smoking marijuana affect academic performance? Two researchers explain how it can alter more than just moods](#) from the Conversation

