

**How to talk to teenagers about marijuana and other drugs in a way they can hear**

Presented by Betsy Byler, MA., LPC-SAS, ICS, LPCC

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**Learning Objectives**

- Learn suggested 'do's and 'don't's when discussing drugs and alcohol issues with teenagers.
- Gain a basic outline of presenting facts to teenagers.
- Walk through the outline above with marijuana including accurate facts so that you can take this information and use it immediately.



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**Don't**

These are the things to make sure you don't do when talking to teenagers

- Lie to them
- Overstate facts
- Use scare tactics
- Pull out single case examples or worst-case scenarios
- Treat them like they don't know what they are talking about
- Act like using drugs isn't ever fun

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**Do**

These are the things to make sure you do when talking to teenagers about substance use

- Tell them you want to have an honest conversation about drugs and alcohol
- Establish that they are willing to have a conversation, rather than argue a point
- Take note of something that you don't know the answer to, and follow up after you find the answer
- Tell them you won't be reporting their comments to any authorities

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**Do**

Here are more things to make sure you do when talking to teenagers about substance use

- Tell them you want to hear their opinions too, and be willing to listen
- Listen to the content of what they are saying (is it about freedom, taking risks, wanting to numb out?)
- Tell them you will give them only fact-checked information
- Acknowledge that THC isn't the worst thing in the world
- Acknowledge positive attributes of the substance
- Tell them if the research is unclear

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## Conversation Structure

<b>WHAT IS IT?</b>	<b>WHAT ARE THE COMMON CLAIMS</b>	<b>FACT CHECK THE COMMON CLAIMS</b>
Explain what the drug is (plant vs. synthetic), how it's made and how it's sold	List the common claims made about the drug in question	Go through the common claims one-by-one, and refute or confirm their accuracy

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## Conversation Structure



**STAGES OF USE**  
Explain what the stages of use are and what they mean. Help them determine their current stage.



**RISK ASSESSMENT**  
 High  
 Medium  
 Low



**SHOULD IT BE LEGAL**  
Tell them when you would support legalization, if you would, and why.

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**Summary**

Sum up the main points that you want them to remember. Choose one or two because this is what you want them to recall when you bring it up again.





**Above all...**

Be yourself. They will see a fake person a mile away. Use facts only. They will learn to trust your word, which is the most important thing.

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### Marijuana-What it is

Marijuana is a naturally-occurring plant. It can grow without interference from humans. It is a hearty plant that can grow up to 18ft tall and can even be found popping up along roads (called 'ditch weed').

The plant is dried for several days to weeks. It is then cured. This is when the stems are cut off and the individual buds are placed into sealable containers. This process can take days to weeks depending on who you ask.

There are three main strains of cannabis: Indica, Sativa and Hybrids. Indica is most often distributed for "medical" purposes due to the qualities of the high it produces. The most common, Sativa, is generally used recreationally because of its more intense effects. Hybrids are numerous as growers experiment with breeding new strains.



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### Marijuana

There are substances known as 'fake marijuana' that are synthetic (man-made) and contain numerous chemicals. Most marijuana users say that the high from synthetic marijuana is nothing like the high from the plant (and they often don't like the synthetic version). Synthetics are typically called 'spice' or 'K2.'

The actual plant is typically used in four main ways. It is smoked in its plant form, smoked in its wax form, smoked in its oil form, or eaten in some form of food-type substance.

The most common way to use marijuana continues to be smoking it in the plant form. Typically these are called 'blunts' which is marijuana rolled in cigar wrappers. There are some people who still smoke 'joints' (rolled with paper and more like a filterless cigarette) or 'bombs' (a typically metal or glass bowl-shaped pipe used to hold the plant while its being lit).

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### Marijuana

In the last decade or so, the rise of 'wax' or 'dabs' has given people another way to use THC. Wax is created by taking a butane torch to a tube packed with the plant and the wax is extracted. Butane Hash Oil (BHO) is a highly concentrated form of THC. Estimates are from 60-90% THC. Over 10% is considered a high percentage of THC.

A person can make their own wax or they can get it from a dealer. So instead of buying the plant you get wax from the dealer, cutting out the need to do the work yourself. The high is far more intense, and typically used by people who have built a high tolerance for THC.

The wax is lit and smoked using a variety of devices. One of the reported benefits of having THC in this form is that it is easier to conceal than having plant material on your person.

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### Marijuana

The rise of edibles has changed the way people use marijuana. Edibles used to be generally just brownies or baked into things at home (with a very low THC concentration). However, now you can buy THC anything if you know where to look. Gummibears, lollipops, chocolate...you name it. You can find a way to eat THC.

You can buy THC and make edibles at home, or you can buy them from dispensaries or others who make them.

The issue with edibles is that there isn't consistent regulation on them, so that the level of THC in a given piece of candy isn't known. THC poisoning is a thing now. Emergency departments all over the country see THC poisoning daily.

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### Marijuana

Vaping is the most recent form of THC use. It's just like nicotine vaping, but instead, the active chemical is THC. Many people who use this method for THC believe it is "safer" or "healthier" than smoking the plant itself. There isn't evidence to support this or refute it. We just don't have enough information yet about vaping.

One of the main reasons people choose vaping as their method of choice is that its use is easier to conceal, than smoking something that has a strong odor.

Another reason is that the high is much stronger than smoking the flower itself. Some users have cautioned that you can get 'too high' and to be mindful of dosage.



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### A word about THC

There are two main players in the cannabis plant, THC and CBD. THC is the chemical in the cannabis plant that is responsible for the high that people seek. THC is extracted from the plant for use in edibles, THC oil, wax etc. CBD does not contain THC (or it generally doesn't) and is being sold as a supplement for a number of different medical issues. Research is scant on CBD and generally, people are relying on personal testimonies.

THC concentration is the key. In the 1960's, THC concentration in marijuana is estimated at 3-4%. Remember that anything over 10% is considered to be a high level by health experts. Wax and THC oil can have upwards of 60-90% THC concentration.



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### Common Claim

**It's from the earth!**  
(insinuation is that because it's from the earth it's safe)

VERDICT	CAVEAT	EXAMPLE	EXAMPLE
Yes, it is from the earth.	That doesn't mean it's safe. Lots of things from the earth aren't safe.	Arsenic is a mineral from the earth. It is extremely lethal to humans over time.	Strychnine trees are the primary natural source of strychnine, which is lethal to humans and animals alike.

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### Common Claim

**It's good for you!**  
(Insinuation that it cures or helps various medical ailments from diabetes to cancer to seizures)

<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">VERDICT</p> <p>Mixed. There are some known uses, but many of the claims are unfounded or based on a single questionable study.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">FACT</p> <p>THC can be useful for reducing nausea and increasing appetite. Medications are available for these reasons. Does not need to be smoked to get these effects.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">SOME EVIDENCE OF BENEFIT</p> <p>There is some evidence to suggest CBD could help inflammation, decrease pain and muscle control problems.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">EARLY AND INCONCLUSIVE</p> <p>Some cancer research with rodents has suggested it might help slow growth of cancer cells. Research is still in early clinical trials.</p>
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### Common Claim

**It's good for you!**  
(Insinuation that it cures or helps various medical ailments from diabetes to cancer to seizures)

<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">SPECIFICALLY</p> <p>CBD-based medication helps with two forms of severe childhood epilepsy. Use of THC can lower seizure threshold in others.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">IN THE UK</p> <p>A mouth spray medication containing CBD and THC is used in the UK to treat muscle control problems caused by MS.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">REGARDING PSYCHOSIS</p> <p>Research suggests a link between a specific genetic marker (AKT1) and developing psychosis. THC can push psychosis forward.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">GOOD OR BAD FOR INSULIN</p> <p>The research is unclear. Some research looked positive while others found complicating factors suggesting it's not beneficial.</p>
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### Common Claim

~~(It's not as dangerous as alcohol or it's going to be legalized anyway)~~

<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">VERDICT</p> <p>If the definition of dangerous is level of lethality, then yes, that is true.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">CAVEAT</p> <p>Other drugs aren't as lethal as alcohol such as LSD or shrooms. That doesn't make them a good idea to use.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">LEGALITY ISN'T THE ISSUE</p> <p>Whether something is legal or not doesn't change what the effects of it are. The law doesn't always choose what is safe.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">ALCOHOL IS DANGEROUS</p> <p>This is absolutely true and worth reinforcing. The use of alcohol, driving while intoxicated, and withdrawal can all cause death.</p>
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### Common Claim

**It's not addictive**

(insinuation is that addictive things are bad and non-addictive things are harmless)

VERDICT	ADDICTION	WITHDRAWAL	IT STOPS WORKING
<p>Yes, it is addictive. Physically and psychologically. The withdrawal just isn't as bad compared to other drugs.</p>	<p>Addiction, in this case, is your body requiring a substance. Just like coffee and nicotine are addictive, the body goes through withdrawal without it.</p>	<p>Initial withdrawal is about 3-4 days of headaches, irritability, and sometimes vivid dreams. After that its about a month to really feel "clear."</p>	<p>Marijuana use builds tolerance. Once a person is using 4+ times a day, they aren't getting high. They use in order to feel normal.</p>

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### Common Claim

**I'm a better driver when I'm high**

(insinuation is that marijuana helps you focus so you pay more attention to driving)

VERDICT	DEPRESSANT	PSYCHEDELIC	DEPTH PERCEPTION
<p>No, it doesn't make people better drivers.</p>	<p>THC is part depressant. Depressants slow the central nervous system. That slows our reactions times. Having a high tolerance doesn't change this.</p>	<p>THC is part psychedelic, altering our view of space and time. This impacts a user no matter what their tolerance level is or their experience with the effects.</p>	<p>One of the ways marijuana impacts the user is altering their depth perception which is a greatly needed skill in driving.</p>

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### Common Claim

**I'm more productive**

(insinuation is that marijuana helps you focus so you can do more things)

VERDICT	SUBCULTURE	HYPERFOCUS	PERCEPTION
<p>Seems unlikely, but could be true depending on the person.</p>	<p>Stoner sub-culture is a thing for a reason. The idea that a chronic pot smoker is unmotivated, unproductive and eats too much are common references in pop culture.</p>	<p>Users often describe feeling hyper-focused on things to the exclusion of other stimuli. It is possible, but not likely, that improved productivity is a side effect.</p>	<p>Because marijuana impacts how a person views space and time, their perception of events may not always be accurate.</p>

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## Common Claim

**It can't kill you**  
(insinuation is that you can use marijuana without negative effects)

<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">VERDICT</p> <p>It's not likely, but possible. Used to be the commonly held belief that it couldn't kill you. THC poisoning is changing that.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">POISONING</p> <p>THC poisoning can be severe, requiring hospitalization and treatment for psychosis, severe vomiting, paranoia, panic attacks, and increased heart rate.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">SIGNS POINT TOWARD YES</p> <p>Because people use more than one drug, it is difficult to tell which is the cause of death. The reports of THC poisoning are increasing and severe cases are on the rise.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">ONLY ONE CONSIDERATION?</p> <p>Is death the only benchmark for if something is a good idea? There are other risks THC poses. Best not to dwell here too long.</p>
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## Common Claim

**I've seen all this stuff on the internet**  
(insinuation is that marijuana is good)

<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">VERDICT</p> <p>Most of that information is biased. The truth is harder to find. Even the anti-marijuana crowd gets information wrong.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">NORMALIZE</p> <p>Tactics used in the 50's about smoking cigarettes are being used today. Smoking was portrayed as a normal way of life. Everyone does it.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">MINIMIZE</p> <p>Tactics are used to make caution seem absurd. The uptight people are scared of everything. They don't want you to have fun.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">MAKE IT HEALTHY</p> <p>Medical benefits are listed all over the internet with little backing, if any at all. If it's good for a medical problem then it's good overall.</p>
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### A word about Big Marijuana

From the 1920s through 1950s we saw the tobacco industry successfully promote cigarettes to the point that even Santa promoted smoking. The tactics they used were to deny addiction potential, downplay adverse health effects, create as large a market as possible, and protect it through lobbying, campaign contributions, and other advocacy efforts. This should sound really familiar.

According to several sources the marijuana industry is worth billions of dollars. Projected to hit \$73 billion by 2027. There are tons of jobs in the new industry outranking several major employment categories such as coal workers. This industry is huge and getting bigger. This is not because it's a wonder drug and these are merely good-hearted benefactors wanting to free the population from diseases. This is about money. And people need to know who is funding the information they find.



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## Common Claim

**It's fun**  
(Insinuation is that they use to feel good)

<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: small;">VERDICT</p> <p>Yep, in the beginning it is fun for most people. Don't deny this, it'll just weaken your argument.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: small;">NORMALIZE</p> <p>It's part of the human experience to try to alter our consciousness. Substance use is found in every culture and people throughout history.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: small;">FUN ISN'T THE PROBLEM</p> <p>Having fun and getting high isn't the problem. No one is saying that smoking weed a few times is going to wreck you. It's when it goes farther.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: small;">WHEN IT STOPS BEING FUN</p> <p>When people are using daily, multiple times a day, it's not about fun anymore. It's a chore, at the very least. It becomes all-consuming.</p>
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## What we know

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Fact-checked uses for THC and CBD:

- Useful for treating nausea from chemotherapy and increasing appetite for conditions like wasting syndrome
- CBD is the component in a seizure medication for two severe types of juvenile seizure disorders
- CBD/THC combo is being used in the UK to help with muscle problems related to MS

Research is ongoing for:

- Cancer research is in the early stages to see if THC/CBD can help slow the growth of cancer cells (either by itself or in conjunction with other traditional therapies)
- Research is being conducted to determine if THC/CBD can influence insulin production and insulin resistance.
- CBD research is being done (and has been for a while) to study the impact on chronic pain and inflammation. The research seems promising.

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## What we don't know

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Long-term health impacts

- We don't know what the long-term impact of smoking marijuana in various forms will have on health. We can guess based on smoking tobacco or other irritants that impact the lungs, but we don't have actual research yet.
- We don't know what the long-term impact of high concentrations of THC have on functioning and memory. THC levels have been rising rapidly in recent years which makes current research outdated.
- We don't know what the impact will be on developing brains (research is happening on this in some longitudinal studies) and at what point the impact on the brain becomes potentially less damaging

Addiction impact

- The impact of marijuana use on future substance abuse (the gateway argument) is unknown. Research is very limited. This has to be paid for and the lobby for big marijuana will want to stop this kind of research.
- There are suggestions that THC helps opioid addiction. The research doesn't support this, but the push to find a solution to opiate addiction puts this on the map.

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## Stages of Use

Progression is a guarantee

No Use	Experimentation	Misuse	Abuse	Dependence
The age a person is when they aren't using at all.	Trying a substance a few times with the purpose of experiencing it. No real intention of continuing use.	Seeking out opportunities to use a substance with the purpose of getting high or intoxicated. Not a daily focus.	Use of a substance multiple times a week with the intention of getting the effect (high or drunk) to the same or greater experience as previous usage.	Reliance on a substance to produce the desired effect and typically to stave off withdrawal from the substance. Struggle to go many days without it.

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## Case Examples

STAGES OF USE IN ACTION

<p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">Marc - 16 year old male Many of his relatives used marijuana and this was seen as pretty normal. Marc first tried marijuana at age 10. He didn't really like it and didn't try it again until he was 12. After that he used on occasion, but it wasn't something he really tried to find. His 13th birthday is when he got drunk for the first time. He decided he liked smoking marijuana better and started using a few times a week. At 14 he was smoking THC (vape pen) a couple of times a day, every day.</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">Adrienne - 15 year old female Adrienne first tried a sip of alcohol from a relative's beer when she was 8. She didn't have any alcohol until she turned 15. She first tried marijuana on the same day as the first drink of alcohol. For the first few weeks afterwards she drank and smoked a few times. Within the next two months she was buying her own stash, smoking alone and using multiple times a week. She doesn't drink as often as she uses marijuana, but has a decent tolerance for alcohol anyway.</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">Cory - 14 year old trans-male Cory's older brother had him try marijuana at age 10. Cory didn't use it again until he was age 13. He used two times during that year and recently began using marijuana again. He estimates he's used 3 times in the last month. Cory has not tried alcohol stating that his dad was an alcoholic and so he won't drink, ever. Cory admitted that he has used pills (stimulants) on three occasions in the last two months. The first time he used pills was about 5 months ago.</p>
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## Case Examples

	No use	Experimentation	Misuse	Abuse	Dependence
Marc	9	10	13	13	14
Adrienne	14	15	15	15	?
Cory	9	10	13	?	?
Ben	11	12	15	15	19

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## What is normal?

- 1 Ask the student "What is a normal amount of drinking?" They typically will say they don't know. They actually do have an opinion; they just haven't thought about it.
- 2 Ask the student to think of someone they know that they think drinks too much. Ask them to describe the person's drinking to you.
- 3 So how many times in a week/month is too much? How many drinks per sitting is too much? Help them clarify this.
- 4 Then ask the student "What is a normal amount of marijuana use?" When is it too much? Is daily too much? Going to school/high? Using alone?

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## Conversation Structure Recap

- 1 What is the substance, how is it used, and how is it obtained.
- 2 What are the common claims about the substance?
- 3 Fact-check each common claim.
- 4 Go through the stages of use.
- 5 Talk about progression and their current stage.
- 6 Closing thoughts and key points reiterated here.

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## To support or not to support...

Legalization of marijuana is here to stay. There is so much money behind the legalization movement that our prevention efforts aren't going to stop it. Teenagers and young adults care about this issue. And because of that, we need to have a well formulated opinion based on facts and also taking into our account our own beliefs. We also need to distinguish between fact and our opinion.

There are common reasons people use when talking about the need for legalization. Some reasons are more valid than others. However, there is a ton of conflicting information. Each of you doing prevention work needs to know the issues and be able to speak about if and when you would support legalization.



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Remember this:

## Earn the right to be heard

Jim Rayburn- Young Life

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## Presenter Information



Betsy is a mental health therapist and substance abuse counselor (since 2003) and recently moved into private practice. She and her family relocated to the Twin Ports in 2008 and now make their home in Solon Springs, Wisconsin.

Betsy is the host of the All Things Substance podcast; the place for therapists to hear about substance abuse from a mental health perspective. You can tune into the podcast on itunes, spotify and on her website [www.betsybyler.com/podcast](http://www.betsybyler.com/podcast)

You can contact her at [betsy@betsybyler.com](mailto:betsy@betsybyler.com)

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## Resources

- 8 incredible facts about the booming US marijuana industry (Business Insider) <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/weed-us-marijuana-industry-facts-2019-8-1028177375#>
- Big Tobacco 2.0 Big Marijuana (Learn About SAM) <https://learnaboutsam.org/the-issues/big-tobacco-2-0-big-marijuana/>
- CDC.gov <https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/index.htm>
- DEA <https://www.dea.gov/drug-information>
- HHS.gov <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/substance-use/marijuana/resources/index.html>
- Hartford Courant <https://www.courant.com/politics/hc-pol-marijuana-five-reasons-20190325-nanzfpncidR7aett5In2ky7q-story.html>
- Marijuana as Medicine DrugFacts (DrugAbuse.gov) <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana-medicine>
- Marijuana Research Report (Drug Abuse.gov) <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/there-link-between-marijuana-use-psychiatric-disorders>
- Marijuana Use Results in Lower Levels of Fasting Insulin (Diabetes In Control) <http://www.diabetesincontrol.com/marijuana-use-results-in-lower-levels-of-fasting-insulin/>
- NAPA [https://www.napa.org/images/uploads/events/Higher\\_Education\\_Cannabis\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://www.napa.org/images/uploads/events/Higher_Education_Cannabis_Toolkit.pdf)
- Prevention Action Alliance <https://preventionactionalliance.org/>
- Prevention Technology Transfer Center (PTTC) Network <https://pttcnetwork.org/>
- ProCon.org <https://marijuana.procon.org/>
- Researching the Potential Medical Benefits and Risks of Marijuana (DrugAbuse.gov) <https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nih/legislative-activities/testimony-to-congress/2016/researching-the-potential-medical-benefits-and-risks-of-marijuana>
- SAMHSA <https://www.samhsa.gov/marijuana>
- Stanford Medicine <https://med.stanford.edu/cannabispreventiontoolkit/resource-directory.html>

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