

INUIT AND CANNABIS USE: STARTING THE CONVERSATION



There are many reasons why Inuit youth may experiment with cannabis, including for social reasons or to cope. Youth may be experimenting with cannabis as a way to socialize with their friends and do something fun. Youth might also feel pressure or might think that everyone around them is using cannabis, so why not try it?

Some youth also use cannabis as a way to cope with stress, to help them sleep or deal with anxiety or depression. Reasons for using cannabis can include any combination of these. There are many social factors affecting Inuit's decision to use cannabis. To learn more about the Risk and Protective factors that can influence Inuit and their relationship with cannabis, please visit LetsTalkAboutUjarak.com

The rate of cannabis use is over two times higher among Canadian youth and young adults than adults. Inuit-specific statistics are limited at this time, however our research suggests that:

- Cannabis use among Indigenous and Inuit youth is likely more common than the rest of Canadians.
- Many Inuit youth begin experimenting with cannabis at a relatively young age, some as early as 8 or 9 years old.
- It's estimated that 1 in 6 teens who consume cannabis will develop a cannabis use disorder.

*There's More To This Than
Cannabis*

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The younger a person is when they start using cannabis, the more risks there are for their health and safety. Inuit youth may use cannabis to:

- Experiment or out of curiosity
- Relax or have fun
- Connect with friends or peers
- Deal with stress, anxiety or to cope
- Help with sleep
- Modelling adults around them



This is why it is important to talk to youth about cannabis use early in life, with age appropriate information.

QUICK FACTS

- Cannabis, often called weed, bud, ujarak, milutsi/miluksi, surrarnaqtuq, aangajaarnaqtuq, sigaaqtuk, or sikarelukak is a substance that affects the mind, body and mood of each user differently.
- It is thought that cannabis can have more and lasting impacts on brains that are still developing, like those of children and youth.

HOW DO YOU TALK ABOUT CANNABIS WITH YOUTH?

Peer-driven and family-centred interventions are some of the ways to respectfully engage youth around substance use.

When discussing cannabis use, parents or guardians need to be open and non-judgmental. This means listening to and valuing the youth's experiences and fostering open conversation. Let Inuit Values guide your discussion, like decision making through discussion and consensus, and being open, welcoming and inclusive, to foster positive relationships. Although it might be tempting to take a fear-based approach, research has proven that it does not work with youth. Any discussions about cannabis will benefit from being open, unbiased and based on information that has been proven by science.

Starting a conversation about cannabis with youth might be difficult for some parents or guardians. In addition to the "[Understanding Inuit and Cannabis](#)" resource, here are some things to consider before you start the conversation:

- 1. What do you hope to get out of this conversation? What are you willing to discuss and what would you rather avoid?**
- 2. Will this conversation be about the "facts" around cannabis use, or are you interested in their personal experiences and use?**
- 3. Stick to facts where you can and avoid judgment as this may close the door to honest conversation.**
- 4. Remember to listen and keep the conversation balanced.**

5. Rather than focusing on the negatives, focus on positive choices, such as not driving while high.

ie. "Can you tell me about some times you feel you made good decisions around cannabis?"



6. Try to understand reasons for using cannabis and help think of healthy alternatives.

ie. "I'm hearing that you feel overwhelmed, and that smoking weed relaxes you. Can we think of some other activities that can help you relax?"

7. It is important not to get upset at them for being honest – particularly if you ask them to be.

ie. "Are you okay with me asking you this? Do you mind if I share a story?"

8. If they are using cannabis already, include a conversation around harm reduction to help them reflect on how serious the impacts of cannabis use would have to be in their life before change is needed.

ie. "I hear you say that your cannabis use isn't a big deal, at what point would it feel like a big deal to you?"

9. Use open-ended questions and allow the youth to speak without interruption.

ie. "Please tell me more about..."



Young people are diverse with different backgrounds and experiences so cannabis education should be specific to the individual.

If you are both comfortable with it, a conversation about why they (or people they know) use cannabis might help you both understand each other better. This may also help you, the adult, guide them to other helpful strategies to promote their wellness and reduce possible harms of cannabis.



- **Speaking about cannabis with young children:**

Just as you would talk to your younger children about the risks of not wearing a helmet, running across the road, talking to strangers, or consuming anything unknown - cannabis can become a part of your general “safety” conversation.

- **Speaking about cannabis with teens:**

Chances are, your teens already have questions about or might have even tried cannabis. Teens should receive balanced messaging about cannabis consumption which helps them to understand facts about use including harm reduction. Consuming cannabis frequently at a young age can put them at a higher risk for developing challenges later in life, but communicating this message may not result in them making a different decision. You can help teens feel supported by being non-judgmental, connecting them with resources, and encouraging healthy alternatives for stress management and recreation they are interested in. Together, you and your teen can learn more about cannabis safety and harm reduction by using reliable sources like the Pauktuutit’s cannabis resource toolkit, and others listed below. Help teens understand that delaying or avoiding cannabis use until they are older will keep their mind and body healthiest. Help teens feel supported and share that there are alternatives to cannabis for managing stress, mental health, sleep and even having fun with friends.

- **Speaking to young adults (19+):**

When discussing cannabis with a young adult, it is important to recognize that they might already have experience with cannabis. It might be useful to start the conversation by asking the question “are you alright with discussing cannabis with me?”. Remind them that every form of cannabis can have potential risks to health or safety. One of the biggest mistakes made with edible cannabis is to accidentally eat too much and then experience a stronger and unintended high. Discuss with them that as an adult, it’s important to make responsible decisions and if they choose to use cannabis the safest approach is to start low and go slow until they know how it affects them. If young adults choose to use cannabis, they should remember it is still illegal to drive a vehicle after using cannabis, because it slows your reaction time. Driving high can be risky to you and your passengers, or get you into trouble with the law.

Manage your own expectations for these conversations. One conversation is a good start, but is likely not enough to instill good habits. The most important thing around cannabis use is safety. So it is better that youth feel they can come to you with questions and not fear getting in trouble.

It is important to accept that some youth will choose to use cannabis regardless of the resources provided. Therefore, including a conversation about the differences between safe and problematic use is necessary.



HARM REDUCTION

Harm reduction is common in Inuit practice and values. It is a practical approach to decreasing the potential negative health, social and economic effects of cannabis use while recognizing that people have different reasons for using cannabis, and that quitting might not be possible or desirable for everyone. It is important to include harm reduction strategies when discussing cannabis use with youth, especially for those who may already be using cannabis. Harm reduction has been shown to be most effective with older youth (16+) and heavy cannabis users.



Harm reduction strategies for youth:

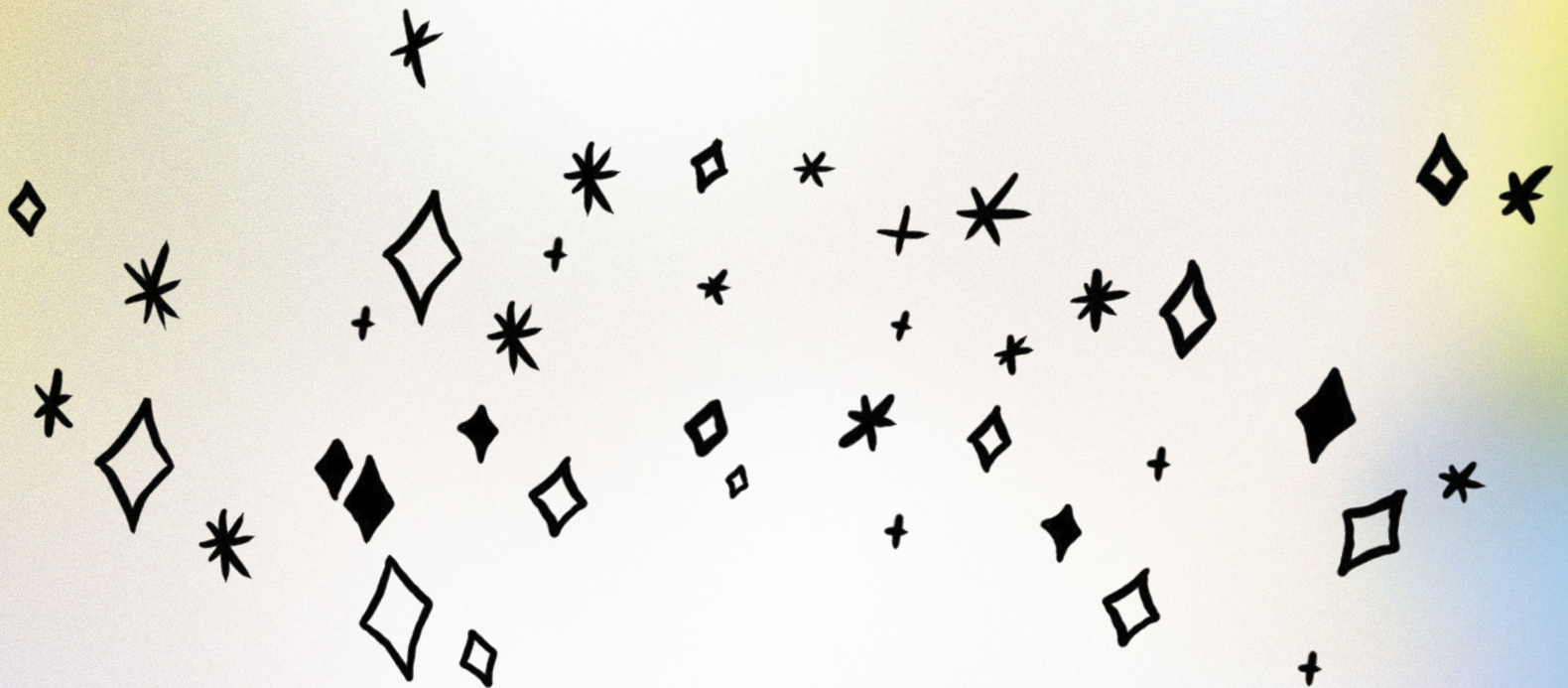
- Space out the time of the week when using cannabis so as not to use daily or near-daily. Try to use it once a week or less.
- Limiting use of weed to weekends can help with focusing in school.
- Try to choose products that have lower amounts of THC (15% or lower). Avoiding high potency THC products can help reduce harms.
- Using products that contain CBD has been shown to counteract some of the psychoactive effects of THC.
- Smoking is the least healthy way of using cannabis. Consider edibles as a less harmful choice, however, remember that some edibles can be very potent and have longer lasting effects than smoking.
- Try to avoid using cannabis with other drugs, including alcohol and tobacco. Mixing cannabis with other drugs can lead to unpleasant and dangerous effects.
- When possible, buy from legal cannabis retailers such as www.nulc.ca (Nunavut), www.ntlcc-cannabis.ca (NWT) www.sqdc.ca (Nunavik), or www.shopcannabisnl.com (Nunatsiavut). This ensures you are getting quality products that are tested for safety.
- Plan for a safe way home or stay at a friend's house if using cannabis. Getting into a vehicle with a high driver risks everybody's safety.
- Ask yourself: Do you feel safe where you are choosing to use cannabis and the people you are with? Choose to use with people you trust and places that are safe.
- Avoid sharing bongs or joints to reduce the risk of sharing germs, tuberculosis and COVID-19 can be spread through saliva that sticks to bongs or joints.
- Sewing, beading or hunting with your family or elders, and learning about your culture are good ways to manage stress, process trauma and pass the time.

When cannabis is used as a coping mechanism for trauma or mental health challenges, often it is related to family or intergenerational trauma, which disrupted culture and severed ties. Reconnecting with culture and rebuilding those ties when possible can therefore help with trauma and mental health.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- drugfreekidscanada.org/prevention/drug-info/cannabis
- getsensible.org/get-toolkit
- ccsa.ca/cannabis
- canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis.html
- sexgendercannabishub.ca
- cannabisknowledgehub.ca
- www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/resources/first-nations-inuit-metis.html



For a list of references please contact
info@pauktuutit.ca

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