

# Marijuana - What's the Big Deal?

*By Ken Ramdhan*

What's the big deal about using marijuana? Well, most teenagers don't think that it is that big of a deal. You don't believe me? Okay, well take a count of the number of people in your age group whom you know have experimented with or are regularly using marijuana. One...two...three. If I try to count I'll need more fingers and toes!

Think about all of the casual remarks you often here your peers making about marijuana and it's usage like "Well if everyone is doing it then what's the big deal?"

or "...weed? Yeah so?" I mean, most of us consider marijuana use to be as normal as saying our prayers before we sleep or when we awake in the morning. Just think back to those times you have passed on the 'block', smelt the weed smoke and thought nothing of it.

Of course, there are a number of us who don't use the drug and have never experimented with it, so the question then is '*Why do some of our peers use?*' Well there are a number of reasons. Some of these reasons are as follows:

œ **Everyone Is Doing It**

I mean, being a teenagers is one of the most confusing, difficult, painful and crucial periods in the cycle of human development so who wants to be different at this stage?

œ **Curiosity**

It's true that adults are telling us that we should not use but aren't we entitled to find out what the big deal is on our own?

œ **Our Role Models Use**

Look at our role models in the entertainment business, they use marijuana and it doesn't seem to affect them negatively, so why shouldn't we use?

œ **To Get High**

What better feeling is there than being high?

œ **Escape**

When we have problems with family members, issues with friends and stress and pressure from teachers and all of their homework, what's the big deal in smoking a 'spliff' to relieve some stress and relax?

It doesn't sound like such a big deal huh? Well it is!

***The Big Deal*** – The big deal with marijuana use stems from the *effects* that it has on the individual. If I was to ask you if you know the effects of marijuana on a person can you answer? Yeah, yeah you may be able to give an answer but let us review the facts just to be safe. A *marijuana cigarette (or spliff)* is made from the dried leaves of a plant called *Cannabis Sativa*. Marijuana contains more than 400 chemicals with the main ingredient being *tetrahydrocannabinol* or *THC*. THC alters the brain's functioning and also affects the heart, lungs and sex organs. While some effects are short term and only occur for a short period of time after we smoke the spliff, some are long term and can result in death.

### ***Short Term Effects Of Marijuana***

- œ Sleepiness & Increased Hunger
- œ Problems with short term memory
- œ Reduced reaction time & ability to perform tasks requiring concentration
- œ Bloodshot eyes, dry mouth and throat
- œ Feelings of relaxation
- œ Paranoia & hallucinations
- œ Impaired thinking, verbal, reading & math skills in young people
- œ Increased heart rate

### ***Long Term Effects Of Marijuana***

- œ Enhanced risk of cancer
- œ Reduced sperm count & testosterone in males
- œ Increased testosterone & chances of infertility in females
- œ Decreased sexual pleasure
- œ Brain cell damage
- œ Increased susceptibility to colds, pneumonia, chronic bronchitis, emphysema and lung cancer
- œ Dependence, causing the user to need more of the drug to achieve the same effect

Well that should be about all for the consequences of marijuana use right? Wrong! We have not even begun to consider the effect that marijuana has on your social life. Legally, a teenagers caught with marijuana in their possession can be charged not only with possession but also with trafficking of the drug. Both of these charges hold serious consequences the most severe being detention in a home for delinquent teens. Then there is the fact that you can be expelled from school. It is true that many of us hate school but how many of us really want to be expelled from school? Think about you future goals and then compare them with the jobs that are available for those persons with no school passes or with a legal record.

The list of consequences can go on and on: your grades begin to drop, your friends may no longer want to hang with you, you begin to have huge arguments with your parents and you may have to live down a nickname like 'Smokey Joe/Jane'. Yet, regardless of all of these consequences, the use of marijuana is an increasing concern for many persons with the most alarming fact being that the majority of users fall within the twelve (12) to twenty five (25) age group. Many of them view marijuana use as no big deal, so it is up to us to show them how big a deal it really is. So, the next time you hear someone ask, "What's the deal about using marijuana?" I hope that you may be able to say, "Well it is a big deal because..." and educate someone a little more about the subject. Always remember that no matter what the situation is, we always have a choice.

For more information, and help for yourself or a friend who is using marijuana or other drugs, you may contact any of the following:

- œ **Families In Action**  
#82 Maraval Road, Port of Spain  
Ph: 628-2333/ 622-6952
  
- œ **Rebirth House**  
Charlotte Street, Port of Spain  
Ph: 623-0952/4050
  
- œ **New Life Ministries**  
St. John Road, Mount St. Benedict  
Ph: 662-1797
  
- œ **HEAL**  
Rienzi Complex, Exchange Village, Couva  
Ph: 679-2616
  
- œ **Rescue Mission**  
113 Tenth Street, Barataria  
Ph: 674-0567/646-4220
  
- œ **Serenity House (*women only*)**  
Guapo Main Road, Point Fortin  
Ph: 648-5454

