

A PARENT & TEACHER GUIDE

The Blunt Truth

What every parent and teacher needs to know about today's marijuana

15,000

Marijuana dispensaries in the U.S.

22%

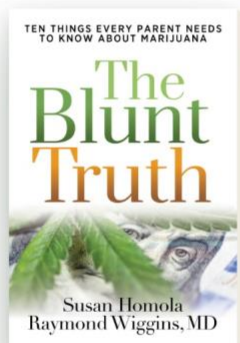
Average potency today, versus 1–2% in 1969

1,375%

Rise in pediatric edible ingestions, 2017–2021

#1

Substance cited by under-20s seeking addiction treatment



BASED ON THE BOOK

The Blunt Truth: Ten Things Every Parent Needs to Know About Marijuana

Susan Homola & Raymond Wiggins, MD

The Blunt Truth

What every parent and teacher needs to know about today's marijuana — the potency, the accessibility, what it does to a developing brain, and how to educate adolescents.

15,000 Marijuana dispensaries in U.S.	22% Average potency of today's marijuana plant versus 1-2% in 1969	1,375% Rise in pediatric edible ingestions from 2017-2021	#1 Substance cited for those under age 20 seeking addiction treatment
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It Is Everywhere Your Children Are

Marijuana is more available today than at any point in U.S. history — even where it remains illegal. According to a 2024 Pew Research Center report, there are approximately **15,000 marijuana dispensaries** in the U.S., and **79% of Americans** live in a county with at least one. There are now more marijuana dispensaries than McDonald's restaurants (13,557) or Dunkin' locations (9,731), and nearly as many as Starbucks (17,149). In 2024, marijuana was a **\$38.5 billion industry** in the U.S. and is projected to grow 11.5% by 2030.

In the Home

About 49.3 million Americans age 26+ use marijuana. Products come as drinks, gummies, chocolate, mints, and baked goods — nearly indistinguishable from the real thing — so more high-potency THC is sitting in more households than ever, often within a child's reach.

In the Community

Hemp-derived THC products are sold not only in dispensaries, but in gas stations and convenience stores. In addition, some online marijuana and intoxicating hemp retailers rely on an honor-system "age gate" — a pop-up *anyone* can click past.

In Schools

A survey by the EdWeek Research Center found **72% of school-based health professionals** report an increase in students using marijuana, with more students arriving impaired and unable to focus.

Today's Marijuana Is Not Yesterday's Weed

At the time of Woodstock in 1969, marijuana's THC potency averaged **1-2%**. Growers quadrupled potency by 1995, then quadrupled it again by 2018. **Marijuana today exponentially more potent than it was in 1969**, averaging around 22% — with some plant strains exceeding 35%. Concentrated marijuana products can contain **up to 99% THC**.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Higher potency is directly linked to more addiction, more anxiety, and more emergency room visits. Compared with low-potency marijuana, high-potency marijuana is **four times more likely** to cause cannabis-related problems and **twice as likely** to cause anxiety. Product labels can't be trusted either. A Johns Hopkins/University of Pennsylvania study found THC amounts on labels were often wildly inaccurate — off by up to 155%.

Marijuana Comes in More Forms Than You Think

"Cannabis sativa" and "cannabis indica" are the two main strains of marijuana plants — and most products sold today are modified hybrids of the two plants. **Hemp and marijuana are the same plant family.** By definition, a plant is considered "hemp" if the potency is 0.3% THC or less.

Commercialization has produced a growing catalog of marijuana products, to include vapes, highly concentrated substances called dabs, marijuana-infused drinks, edibles (baked goods, chocolate, gummies, mints, etc.), suppositories, nasal drops, sublingual sprays, transdermal patches, dissolvable strips, inhalers, chewing gum, and more.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Many forms are odorless and disguised as everyday items. Understanding the range of products is the first step to recognizing what adolescents may use and try to conceal.

The Health Harms — Recent Research

2-5x Ischemic stroke risk, adults under 50 (2025 JACC, 9M+ patients)	3x Schizophrenia risk with cannabis use disorder in legal states (2025 JAMA)	16x Rise in depressive episodes, adults 50 & under (2025 meta-analysis)
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Mental Health

Marijuana is linked to mood disorders, anxiety disorders, psychosis, personality disorders, and addiction. Adolescents who use marijuana are **more than twice as likely to attempt suicide** as nonusers. In Colorado, the share of adolescent suicide toxicology screens positive for marijuana rose from 16% (2011) to 31% (2021), tracking with the state's legalization timeline.

Physical Health

Marijuana smoke is a listed carcinogen. Regular use is tied to strokes, cardiovascular strain, and— new research shows — epigenetic changes passed to future generations through DNA methylation, affecting genes tied to brain development, cognition, and disease risk.

Why Age Under 25 Changes Everything

The human brain is not fully mature until approximately **age 25 to 27**. Marijuana interferes with the brain regions governing decision-making, impulse control, and reward, and these areas can be **permanently damaged** when exposed during development. A study of 14-year-olds who had used marijuana only once or twice already showed reduced brain gray matter compared to nonusers.

8-to-9 point IQ drop

In regular marijuana users who started young, and cessation does not fully restore brain function

Daily teen use is linked to a **2.5x higher risk of anxiety by age 29**. Teens who used weekly/daily and continued into adulthood show a **3.2x higher risk**.

Access: Homes, Schools & Community

Between January 2021 and May 2022, poison control centers logged **10,448** exposure cases involving edible THC products; 91% of unintentional exposures were pediatric. Nearly all (98%) occurred in the home. Two- and three-year-olds account for over half of pediatric cases. One case was coded as a death following ingestion of a suspected THC edible.

Vapes and Edibles Are Built to Be Missed

Vapes are manufactured to resemble highlighters, pens, USB drives, and smartwatch bands. Edibles are packaged to mimic Trolli gummies, Oreos, Trix, and other trusted snack brands, sometimes with a misspelled logo as the only indicator. In 2022 the FDA and multiple state attorneys general issued warnings about copycat packaging designed specifically to appeal to children.

What to watch for: • A highlighter/pen that's unusually heavy, or has a metal clip • USB-shaped items • Tins or wrapped candy with an "almost right" logo	Top marijuana hiding spots for youth: • Battery compartments (alarm clocks, calculators) • Highlighter caps • In clothing pockets and shoes in closet • Stuffed animals (inside seam)
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hoodies and backpacks with an atomizer tube hidden in the hood/pocket • Phone cases or smartwatches with hidden atomizers and concealment areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inside heating vents • Taped behind posters • Car interiors (under seats, behind steering wheel, in trunks) • Gaming consoles |
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Parents Are the Strongest Protective Factor

Research consistently shows that clear, repeated parental disapproval of drug use has a measurable **shielding effect** that strengthens as children get older — even against the pro-marijuana messaging kids see in media and online. A 2024 University of Washington study found teens' *perception* of a parent's marijuana use (whether accurate or not) was strongly linked to their own likelihood of using and to viewing marijuana as a lower-risk substance.

"Parents need to recognize that their use matters. If teens perceive their parents use cannabis... it can send the message that the behavior is also acceptable for them, especially without explicit conversations that set boundaries."

- The Blunt Truth: Ten Things Every Parent Needs to Know About Marijuana

What Protects Kids

- **Set the example.** "Do as I say, not as I do" will ring hollow to adolescents if parents use marijuana. Parental modeling of healthy behavior is critical.
- **Communicate disapproval clearly and often.** Kids who perceive consistent parental disapproval carry that shielding effect into later adolescence.
- **Stay involved.** Parental monitoring, checking of child's bedroom/devices, and knowing who your child is spending time with goes a long way in ensuring your child stays drug free.
- **Talk to your child - even if you experimented with marijuana yourself.** Avoiding this topic removes one of your most effective parenting tools to help your child. Parents who used marijuana in the past should explain how today's THC products are categorically stronger than what they may have used in their youth.

The Bottom Line

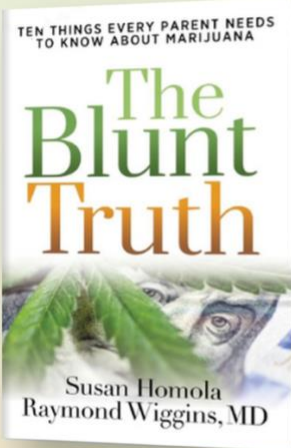
Marijuana availability is at a historic high and potency has never been greater, but a parent's consistent, informed voice remains one of the most powerful protective factors for their child.

What to Say — A Starting Script

LEAD WITH FACTS, NOT FEAR

- "Today's marijuana isn't what it was a generation ago — it's up to 30 times stronger."
- "Your brain is still developing until your mid-twenties. Marijuana interferes with that development and can cause lifelong mental and physical health issues."
- "I disapprove of you using this, and here's why: It's about your health, not control."
- "These products are being commercialized by industries who know how to market addiction, and I do not want you to be their next addicted customer."

Where to Learn More



THE BLUNT TRUTH

Ten Things Every Parent Needs to Know

A clear guide to today's high-potency marijuana and youth health.

"A must-read for parents, educators, and physicians."
— Ericka P. Greene, MD, MACM

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BONUS:

- Sign up for a free chapter on the money behind Big Marijuana at suehomola.com
- If you would like Sue Homola to provide a presentation to your group on today's high-potency THC and its impact on youth health, please email: suehomolatruth@gmail.com