

# Refuse, Remove, Reasons: Pot Lowers Math Scores

## On the Video...

Some kids know how dangerous marijuana can be.

"You lose a lot of brain cells, you know, smoking too much," 18-year old Zaneta says.

"Smoking it will make you lose your memory," says Katie, age 17.

"Memory impairment – a lot of memory impairment," Ryan adds.

According to a study from the Rand Corporation, a national research group, smoking marijuana lowers math scores.

"I imagine it would," says Melissa, another teen. "I imagine it would lower all your scores, you know, it's bad for you. It doesn't make you smart."

The study looked at 6,000 standardized test scores of teens who started smoking pot in the 10th grade. Two years later, their math scores were 15% lower than kids who didn't smoke pot.

"I'm not surprised math went down. I think pot is not a harmless drug. It's not surprising that it's literally harming brain functioning," says Dr. David Gore, a psychologist who specializes in helping addicted teens.

Nineteen-year-old Michael isn't surprised either. "I have a lot of friends that are pot heads, and they smoke a lot of marijuana, and I've seen their lives just go down the drain. They get so addicted, and it's a never-ending cycle," he says.

Experts say parents can help end that cycle. They suggest talking long and hard to your kids about the dangers of marijuana and be specific. Tell your children about how pot affects memory, motivation and coordination. Tell them how it can damage their lungs, lower math scores and in general, ruin their lives.

"If you don't care about your math scores, that's fine. But do you care about your total brain development? Do you care about your ability to connect with other people?" Dr. Gore muses. "Pot kills you emotionally; it just deadens you, and that, to me, is the biggest danger."

And like most experts, Dr. Gore says even if you don't think your kids are listening, keep talking anyway. Seventeen-year-old Stephanie says talking to her parents about drugs helped her.

"They were always pretty open about talking about it, and being open about talking about it was a lot easier in understanding that it wasn't something that I wanted to do," she says.

## What We Need to Know...

So how big of a problem is marijuana use during the teen years? Since 1975, the National Institute of Health's annual Monitoring the Future study tracks trends in teen alcohol, tobacco and drug use. In 2010, marijuana use ticked up slightly while tobacco use stayed steady. In 2010, 21.4 percent of high school seniors had used marijuana in the past 30 days, while 19.2 percent had smoked cigarettes, according to the study. So, for the first time in decades, marijuana was more popular than cigarettes among teens.

Marijuana hinders the user's short-term memory (memory for recent events), and he or she may have trouble handling complex tasks. Under the influence of marijuana, students may find it hard to study and learn. Young athletes could find their performance is off; timing, movements, and coordination are all affected by THC, the chemical in marijuana (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol).

As a parent, you have the most influence over your teen's choice to use drugs. Experts agree that parents can be influential by talking to their children about the dangers of using marijuana and other drugs, and by remaining actively engaged in their children's lives. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, research shows that appropriate parental monitoring can reduce future drug use, even among those adolescents who may be prone to marijuana use, such as those who are rebellious, cannot control their emotions, and experience internal distress. Be sure to share your values with your teen. That can be as simple as letting your teen know that you do not condone the use of marijuana.

## Conversation Starters...

- What do you hope to accomplish in life? How does your schoolwork impact those goals? How would marijuana use affect your goals?
- Discuss unhealthy risks you want your child to avoid. Ask, "As your parent, how can I help you stay on the right track?"
- What are some healthy risks to achieve that goal? Share a healthy risk you took in your life.