

Refuse, Remove, Reasons: For Teens, Is This Summer Going to Pot?

On the Video...

For most teens, the summer brings sun, swimming and maybe some extra time spent on the skateboard. But for others, the season marks the time when they first try pot.

"Beginning of summer, first day of summer, in fact," says Sarah, who's 19.

"It was during the summer because then we could stay out later and a lot of other kids were out of school, too," 18-year-old Angelique adds.

In fact, studies show 40 percent of teens who smoke marijuana first tried the drug during the summer.

"They have a lot of free time. A lot of kids are bored during the summer. They've got nothing to do. So the fact that a lot of kids are starting to get into things they shouldn't and experiment isn't surprising at all," says addiction counselor Dr. Robert Margolis, who serves as executive director of Solutions Counseling in Atlanta.

Every month... but especially during the summer months, parents need to know what their kids are up to.

"I think they ought to ask themselves do they have any plan going into the summer for their kids. What are their kids going to do? Are they going to get a job? Are they going to maybe go study someplace ... are they going to have something that's structured to do?" Dr. Margolis says.

He says that regardless of their own personal experiences when they were young, parents should explain the dangers of marijuana, especially at the beginning of the summer. "What parents need to understand is that this is a very harmful, addictive drug that ruins people's lives. And they better be prepared with facts to discuss this with their kids," Dr. Margolis says.

Talks with her parents, and her doctor, finally convinced Angelique to stop smoking marijuana.

"Like they're more dangerous than cigarettes and all that stuff. I didn't know that," she says.

What We Need to Know...

The summer months often bring more freedom to teens. But many of them abuse this freedom, as evidenced by data released by the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse that shows 40% of teens first try marijuana during the summer. In fact, about 5,800 teens try marijuana for the first time each day in June and July.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the prevalence of drug use can, in part, be attributed to the overall perceptions and attitudes that drug use – particularly that of marijuana – is not harmful and is insignificant. Yet, THC – the main chemical in marijuana – changes the way in which sensory information gets into and is acted on by particular systems in the brain. A person who smokes marijuana regularly may have many of the same respiratory problems that tobacco smokers develop. Continuing to smoke marijuana can lead to abnormal functioning of lung tissue injured or destroyed by marijuana smoke.

Conversation Starters...

- What are your plans – and goals – for the summer? What do you hope to accomplish?
- What are you and your friends doing for fun this summer?
- How would you handle tough social situations that might arise including smoking pot?