



**420 – April 20<sup>th</sup>**

## **FACTS, FICTION AND CONVERSATION STARTERS WITH YOUTH**

### **What is '420'?**

'420' (pronounced 'four twenty') is a term used mostly in North America. It refers to the consumption of cannabis (marijuana) and may be used to identify oneself with cannabis subculture. 420 observances are based on time (4:20pm) as well as date (April 20<sup>th</sup>.) On April 20<sup>th</sup>, a 420 rally and gathering will be held that will be attended by several thousand participants and onlookers.

### **What youth need to know & how we can talk to youth about marijuana**

Most youth in Vancouver do not attend the 420 rally. As parents and caregivers, we can use this opportunity to have conversations with our teens that are non-threatening and allow us to express our values and expectations in ways that are more likely to be heard. A good way to start the conversation is to allow teens to generate ideas about the commonly held beliefs of marijuana use.

Here are some conversation starters and ideas to help foster open and honest conversations with youth:

- The most important part of the conversation is your ability to listen and to be willing to have a back-and-forth dialogue. Instead of thinking of yourself as having to implant the right ideas in your teen's head, think of yourself as an explorer and a guide. Be sincere and curious about what they know, and ask questions that help them think about those ideas. (For example: Does "natural" mean it has no effect? Can a natural substance have negative effects – such as tobacco?)
- Almost all teens will need to make choices around marijuana use at some point. Most teens choose not to smoke marijuana or to attend 420. A great conversation starter is to ask young people: 'Why do you think some people choose not to smoke weed?' It's a great way to find out the risks and potential harms that youth are aware of and to encourage thoughtfulness.
- Use open-ended questions to explore several sides of the issue in a general way. For example: What do young people think about someone who chooses not to smoke weed? What about those who do?
- Not using is a valid, common and socially acceptable choice; keep that idea present in the conversation. Reasons people might not use marijuana include: don't want to feel out of control; don't need it to have fun; don't want to disappoint parents, friends, teachers; like feeling healthy and thinking clearly; don't want to impact their sports or creativity; like being a good role model for younger youth.
- The issue of legalization is often of interest to youth. It is good to point out that if cannabis were decriminalized or legalized it would still be a prohibited substance for minors. Cannabis, like alcohol, poses higher risks for young people and would have similar restrictions.

- At this time of the year with 420 approaching, it is important that we help down play the glorification of cannabis culture while providing facts about the potential harms of marijuana use. A conversation starter is, “Do you think there are harms associated with smoking marijuana?” Youth should know that there are different risks associated with marijuana use for adults and youth and there are great benefits to avoiding or delaying marijuana use as a teen.
- Many youth might suggest that they see marijuana as being ‘natural’ and thus ‘non-harmful’. Having conversations to help expand youth thinking on this aspect is important. You can help by supporting youth in understanding that there are harms that come with cannabis use that are beyond lung damage. For example, youth have identified that marijuana use and the lifestyle that often goes with it can have consequences that negatively impact the following aspects of their lives:

<i>romantic relationships</i>	<i>stress with family</i>	<i>stress with peer groups</i>	<i>being judged</i>
<i>coping skills</i>	<i>legal issues</i>	<i>ability to travel</i>	<i>trust building</i>
<i>employability</i>	<i>reputation</i>	<i>identity</i>	<i>school performance</i>
<i>diet</i>	<i>financial</i>	<i>risk taking</i>	<i>motivation</i>

- Through open discussion, youth have been able to identify that marijuana use can impact their:
  - Mental health (especially related to anxiety and depression, memory changes and paranoia)
  - Ability to get support early (marijuana use can mask symptoms of depression and anxiety)
  - Interest in passions and participation in hobbies and recreational activities
  - Ability to have honest relationships with friends and family
  - Sense of control in their lives – may feel like they need to use marijuana to feel ‘normal’
  - Health (overall health and immune system well-being)
- Parents can inadvertently send a message that encourages substance use. “I know I can’t stop you...” or “I know all kids do it...” or “if you’re going to do it, then...” can leave youth feeling like their parents expect them to use, and maybe there is something wrong with them if they don’t. Then when social pressure hits, they may feel that they have no solid reason to decline. The younger the youth, the more problematic this is.
- When teens know their parents would not be happy with teen substance use – because their parents care about their health and well-being, not because of teen defiance – teens make safer choices.
- If an adult supports de-criminalization and recreational use of cannabis, it is responsible to remember that teens are not adults and can be seriously impacted by regular use. Set boundaries about what is healthy for youth and encourage delay. Teens are developmentally different than adults and delaying use until adulthood makes a difference in numerous areas of teen social, emotional and cognitive development.
- Consider watching a documentary, such as “The Downside of High” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOzdCKSlSJ0>) together and discuss.
- As a parent, listen to and discuss all sorts of opinions, and then set limits and expectations. Be clear about your expectations AND clear that you will be there if something goes wrong. (You may need to have a conversation afterwards, and there may be consequences, but you won’t “freak out” in the moment.)
- When teens are active in interests of their own, they build confidence, a sense of competency, self-worth, create friendships and strengthen social and emotional development. Help your teen get involved, even if the interest doesn’t make sense to you. Examples: soccer, paint ball, music, writing, mixed martial arts, car hobbies, rock bands, performance, creating games, anime, film-making, skate boarding, Canadian Reserves, work, driving the car... Support them with your time, your attention and maybe even your money.

- Most youth in Vancouver do not use cannabis, and most secondary students do not attend the 420 rally. If you think your teen is curious, and you are concerned, consider things parents have done in past years:
  - Make plans for the day that are super fun and that your teen wants to do. Examples we have heard are: driving lesson with a parent (16 year old driving out in the valley on country roads); take your teen and a friend bungee jumping, horseback riding; a shopping trip (whether Metrotown or Seattle). Hosting an all-day gaming party for kids, with great snacks and drinks.
  - Start the conversation before Saturday. Be honest about it. Offer something to make up for it if your teen is insistent.

Learn more about cannabis at: <http://heretohelp.bc.ca/factsheet/cannabis>,  
<http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/sites/default/files/cannabis.pdf>  
<http://cannabissupport.com.au>

**420 - 101:** Regardless of our opinion about 420, some facts and common misperceptions about the event:

<b>What's the origin of 420?</b>	In the early 1970s a small group in northern California used to meet at a designated location every day to smoke pot at 4:20 pm. "420" became a general euphemism for "time to light up." The catchphrase moved beyond California, it is now used worldwide. Today 420 is, whether expressed in the form 4:20 (as a time of day), 4/20 (as a calendar date), or just the unadorned numeral (pronounced "four-twenty"), an unofficial symbol for the use and appreciation of marijuana.
<b>What about 420 in Vancouver?</b>	In Vancouver, the annual rally at the Art Gallery on 20 April is also a political event supporting the decriminalization of marijuana.
<b>What about youth attending 420? It is a publicly held event after all?</b>	It is important for youth to know that many pro-marijuana advocates are aware of and speak openly about the potential harms of marijuana use and misuse and the specific risks for youth. It is also important for youth to know that advocates feel that youth presence at the event negatively impacts the political cause.
<b>Is public marijuana consumption legal on 420 (April 20<sup>th</sup>)?</b>	Police recognize it as a day of protest and much substance related behavior is tolerated. However, arrests can be made at such events. Many believe that the police cannot enforce laws on this day. That is false.
<b>420 Myths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 420 isn't the date Bob Marley died, (he died on 5/11/81). It's not his birthday, either.</li> <li>▪ 420 isn't the number of a bill in US Congress to legalize pot, despite many people thinking it is.</li> <li>▪ 420 isn't the police or penal code for marijuana possession in California (or any other state), though many people believe that, as well.</li> <li>▪ 420 is not the number of chemical compounds in found in cannabis, the marijuana plant, though many authors seem fond of stating so.</li> </ul>

Please connect with a SACY staff person affiliated with your school for information, support and resources:  
[www.vsb.bc.ca/sacy/contacts](http://www.vsb.bc.ca/sacy/contacts).

We all have a role in prevention. Thank you. Art Steinmann, Manager, Substance Use Health Promotion & SACY. 604 713 5233 [asteinmann@vsb.bc.ca](mailto:asteinmann@vsb.bc.ca)