

**Social supports are vital to the overall wellbeing of children and youth** and having a support system that includes caring adults and positive peers is shown to be a significant protective factor for individuals facing stress or emotional challenges. It is important that students know how and where to access support and evidence-based resources while at school and during their time away from the school environment. Children and youth with a strong support system feel safe and cared for and are more likely to access support in times of struggle or crisis. We encourage to you review and consider the use of the [Community Support Templates](#) below to assist students in identifying their social supports. Examples of supports include family members, friends, teachers, coaches, neighbors and health/mental health professionals. Students with limited support systems may benefit from discussion around how they might build this network.



As outlined in School Mental Health Ontario’s Practice Guide titled [School-Based Interventions Related to Student Cannabis Use](#), about **1 in 5 youth report use of Cannabis in the past year**. Cannabis use is particularly common among youth who struggle with their mental health which highlights the importance of addressing both mental health concerns and cannabis use at the same time.

**This info sheet helps educators to have informed conversations with students about recreational cannabis.**

Updated September 2020

Cannabis: What Educators Need to Know

This Info-Sheet helps educators to have informed conversations with students about recreational cannabis.

How can educators approach the topic of cannabis with students?

The legalization of recreational cannabis for adults who are 19 or older gives educators an opportunity to promote critical thinking around substance use. It also encourages students to engage in personal decision-making, now and in the future, that will help them to achieve their short- and long-term goals. While it is illegal for Ontario youth under the age of 19 to use, buy, possess, cultivate or share recreational cannabis, legalization for adults may prompt students to think more about this issue and come forward with questions.

To have a meaningful conversation with students, approach the topic of cannabis in a knowledgeable, supportive and non-judgmental way, and in the context of a positive educator-student relationship. Take time to reflect on when you were younger and what information you needed at that point in your life.<sup>1</sup> Tailor the conversation to the students' knowledge needs and provide appropriate information by considering:

- the reasons why students use cannabis;
- risks of cannabis use;
- the student's age and level of development;
- the school/community/family context.

Like other substances, most students will not use cannabis;<sup>2</sup> some will use it recreationally without developing problems, and a subset may develop problems as a result of their use. In your conversation, recognize the differences between the use of cannabis for recreational and for medical purposes, which requires medical authorization under federal law.

Be aware of common myths that can influence students, such as the belief that trying cannabis is not harmful. The references and links provided at the end of this Info-Sheet offer more detailed information to assist with knowledge-building in this area.

Health promotion, prevention and harm reduction approaches can be considered when talking with students about cannabis or other drugs. Health promotion and prevention approaches aim to promote well-being, reduce the number of students who will start using cannabis, delay initiation, and reduce the frequency of use.<sup>3</sup> Harm reduction approaches aim to decrease the harms and risks associated with cannabis use.<sup>4</sup> Harm reduction strategies have become increasingly accepted as a pragmatic and effective approach for individuals who may be at greater risk of using cannabis or are already using drugs.<sup>5</sup> Providing evidence-based information about harms and risks associated with cannabis can help potential users to make informed decisions about trying this drug and about precautions they can take to minimize risks.<sup>1</sup>

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Cannabis: What Educators Need to Know

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