

Talking Points

If asked about the following issues, bridge back to the main message about marijuana being a harmful drug for youth.

Marijuana v. tobacco and alcohol

- Alcohol and tobacco certainly pose significant risks, especially to young people
- Fortunately, as a result of legal settlements and vigorous public education efforts, many Americans are aware of the dangers of dependence and addiction associated with alcohol and tobacco use

Bridge:

- Far too many of us are unaware of the pernicious effects of marijuana
- The coalition of public health agencies that has come together to inform parents of the dangers of marijuana use will reinvigorate the public discussion, and will help do for marijuana prevention and treatment what has already been done for tobacco and alcohol

Gateway theory

- Direct cause and effect relationship between marijuana use and later abuse of other drugs is hard to prove, but studies show that of the people who have ever used marijuana, those who started early are more likely to have other problems:
 - 8 times more likely to have used cocaine;
 - 15 times more likely to have used heroin;
 - 5 times more likely to develop a need for treatment of abuse or dependence on ANY drug

Bridge:

- Important not to trivialize negative consequences of marijuana use on its own
- Parents, especially, must know the truth about the dangers of marijuana use – it can have serious health and social consequences

Medical marijuana

- Research has not demonstrated that smoked marijuana can be helpful as medicine
- Marinol is a medicine – smoked marijuana is not.
- Smoked marijuana contains more than 400 chemicals and increases risk of cancer, lung damage and poor pregnancy outcomes

Bridge:

- Unfortunately, coverage of the medical marijuana debate has contributed to misperception that marijuana is harmless or may even have health benefits
- Interviews with teens found that some believe that marijuana can cure cancer and other serious diseases

Drug testing in schools

- Student drug testing may not be right for every school in every community
- Important for parents, school officials and community leaders to examine the nature and extent of their youth drug problem to determine if testing is appropriate for their schools

Bridge:

- Can be an important tool in preventing and treating youth drug use

- Marijuana use affects the growth and development of young minds, and can inhibit the ability of young people to concentrate and retain information during critical learning years
- Testing provides a way for teens to resist peer pressure

The ONDCP marijuana initiative

- Changing the way Americans think about marijuana
- Cross-cutting effort that engages all ONDCP components, their interagency counterparts, and their community partners
- Major advertising campaign targeting youth and their parents
 - TV, print, radio, and interactive advertising deliver powerful messages to dispel the myths
 - Spending nearly \$48 million in advertising through December 2002, and will extend throughout 2003

Bridge

- Encourage officials at all levels of government, educators and parents to get the facts: marijuana is a dangerous drug
- We all have a role to play in preventing its use among young people and in helping those with a problem get treatment and stay in recovery