

Underage Cannabis Prevention

Toolkit for Educators & Coalitions



The Dangers of Underage Cannabis Use

Cannabis, following alcohol, ranks as the most commonly misused substance among youth. Research indicates that cannabis use during adolescence and young adulthood can adversely affect the developing brain. As an increasing number of states legalize recreational and medical cannabis, it is imperative that we adopt a proactive approach to prevent cannabis misuse among children. Educators, community coalitions, parents, and prevention organizations, such as MADD, must collaborate to educate the next generation of drivers about the dangers associated with driving under the influence of cannabis.

Purpose of this Toolkit

The MADD Cannabis Video Series is designed to educate youth about the dangers of underage cannabis use and impaired driving. This toolkit supports conversations with young, new, or soon-to-be drivers by helping them understand the serious—and often deadly—risks of driving while high.

After students watch the videos, educators are encouraged to facilitate a group discussion with the discussion guide following the activities, and display the free printable poster in school hallways to reinforce key messages.

MADD encourages youth and the caring adults in their lives to continue having open, ongoing conversations about how cannabis affects the developing brain and body, as well as the lethal risks associated with impaired driving.

This video series was created in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals (BHDDH).

What's Included



4 videos, available on
YouTube



Digital poster, available
for print



Discussion guide and
activities for group
learning

Who is this for?

The videos were created with teenagers in mind, specifically new drivers or driving school students. The toolkit is ideal for educators, mental health providers, and other professionals who work with youth, including but not limited to:

- Teachers
- Coalitions
- School Counselors
- Student Resource Officers
- School Administrators
- Driving Schools
- Substance Abuse Prevention Providers
- Social Workers
- Mental Health Providers
- Coaches/Instructors

Activity 1: Video Viewing

The video series lives on YouTube through MADD's channel. You can access all four videos for free here: <https://tinyurl.com/4ku83r8y>.



Video 1: "THC: Glitching the System"

This video explores the contrasts between a healthy teenage brain and one that is developing under the influence of underage cannabis use. By comparing "high Liam" and "sober Liam", viewers can see all the ways cannabis use affects their life and their game.



Key points:

- Studies show that regular cannabis use before 18 can permanently lower your IQ by up to eight points.
- Long-term effects can include memory issues, trouble focusing, less

- motivation, and even anxiety or depression.
- The brain is developing well into the mid-20s.

Video 2: “Let’s Get Real: Cannabis Myths vs. Science”

This video demonstrates the plethora of myths out there surrounding cannabis. Many teens believe that “everyone” is using cannabis, when in reality, 2024 data shows that nationally: 9 out of 10 eighth graders, 4 out of 5 tenth graders, and nearly 3 out of 4 twelfth graders are not using cannabis. There’s power in numbers. Liam’s friends squash out the common myths many young people believe about cannabis.



Key Points:

- Using cannabis while your brain is still wiring itself can increase the risk of impaired thinking, memory problems, and changes in emotional regulation. For some people, it can also lead to mental health issues like anxiety or depression.
- Cannabis may be “natural” in that it comes from a plant, but that does not mean it is safe for the developing brain.
- Cannabis products sold at dispensaries today are exponentially more potent than the “pot” of the 90s. That massive increase in potency also

means a higher risk for addiction, and more intense side effects like paranoia, anxiety, and psychosis — especially for young brains still developing.

- Just because something is sold in a store doesn't mean it's safe. The tobacco industry is legal and regulated, too — and we all know how that turned out.
- About 1 in 6 teens who start using cannabis will develop cannabis use disorder — that's a real diagnosis, and it means someone starts to feel like they *can't stop using*, even if it's affecting their mental health, grades, or relationships. And it's not just physical cravings — it's psychological dependence, like needing it to chill out, sleep, or get through the day. It's another way of saying they are *addicted*.
- THC affects reaction time, coordination, and decision-making — all the things you rely on to stay safe behind the wheel. You might not weave all over the road like someone who's drunk, but you're more likely to drive slowly, misjudge distances, or miss something important, like a stop sign or a pedestrian.

Video 3: “Swipe to Reality: Your Brain on Cannabis”

In this video, Liam spends some time scrolling social media to see what other people and resources have to say about cannabis. After reflection on the facts, it's hard to see the benefits of cannabis.



Key messages:

- Three major parts of the brain are in development until your mid-twenties: The prefrontal cortex: which handles judgment, planning, impulse control; the amygdala: the emotion center of the brain; and the Hippocampus: which processes memory and learning.
- Your brain's doing synaptic pruning—deleting unused connections to make important ones stronger—and myelination, adding armor to your most-used pathways so signals move faster.
- Cannabis contains THC, which hacks into your brain's endocannabinoid system—controlling mood, memory, coordination, and motivation.
- Studies show regular cannabis use in adolescence is linked to memory trouble, slower processing, mood changes, and weaker decision-making. One study found teens lost up to 8 IQ points by adulthood—and those points didn't come back, even after stopping.

Video 4: "Driving High = GAME OVER"

In this video, Liam meets up with friends Mia and Jose to play some video games. His friends remind him of the lethal consequences of driving high. In a game you can always restart, but in real life, you get one chance to get home safely.



Key points:

- Driving high is impaired driving. No one should ever drive under the influence.
- Even a little amount of cannabis slows your reaction time and impairs your cognitive abilities, affecting your ability to safely drive.
- Just because someone has gotten home safely once doesn't mean they will get home safely the next time.

Activity 2: Ride Along Scenarios

Would you get in the car?

After watching the videos, students will be equipped to apply concepts to real-life situations. Educators can facilitate this activity in various ways: by dividing students into small groups and assigning a scenario to each, or by leading a discussion with the entire class. Each scenario will challenge students to consider whether they would choose to get into the car or not.

To foster deeper reflection and discussion on their responses, educators should prompt students with the following prompt questions, encouraging them to explain their reasoning.

Scenario 1: “I’m Good Now”

The driver smoked cannabis earlier, says it was “a while ago,” and feels fine—but seems a little slower than usual.

Prompts:

- What does “a while ago” mean—and why might that matter?
- Which matters more for safety: how someone feels or how they’re functioning?
- What subtle signs could indicate impairment?
- What’s a respectful way to decline the ride?

Key Point to Reinforce: *It takes longer than one might think for a someone to become sober again.*

Scenario 2: The Smell Test

The car smells like cannabis. The driver claims they drive better high and seems confident.

Prompts:

- What information does your sense of smell give you?
- Does confidence make someone safer behind the wheel?

- How could confidence actually increase risk?
- What would you say before the car even starts moving?

Key Point to Reinforce: *Confidence is not the same as capability. No one drives better impaired.*

Scenario 3: The Edible Excuse

The driver took an edible hours ago and says they feel normal now since it was a low-dose gummy.

Prompts:

- How are edibles different from smoking cannabis?
- Why might impairment last longer than expected?
- How can you pivot this situation to a safer way home?

Key Point to Reinforce: *Feeling “normal” doesn’t mean the brain is unimpaired. The way someone uses/consumes a substance affects how their body processes it.*

Scenario 4: Everyone Else Is Riding

The driver used cannabis, but everyone else is getting in and telling you not to worry.

Prompts:

- Who is responsible for your safety?
- What are realistic alternatives if you say no?
- How could planning ahead help here?

Key Point to Reinforce: *Other people’s choices don’t reduce your risk.*

Scenario 5: Something Feels Off

You don’t know for sure if the driver used cannabis, but they seem distracted, slow, and unfocused.

Prompts:

- Do you need proof to decide not to ride?

- Which senses are giving you warning signs?
- Why is trusting your instincts important?
- How would you explain your decision to a friend?

Key Point to Reinforce: *You never need evidence to protect yourself. Trust your gut.*

Activity 3: Debunking Cannabis Myths

Here are some prevalent myths that young people often hold about cannabis. Educators are encouraged to engage their students in a fun “True or False” game, utilizing the statistics in the right column to clarify the misconceptions listed in the left column concerning cannabis and impaired driving.

Common Myths Youth Believe About Cannabis

Myth	Fact
Cannabis is safe and not addictive.	Cannabis is currently the leading cause of addiction and dependence other than alcohol in the U.S. Studies show that cannabis accounts for over 50% of the 7 million people aged 18 and older dependent on or abusing a drug. Cannabis is much more prevalent today than in the past. There is no way to determine a safe dose (e.g., some vaping, a few bites of a brownie). There are also many different strains with different effects, making cannabis a high-risk drug to use.
Cannabis is safer than alcohol.	Both alcohol and cannabis are associated with significant health risks. Comparing which is safer overlooks that there are serious risks associated with both drugs.
Cannabis is a widely accepted medical treatment and is therefore safe to use.	While medicinal cannabis is legal in some states, it is only for specific conditions and requires certification from a qualified healthcare provider. Patients need prescriptions that specify how much, how often, and in what form it can be used. Medicinal cannabis is rarely prescribed to children. In these instances, the benefits of medicinal cannabis MUST outweigh the potent damage to the developing brain.

<p>Cannabis makes you a better driver.</p>	<p>Studies have shown that, of seriously injured drivers admitted to trauma centers, more than 1 out of 4 tested positive for cannabis. In another study of fatally injured drivers in a western state, over 1 in 10 tested positive for cannabis.</p>
<p>All cannabis is legal.</p>	<p>While some states have legalized cannabis for medicinal and recreational use, it remains illegal at the federal level and is classified as a Schedule I drug. Federal law still prohibits its possession, sale, and use, regardless of state laws. No state allows recreational cannabis use for individuals under 21.</p>
<p>Cannabis helps you sleep.</p>	<p>Teens who use cannabis report more trouble sleeping and staying asleep compared to their peers who do not use cannabis.</p>

Conclusion & Recommendations

Student Reflection

Ask students to respond verbally or on paper:

- One thing that surprised you
- One sign of impairment you'll watch for
- One choice you'll make if cannabis is involved

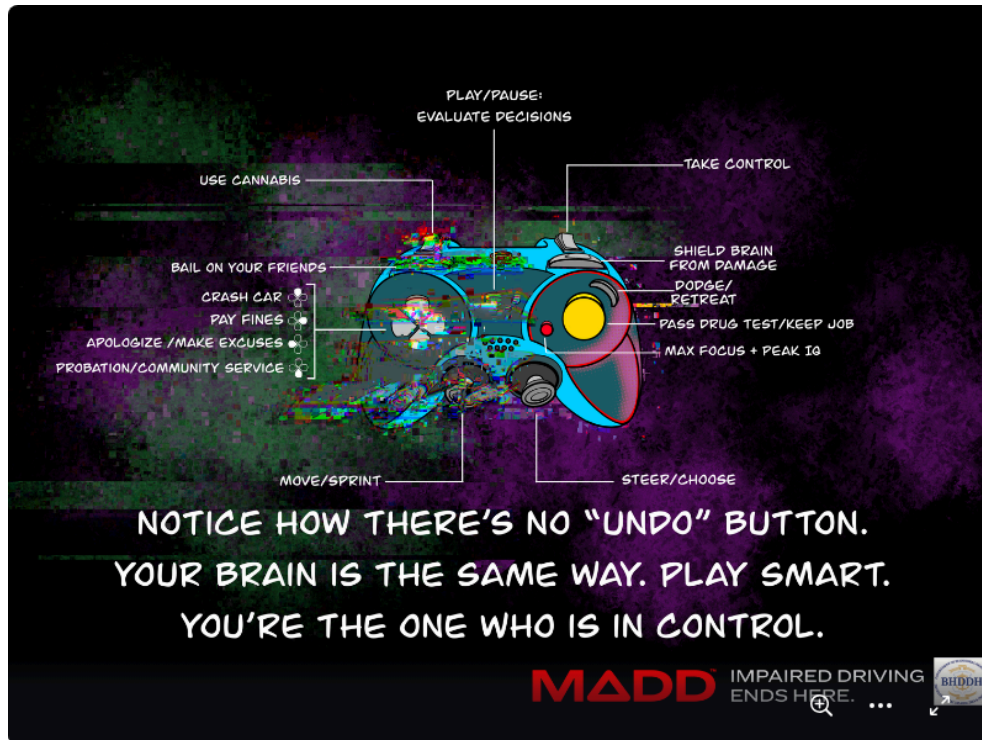
MADD emphasizes the importance of regularly revisiting the issue of cannabis and impaired driving. As adolescents grow, their understanding of the world expands, and situations become increasingly intricate. Children often seek guidance from the adults in their lives, sometimes more than we recognize. Be a positive influence by helping them avoid the risks associated with underage cannabis use.

Poster

To reinforce the messages learned through this video series, we recommend printing the free poster and hanging it in your classroom or community space! Download the file and print at a local printer or order through Canva by scanning the QR code or clicking the link below.

<https://tinyurl.com/s2bzxtde>





About MADD

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) is a national nonprofit leading the movement to end impaired driving for good. Since 1980, MADD has helped reduce drunk driving deaths in America by more than 40%, saved nearly 500,000 lives, and served nearly one million victims and survivors. The organization is committed to leading prevention efforts with young adults, collaborating with law enforcement to keep our roads safe from impaired drivers, as well as advocating for stricter sentencing and stronger laws, including the HALT Drunk Driving Law that mandates anti-drunk driving technology in every new car. MADD continues to provide support services to victims and survivors of impaired driving at no charge through victim advocates and the 24-Hour Victim Help Line 1-877-MADD-HELP.

For more information or to donate, visit madd.org and follow MADD on social media.

MADD™ IMPAIRED DRIVING
ENDS HERE.