

Study: Parent Cannabis Use Shapes Teen Attitudes Toward Drugs

Interestingly, the Study Found That the Influence of Parental Closeness Differed by Gender

A new study from Washington State University (WSU) reveals that adolescents' attitudes toward cannabis are strongly influenced by their perceptions of parental use, with distinct effects depending on the gender of the parent. Published in the *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, the research underscores the significant role that both parental monitoring and the closeness of the parent-child relationship play in shaping teens' views about cannabis. These insights could prove valuable for parents, particularly in states like Washington where cannabis is legal, and societal messages about substance use can be complex.

The study found that teens who believed their parents used cannabis were more likely to have favorable attitudes toward the drug and were more inclined to try it themselves. However, the study also highlighted that the nature of the parent-child relationship—specifically the closeness and level of monitoring—can serve as a powerful deterrent or encouragement, depending on the parent's gender.

The Role of Parental Perception in Teen Cannabis Use

The study surveyed 276 adolescents aged 13 to 17 in Washington state, exploring their perceptions of parental cannabis use, their relationship closeness with their parents, and the extent of parental monitoring. A striking 32% of teens believed their fathers used cannabis, while 25% thought their mothers did. These perceptions were strongly linked to more favorable views of cannabis and an increased likelihood of teens wanting to try it.

“Parents need to recognize that their use matters,” said *Stacey J. T. Hust*, the study's lead author and a professor of communication at WSU. “If teens perceive their parents use cannabis, whether they actually do or not, it can send the message that the behavior is also acceptable for them, especially without explicit conversations that set boundaries for the teen.”

The study also explored the influence of *parental closeness*—the degree to which teens feel emotionally connected to their parents—and how it affected their attitudes toward cannabis. Interestingly, the effects of parental closeness were not uniform for mothers and fathers.

The Gendered Influence of Parental Closeness

The research found significant gender-based differences in how parental closeness influenced teens' views on cannabis. For teens who were close to their mothers and whose mothers did not use cannabis, there was a notable decrease in the teens' intentions to use cannabis. On the other hand, teens who were close to mothers who did use cannabis exhibited more positive attitudes toward the drug and stronger intentions to try it themselves.

In contrast, for fathers, the mere closeness of the relationship—regardless of whether the father used cannabis—was associated with more positive attitudes toward cannabis use. The study suggests that a close relationship with a father could promote acceptance of cannabis, even without direct parental use.

Parental Monitoring as a Protective Factor for Boys

Another key finding of the study highlighted the importance of parental monitoring, particularly for boys. Teens who reported higher levels of parental supervision—such as their parents knowing where they were and who they were spending time with—were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward cannabis. This protective factor was particularly pronounced in boys, suggesting that consistent monitoring may help deter cannabis use in adolescent boys more effectively than in girls.

The Importance of Open Conversations

While the findings suggest that perceptions of parental use and closeness play a role in shaping teens' attitudes, the study also emphasized the importance of open, honest conversations between parents and teens about cannabis. Both Hust and *Jessica Willoughby*, an associate professor of Communication at WSU and co-author of the study, stressed that parents should make clear that cannabis is an adult decision, similar to alcohol or tobacco, and should be framed as a substance with potential risks, particularly for developing adolescent brains.

Moving Forward: Understanding How Parents Can Shape Teens' Health Behaviors

The WSU researchers plan to build on their current findings by exploring how parents can effectively communicate about cannabis use with their teens. Future studies will examine how parental warmth, closeness, and other factors contribute to healthier conversations about cannabis and other health-related behaviors. By understanding these dynamics, the researchers hope to offer parents more effective tools to help guide their children through a world where cannabis use is increasingly normalized.

In a state like Washington, where cannabis is legal and societal attitudes continue to evolve, this research provides valuable insights into how parents can navigate complex conversations and influence their teens' attitudes toward substance use.

As the landscape surrounding cannabis use continues to shift, this study serves as a timely reminder that parental involvement, open communication, and appropriate monitoring can help guide adolescents toward healthier choices.

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