

Cannabis Education: Activate the Discussion

Secondary School Discussion Guide



Purpose of this Guide

The recent changes to the laws in Canada regarding recreational cannabis undoubtedly have implications for schools and students in Ontario. Rules have been established to keep cannabis out of the hands of children and youth. Teachers play an important role in providing relevant, age-appropriate learning experiences for their students, informing parents/guardians/caregivers about their child's learning, and promoting a school-wide approach to cannabis education.



Teachers can play a valuable role in facilitating ongoing conversations about cannabis with other teachers, students, and parents/guardians/caregivers.

These planned and/or impromptu conversations provide opportunities for teachers, students, and parents/guardians/caregivers to deepen their understanding of cannabis. This in turn enables students to understand the implications of cannabis in their community and society, to draw connections to their own health and well-being, and to make informed decisions when dealing with situations involving cannabis. Helping parents/guardians/caregivers understand what and why their child is learning about cannabis helps foster a home-school connection and a shared responsibility for educating children and youth about cannabis.

The purpose of this guide is to promote an open dialogue within the school community about recreational and medical cannabis, to address questions and concerns, and to foster a whole-school approach and shared responsibility when dealing with situations involving cannabis. This guide provides conversation starters that may be used among teachers, students, and parents/guardians/caregivers, to shift the conversation away from a consequence-only approach in dealing with cannabis and toward adopting an informed decision-making, prevention, and harm-reduction approach while facilitating student engagement in learning about cannabis. The questions included in this guide focus on cannabis, but are also relevant to other substances such as alcohol, illicit drugs, and other intoxicating substances.





This guide is meant to be used as a companion to *Cannabis: What Educators Need to Know*, and *Cannabis: What Parents/Guardians/Caregivers Need to Know* information sheets that support educators, parents/guardians/caregivers to have informed conversations with students about recreational cannabis. It is recommended that educators read the Info-Sheets and know the facts before using this guide.

For additional resources, visit Ophea's [Cannabis Education Resources](#) on Teaching Tools.

Tips to consider before leading a cannabis-related conversation

Understanding Your Audience. Considering the experiences of the participants in the conversation and the entry point to their understanding of cannabis will help you to meet the objectives of the conversation while making it relevant to your audience. Knowing your audience and being able to understand their reactions will:

- help guide you in the facilitation of the conversation;
- help you to be conscious of what participants understand about cannabis; and
- help you respond to questions and concerns about cannabis and cannabis education.

Starting the Conversation. Discussions about cannabis are increasingly more important and relevant as school communities navigate the issues, concerns, and questions about cannabis. Starting conversations with other teachers, students, and parents/guardians/caregivers is a good start. These conversations might include:

- how to engage others in an open dialogue about cannabis use and its effects;
- strategies for creating and maintaining a safe and inclusive environment to talk openly about cannabis;
- reducing stigma for those who choose to use cannabis;
- the importance of adopting an informed decision-making, prevention, and harm-reduction approach; and
- effective strategies to engage students in cannabis education in order to deepen their learning and to help them make informed decisions when dealing with situations involving cannabis.

Engaging Others. The questions provided in this guide are designed to invite conversation and help you engage others in a dialogue about cannabis and to promote an understanding of the diverse perspectives about cannabis. When leading a group discussion or having a one-on-one discussion, it is important that you consider the following:

- create a safe, respectful, and non-judgmental environment for individuals to feel supported to express their perspectives and ask their questions;
- gather the necessary information about educator, student, and parent/guardian/caregiver needs; and
- facilitate learning, including building awareness of where to obtain more information and supports if needed.

Because cannabis may be a sensitive topic for discussion, it is important to approach the conversation in a knowledgeable, supportive and non-judgmental way and recognize the diversity of other teachers, students, parents/guardians/caregivers. We invite you to select questions that are most relevant, or adapt them as needed to make connections between your classroom, school, and community.



Questions and Prompts

Teacher with Teachers

1. How can we make connections between cannabis use, legalization and regulation, and our board policies and school procedures in order to inform our approach to cannabis education and use in our school community?

- What are the goals and common understandings for cannabis education in our school board and school community?
- How might we take a shared approach to cannabis education and how we address cannabis use as a school community?
- Where can we find relevant data about student use of cannabis in order to understand more about our students' possible experiences with cannabis?
- How might a Healthy Schools approach be used to foster discussions about cannabis? And vice versa, how might classroom discussions about cannabis be used to support a Healthy Schools approach to student well-being?



- How might we provide opportunities to strengthen students' voice and advocacy about cannabis education at a whole-school level?
- What do we know about the impact of cannabis on students' well-being?
- What strategies do we currently use and/or should we consider using in order to promote student well-being, prevention, and harm reduction related to cannabis?
- How can we help students who are dealing with situations involving cannabis? How might we utilize the curriculum to do this?

2. To what degree do you think you are equipped to teach students about cannabis and have conversations about cannabis use/situations involving cannabis?

- What are your key issues, questions, or concerns about cannabis awareness and education being introduced to our students?



- Where can we find reliable and relevant facts about cannabis?
- How can we build our shared knowledge and enable ourselves to adopt a common approach to our conversations, such as common myths about cannabis that can influence students, teachers, and parents/guardians/caregivers?
- What other resources are available to help us develop our understanding about cannabis and to support our students learning about cannabis?
- How might we connect with local and regional supports, such as public health units, to support us when teaching our students about cannabis?
- What do we need to keep in mind when we are talking about cannabis with our students in order to address the topic with sensitivity and without bias?
- How can we take a health-promotion, prevention, and harm-reduction approach when talking to students?
- How can we address our own biases with respect to cannabis use when it may differ from those of other colleagues, our students, or parents/guardians/caregivers?
- How can we support our students in recognizing their own biases when it comes to the decisions of others regarding cannabis use when it may differ from those of other students during classroom and whole-school conversations?

3. How might the topics of cannabis use, including recreational and medical cannabis, legalization, and regulation specifically connect to your curriculum?

- How can we help ensure we are having meaningful conversations with our students about cannabis?
- How do we tailor our conversations about cannabis to be age-appropriate for our students?
- How can we sustain conversations about cannabis beyond a few lessons?
- How might we make connections to student learning in different subjects? How do we do this at the different grade levels?
- What opportunities might there be to create cross-curricular connections in order to broaden the conversation and deepen our students' understanding about cannabis?
- What opportunities might there be to create and use shared assessment practices to support our students in deepening their thinking and learning about cannabis?





Teacher with Students

1. Where are youth your age most likely to be dealing with situations involving cannabis?

- Where do you think youth are most exposed to situations involving cannabis, and in what ways?
- How does/might this exposure affect your day-to-day life at school and in your community?
- How can we foster and strengthen your voice in our school and community as we talk about cannabis?
- How can we support youth in using leadership skills to support younger students when dealing with situations involving cannabis?
- What help is available to support students in dealing with cannabis-related problems they might be experiencing?

2. What do you think students need to know more about when thinking about the ways in which substance use, including cannabis use, can affect a person's health and well-being?

- Do you think youth are aware of the risks of cannabis use?
- How does knowing these risks impact their choices when dealing with situations involving cannabis?
- What skills do you think all youth should develop in order to deal with situations involving cannabis?
- How would self-awareness, effective decision-making skills, and stress-management skills help youth deal with situations involving cannabis?
- Do you know where to get more information about cannabis use and/or access additional supports?
- How can your teachers support you in developing and applying strategies to different situations involving cannabis?

3. If you were to design lessons about cannabis, what would they include?

- What would be important to include in the lessons?
- What do you think is currently missing in educating students about cannabis?
- What do you think students would like to know more about with regards to cannabis?
- If you were given an assignment to demonstrate your learning about cannabis, what would you choose to do?
- How can teachers help you think about your own biases when you are involved in conversations about cannabis where there are differing perspectives?



4. It can be difficult for adults and youth to discuss cannabis. What are some difficulties families may have discussing the topic of cannabis? How can young people help start the dialogue?

- What might make the topic of cannabis a sensitive topic for adults to discuss with their children? How can young people help start the dialogue?
- What do you think parents/guardians/caregivers and youth should talk about during their conversations about cannabis?
- What information do you think is most important for parents/guardians/caregivers to have when it comes to talking with their child about cannabis?

Teacher with Parents/Guardians/Caregivers

1. Is there anything that is surprising to you about cannabis, the new laws, and/or conversations you are hearing or things you might be seeing in your community?

- How can parents/guardians/caregivers be involved in conversations about cannabis in our school community?
- In what ways can we work together to foster a home–school connection for conversations about cannabis?
- How can we work together to support your child in cannabis education?
- Would you like additional information on the differences between recreational and medical cannabis?

2. What can parents/guardians/caregivers do to provide students with cannabis education early and throughout their school years?

- Are you aware of the cannabis education your child is receiving in school?
- What questions do you have about cannabis education?
- What would you like your child to learn about cannabis in the classroom?
- What skills would you like your child to learn to help them deal with situations involving cannabis?
- How can you support your child in developing these skills?

3. What are some difficulties families may have discussing the topic of cannabis?

- Do you think other parents/guardians/caregivers feel comfortable talking to their child about cannabis?
- What might make the topic of cannabis difficult for parents/guardians/caregivers to have with their child? And vice versa, what might make the topic of cannabis difficult for children and youth to discuss with their parents/guardians/caregivers?
- What information do you think is most important for parents/guardians/caregivers to have when it comes to talking with their child about cannabis?



4. Are you comfortable and/or do you know effective strategies for speaking to your child about cannabis use and situations involving cannabis?

- What additional information would you like to have in order to help you have informed conversations about cannabis with your child?
- Do you know where to find reliable information that could help you in these conversations?

5. What are your primary concerns around your child's habits that could lead to cannabis use?

- What strategies do you hope your child will learn that will support their positive mental health and ability to cope with situations involving cannabis?
- What does your family do and/or what strategies do you use to foster positive mental health in your home life?
- Are you aware of some of the warning signs that might indicate that someone is having a problem with cannabis? Do you know what you should look for in your home and in your child if you suspect cannabis use?
- Are you aware of the supports in our school and community for you and your child to access for help when dealing with situations involving cannabis? Do you access any community programs or services to support your child's well-being, such as youth centres, youth groups, community centres, and/or recreation programs?
- What supports and/or resources do parents/guardians/caregivers need to better support their child?