

# Cannabis IQ

Know the drug.  
Know your loved one.  
Know the risks.

A RESOURCE FOR FAMILIES



EARLY PSYCHOSIS INTERVENTION  
ONTARIO NETWORK

#mycannabisIQ  
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Being there for your loved one while they make decisions about cannabis use is not always easy. Having the right information is key to helping your loved one make informed decisions about whether or not to use cannabis. It is important to have the facts and background knowledge in order to be as supportive as possible.

We know how important it is to make decisions that work for you and your family. This booklet was created by EPION's members to help you and your loved ones stay in-the-know about cannabis, its side effects, and the risk factors to keep in mind before deciding to use.



# **BOOST YOUR** *Cannabis IQ*

**Know the drug.  
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# The Big Picture

## **Now that it's legal, is it healthy?** PAGE 1

No: Legalizing cannabis doesn't mean it is always safe or healthy for everyone. Different strains of cannabis have different impacts on health depending upon medical history, age of use, and potency of the cannabis. It is important to know the facts about the drug and the risks for each individual.

## **Is there a connection between cannabis and psychosis?** PAGE 2

Yes: There is considerable evidence linking cannabis use to psychosis. Teenage marijuana use can induce psychosis several years later. Full recovery from psychosis is possible, but the outlook is more hopeful when young people stop their use.

## **Is cannabis more harmful to young people?** PAGE 3

Yes: The brain continues to develop until age 25, so younger users are at a higher risk. Teenagers are at greater risk for psychosis and addiction compared to adults.

## **Are there ways to lower risks?** PAGE 4

Yes: The least amount of risk is not using at all; this is called abstinence. However, if you choose to use, consider how you can reduce risks and use safely. Educate yourself on potency issues, THC vs CBD, frequency of use, and other risk factors.

## **How can I talk to my loved one about cannabis?** PAGE 5

Like any conversation about a complex topic, talking about cannabis will be different for every family. We suggest you understand your family history of mental health and addictions problems, as this can impact on the risk for your loved one. Look for ideas and supports about this topic from trusted healthcare providers.

# Now that it's legal, is it healthy?

No: Legalizing cannabis doesn't mean it is always safe or healthy for everyone. Different strains of cannabis have different impacts on health depending upon medical history, age of use, and potency of the cannabis. It is important to know the facts about the drug and the risks for each individual.

## Quick Facts:

- All drugs come with risks. In general, the younger one starts using, the more frequently they use, and higher potency poses higher risk.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Cannabis-related risks may be immediate or long-term, and can include: cognitive, psychomotor and memory damage; psychosis, hallucinations and impaired perception; addiction/drug dependence; impaired driving, injuries, and/or fatalities; breathing problems; and reproductive problems.<sup>3</sup>
- The onset of most mental health disorders is before 25 (when the brain stops maturing), so those under 25 are at the highest risk of cognitive/mental health effects.<sup>2</sup>

# Is there a connection between cannabis and psychosis?

Yes: There is considerable evidence linking cannabis use to psychosis. Teenage marijuana use can induce psychosis several years later. Full recovery from psychosis is possible, but the outlook is more hopeful when young people stop their use.

## Quick Facts:

- Cannabis and psychosis are linked, but that doesn't mean cannabis causes psychosis, per sé. Some people are vulnerable to psychosis and are better off avoiding cannabis.
- Factors such as genetics, stress, and childhood trauma can make an individual "vulnerable" to psychosis.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Early and regular cannabis use increases the risk of psychosis in those who are vulnerable, and continued use worsens long-term symptoms and functional outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

# Is cannabis more harmful to young people?

Yes: The brain continues to develop until age 25, so younger users are at a higher risk. Even casual cannabis use before age 25 can impact mental health and cause lifelong damage to the brain.

## Quick Facts:

- The human brain is still developing and maturing until at least the mid-20's, so the brain is most at-risk to stress and chemicals (like those in cannabis) during this time.<sup>1,2,3</sup>
- For those under 25, cognitive functions (such as attention, memory, and overall intelligence) may be permanently impaired by regular cannabis use. Once impacted, choosing to stop cannabis use after using regularly may improve some, but not all, of these cognitive domains.<sup>2</sup>
- Early and regular cannabis use is linked to younger onset of psychosis and bipolar disorder. Younger use has been linked to higher rates of drug dependence as an adult.<sup>2</sup>

# Are there ways to lower risks?

Yes: The least amount of risk is not using at all; this is called abstinence. However, if you choose to use, consider how you can reduce risks and use safely. Educate yourself on potency issues, THC vs CBD, frequency of use, and other risk factors.

## Quick Tips:

- Encourage abstinence for anyone who is under 25 or has experienced psychosis. Failing that, aim for only occasional use (at most once a week<sup>3</sup>).
- Only use cannabis from a known source, with trustworthy people, in a safe environment with a designated driver.
- Keep an eye on levels of THC (tetrahydrocannabinol). Higher THC potency is linked with immediate and long-term negative effects on cognition and mental health.<sup>2,3</sup>

## Suggested Reading:

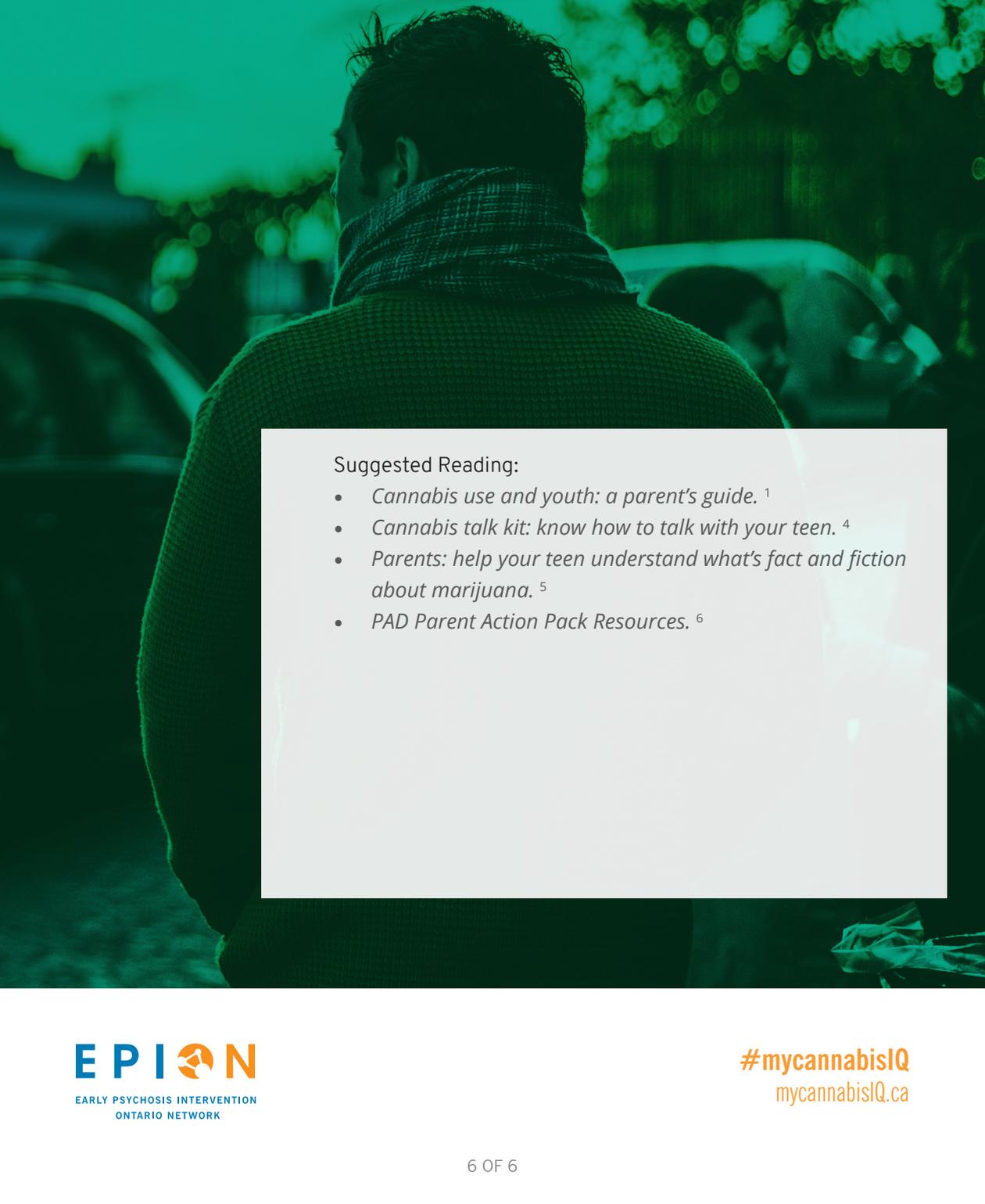
*Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines*<sup>3</sup>

# How can I talk to my loved one about cannabis?

Like any conversation about a complex topic, talking about cannabis will be different for every family. We suggest you understand your family history of mental health and addictions problems, as this can impact on the risk for your loved one. Look for ideas and supports about this topic from trusted healthcare providers.

## Quick Tips:

- Start with the facts! Know the drug, know your loved one, know the risks. The more you know what you're talking about, the more naturally the conversation will flow.
- Whether you use or abstain, the decisions you make about cannabis use for yourself are likely observed by your loved one and factored in to their decision making. <sup>4</sup>
- Read over some existing toolkits to make yourself more comfortable with starting the conversation. Make sure you choose the method(s) that feels most natural.



Suggested Reading:

- *Cannabis use and youth: a parent's guide.* <sup>1</sup>
- *Cannabis talk kit: know how to talk with your teen.* <sup>4</sup>
- *Parents: help your teen understand what's fact and fiction about marijuana.* <sup>5</sup>
- *PAD Parent Action Pack Resources.* <sup>6</sup>

## REFERENCES:

1. *Cannabis use and youth: a parent's guide*. Heretohelp (BC) 2014.
2. *Position Statement: Implications of Cannabis Legalization on Youth and Young Adults*. Canadian Psychiatric Association. 2017.
3. *Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines*. Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse & CAMH. 2017.
4. *Cannabis talk kit: know how to talk with your teen*. Drug Free Kids Canada. 2017.
5. *Parents: help your teen understand what's fact and fiction about marijuana*. Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. 2017.
6. PAD Parent Action Pack Resources:
  - a) *Stats, facts, and talking points about alcohol and other drugs*. PAD Parent Action Pack Resource. 2016
  - b) *Questions Parents Ask: How to approach issues of alcohol and other drug use with your teen*. PAD Parent Action Pack Resource. 2013.
  - c) *Questions Teens Ask: About alcohol and other drug use*. PAD Parent Action Pack Resource. 2013.

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**E P I O N**

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ONTARIO NETWORK

# *Cannabis IQ*

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Have more questions about Cannabis and Psychosis?  
Please contact:

ATTACH PROGRAM LABEL

For more resources in this series, please visit:  
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## What is EPION?

EPION is a network of people who work in early psychosis intervention (EPI) services in Ontario, individuals who have received EPI services, and their family members and caregivers.

## What we do

We help strengthen early intervention services across Ontario and support the implementation of the MOHLTC's Early Psychosis Intervention Program Standards, released in May 2011.

### OUR MISSION:

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To promote rapid psychosis detection and access to care, to advance early psychosis intervention through research and knowledge exchange, and to implement and advance standards of care for early psychosis intervention.

### OUR VISION:

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To build and support a network of provincial leaders that advances knowledge, provides advocacy, promotes quality evidence-based care and support for people and families living with early psychosis.



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