



Driving While High

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“Pot is the sneakiest of drugs because it takes out your functioning. It decreases reaction time. It messes up judgment. It messes up driving,”

– Steven Jaffe, MD, psychiatrist

For a young driver, there are so many dangers: speed, ego, inexperience and another often ignored danger: drugs.

“I think it’s very irresponsible and it could lead to a lot of dangerous accidents. It’s just as bad as driving drunk – quite possible even worse,” says 17-year-old Allison Meisburg.

Researchers from the University of Montreal studied the habits of 83 male drivers. They found that nearly 20 percent have been high behind the wheel.

“...and I would estimate at least two or three times that number have been in the car in which the driver was stoned,” says Dr. Steven Jaffe, a psychiatrist, who specializes in substance abuse issues.

“[Driving while high] is not as bad as drinking and driving, but it is still bad of course, because you know your reflexes are delayed and all that jazz,” says 16-year old Justin.

Experts say teens simply don’t realize the dangers.

It’s hard to believe, but some kids believe pot helps them driver *better*.

“They really think they do,” says Dr. Jaffe. “But they don’t. They really don’t. They don’t realize they are impaired. Pot is the sneakiest of drugs because it takes out your functioning. It decreases reaction time. It messes up their judgment. It messes up driving.”

Dr. Jaffe says parents should adopt a zero-tolerance attitude. Remind your kids that pot is a mind-altering drug and not to ride with drivers who are high on *any* drug. Then, remind them of the consequences.

“The biggest consequence would be you run into another on-coming car during traffic and you kill them and yourself. That’d be the biggest consequence,” says Reggie, 17.

Dr. Jaffe concurs. “It only takes one time to kill yourself and kill somebody else.”

Tips for Parents

According to government studies, nearly 11 million Americans, including one in five 21-year-olds, have driven while under the influence of illegal drugs. Young adults don't consider driving while high to be as dangerous as driving while under the influence of alcohol, according to John Walters, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. Therefore, his office is starting a campaign warning teens about driving while smoking marijuana. Concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time can all be affected for up to 24 hours after smoking marijuana, Walters said.

So how can you determine if your teen has been using drugs, namely marijuana? The experts at the National Institute on Drug Abuse suggest looking for these trouble signs in your teen. He/she may:

- Seem dizzy and have trouble walking
- Seem silly and giggly for no reason
- Have very red, bloodshot eyes
- Have a hard time remembering things that just happened
- Seem very sleepy or groggy (after the early effects fade, sleepiness may occur)

In addition to these signs, parents should also be alert to changes in any of the following:

- Behavior, such as withdrawal, depression, fatigue, carelessness with grooming, hostility and deteriorating relationships with friends and family
- Academic performance, including absenteeism and truancy
- Loss of interest in sports or other favorite hobbies
- Eating or sleeping patterns

Also be on the lookout for:

- Signs of drugs and drug paraphernalia
- Odor on clothes and in bedroom
- Use of incense and other deodorizers
- Use of eye drops
- Clothing, posters, jewelry, etc., promoting drug use

References

- National Institute on Drug Abuse
- Parents. The Anti-Drug.
- Office of National Drug Control Policy
- University of Montreal