

New Film-Based High School Resource Encourages Open Conversation About Cannabis

Opportunity to pilot new materials

Teens need opportunities to talk openly and honestly about cannabis (marijuana), especially given the confusing mix of messages about the drug in today's media and elsewhere. This is why researchers at the UBC School of Nursing have developed CYCLES, a new classroom resource for secondary schools that explores decision making and cannabis use, based on studies involving youth in three BC communities.

CYCLES features a locally produced short film (28 minutes) about two fictional high school students and their relationships with cannabis. It also contains classroom materials that support self-reflection and dialogue about factors that can influence a teen's choices to use—or not use—the drug. The resource includes lesson plans, teaching tips, student handouts, and quick facts about cannabis use. Facilitators of the 50-minute module (or longer if a deeper discussion is desired) do not need to be experts on cannabis or any other drug. Their role is simply to guide a thoughtful class discussion, whether students are experienced with cannabis and its effects or not.

"Meaningful dialogue with young people about marijuana use can translate into informed decision making," say the resource's creators. In other words, talking things out may make frequent users consider cutting down on how often they took up, and it may delay or deter other students from trying cannabis in the first place.

A recent survey of BC students supports the call for open, non-judgmental conversations in schools about cannabis and other drugs. Teens who are able to discuss such issues with parents, teachers and other adults are more likely to make healthier decisions. Rates of substance use among students have been declining for a decade according to [McCreary Centre Society's 2013 Adolescent Health Survey](#). The vast majority of students in Grades 7 through 12 said they had never tried cannabis (74%), and many of those with experience reported waiting until they were at least 15 before first experimenting with the drug. Eight percent of students reported using cannabis on the weekend before the survey was taken, down from 12% in 2008.

"Judging young people for their choices regarding marijuana is not helpful," reads a CYCLES footnote. "Engaging in meaningful discussion contributes to healthy dialogue."

Educators and adult facilitators interested in pilot testing these knowledge translation materials are encouraged to contact Barbara Moffat at barb.moffat@nursing.ubc.ca