



## Talking to Children about Marijuana

Until recently, when parents found that a child was using marijuana, they panicked. Now, more and more countries are legalizing marijuana. It has become socially “kosher.” What should *frum* parents do? Should we see it as kosher too?

If you are looking for halachic guidance, consult a *posek*.

I spent over 40 years treating chemical addiction, and I can only give you my opinion.

Drugs such as opiates or cocaine are recognized as being potentially deadly. But inasmuch as there is no sudden death from marijuana, people consider it safe. There are arguments for and against the use of marijuana, but there is one danger in marijuana that is largely unrecognized.

Especially in young people, marijuana can cause amotivational syndrome. It can significantly decrease a person’s motivation or drive for achievement, but this is hardly noticeable. The danger is much like cancer, which may not produce symptoms for years, but when it does, it may be life-threatening.

People who use marijuana may hold a job or go through school, but may not achieve their potential. A person who would not accept his car operating at only 60% of its potential may have to accept that he has not realized his capabilities and is functioning at 60% of his ability.

A man of 38 consulted me. “My father is a prominent physician, head of a department in a major hospital. He is highly respected and sought after as a lecturer. My dream as a kid was that I would grow up to be a somebody. Maybe a doctor like my father, or a scientist, or a mathematician or a historian. I always wanted recognition. I only got a bachelor’s degree and made passing grades, and for me, that is not satisfactory. I used pot frequently, but I was unaware of how it was affecting me. I blew it. I could have become a somebody, but not anymore.”

There are many people who have great potential, but to activate this potential requires drive and effort and they may have to compete against others. While only one of the dangers,\* the

amotivational syndrome resulting from marijuana may deplete the drive necessary for success.

We cannot control our children. They will make their own decisions. But we can educate them. Parents should thoroughly educate themselves on marijuana use and share their knowledge with their children. Don’t threaten. Just put the cards on the table and hope that they will make the right decision.

**Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski** is a psychiatrist and rabbi, and founder of the Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pennsylvania.

**\*Editor’s note: Aside from amotivational syndrome, marijuana use can cause short term memory impairment, difficulty thinking clearly, changes in mood, body movement impairment, and sometimes hallucinations, delusions, or even psychosis, which can lead to dangerous behavior. Marijuana use can also negatively affect long-term brain development and is associated with lower IQ levels when used by teenagers. For more information, see [drugabuse.gov](http://drugabuse.gov).**