

Ron Luce: Legalized Pot a Buzz-Kill for Teens

Washington and Colorado have recently legalized marijuana use for adults over age 21. Some might see this as a progressive step forward, but in truth, it's a major buzz-kill for teenagers.

The effects of both legal and illegal marijuana use are impacting youth in America in a major way. Substance abuse experts already see a correlation between the legalization of marijuana in these states and increased use among teens. Studies have shown that even before these laws were in effect, teens were abusing this drug at a high rate: Two-thirds of first-time marijuana users are under 18, and one in six teens who tries marijuana becomes addicted to it.

Our culture glamorizes drug use in movies, in music and on television. Teens are bombarded with these messages, and the devastating consequences of marijuana use are almost never portrayed. Now, 14 states are considering following Colorado and Washington in legalizing marijuana.

While some might say that legalizing marijuana gets it out of the hands of unscrupulous dealers, and therefore protect teens, we should all know better. Creating a culture more tolerant of drug use makes drug use more "acceptable" in the minds of teens. In fact, Colorado is among the states with the highest teen marijuana abuse, and usage is increasing while the perception of risk is falling.

We need to help our teens understand that marijuana use isn't glamorous, and it isn't safe. Not only are there risks to their health and brain development, but driving under the influence of marijuana can be just as dangerous as driving drunk.

Besides, why would we want to send a message to a generation ripe with potential that getting hooked on a chemical is an okay thing? We are talking about the future leaders of our nation! All of the "Just say no!" messages fly out the window when we make laws that say, "Well, *this* particular drug is okay."

Marijuana takes away motivation and passion for life and for work. When's the last time you heard of any great inventions coming out of Amsterdam, where pot has been legal for a generation?

Do we want an addicted generation? Or do we want a generation that values a sober mind and responsible behavior?

The teenagers of our nation are *yearning* for more from life. They crave a meaningful life. Instead of pushing a message that tells them "life is hard, so ease it with a drug," let us instead inspire them to take on the challenges of life with ingenuity, creativity and dedication.

There's also a spiritual risk with drug use. If teens relinquish control of their minds to drugs, they are inviting all kinds of terrible things to come in. So many people have become oppressed, depressed, or even possessed because of drug use. By letting their guards down physically and spiritually, they can be invaded by things they never asked for and may never have been aware of.

The Old Testament word for "sorcery," or communication with demons and evil spirits, is "pharmakeia." Pharmakeia is where we get our word "pharmacy." It was directly related to drug abuse. Sorcerers would ingest different things to distort their minds, allowing them to communicate with evil spirits.

Teach your teen that as he gives up control of his mind to a drug, he no longer has the resources to stand against the world of evil spirits. Help him understand all of the *why's* against using drugs rather than just giving him

a *no*. You'll be amazed at how responsive your teen will be if you're arming him with information and helping him develop a plan for how to deal with the pressure to use drugs. When it becomes *his* conviction and not just yours, he will be able resist the allure of drugs and stand strong against the turning tide of culture.

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