

DON'T READ THIS

Now that I have your attention, let me tell you a little story. While living in Europe working as a professional dancer, I traveled extensively and had the chance to interact with many different cultures. Once, after a performance in Berlin, we attended an “underground” music event in an abandoned factory. During the intermission a German musician was rolling a joint with tobacco and hash sprinkled together and one of the dancers in our troupe suggested leaving the tobacco out. The joint roller commented, “What? You want only the hashish?”

“Yes,” said the American sincerely. “Why add tobacco?”

Then the German fellow paused and looked up. “You know,” he said, “we Germans just want to relax and be social when we smoke pot. You Americans want to get f— up! You just want to get f— up!”

I smiled inwardly. He had a point.

With marijuana and alcohol, it appears many young Americans are only interested in consuming to excess. Young Europeans in general begin drinking legally at age sixteen because, I believe, they have a sense of maturity, balance, and common sense about “catching a buzz.” It is not about getting f— up. It is about being smart, knowing your limits, and enjoying the moment. That is balance.

I understand the topic is controversial and not everyone is supportive of an open discussion. In the United States, marijuana is illegal for anyone under age twenty-one, and that will likely never change. However, just as there are sex education classes for teens (who are not supposed to be engaging in sex), I believe education is appropriate for the millions of teens who are not supposed to be smoking pot...but will anyway.

In working with teens as a licensed counselor over the last twenty years, I have seen many succeed and change shape as they moved through the often difficult years of adolescence. I have also seen many struggle to find that next step that moves them from problem child to thriving young adult. Some teens simply have an easier time with the emotions, burdens, and challenges of adolescence, and some truly struggle. The reasons are many, from mental health and genetics to parenting style and coping skills. I am a cognitive-behavioral counselor and primarily work within a framework that teaches, smart choices reduce suffering.

In writing this book, it is my intent to explore pertinent issues posed to me over the years by teens who smoke marijuana. I hope this will lead to the possibility of teens and parents discussing marijuana in a healthy and respectful manner. Some of you may think pot is no big deal. Others may think the drug is horrible and to be forbidden at all costs. I try and walk a middle path. One thing for sure is that the subject is relevant to the millions of young people smoking pot today.

THE BEGINNING

HELLO

We were parked in a parking garage, top floor, with a view of the distant mountains. All of us, Jimmy, Ronnie, and me, were sixteen years old. The sun was setting, and the sky was glowing red and purple and orange as we passed the joint around on a hot summer night. Suddenly, a car pulled up next to us, and Jimmy's mom got out. We were busted! But, Jimmy's mom did not freak out. She asked us all to get out of the car and had a talk with us right there on the parking garage. She was disappointed in all of us, but somehow let us know she really cared. I remember thinking, what a cool mom. Then she went home.

Marijuana is on America's mind. According to a recent study by the Partnership at Drugfree.org, one in ten American teens smoke marijuana at least twenty or more times per month. That means over two million teens smoke pot regularly, many every day. Though marijuana remains illegal for anyone under the age of twenty-one, the reality is that millions of American teens will try marijuana this year. As of this writing, two states have legalized marijuana for adults (over age twenty-one), and numerous others have medical marijuana dispensaries. Several states have decriminalized marijuana and relaxed laws for minor infractions. Alaska and Oregon are about to vote on the issue, and six other states—Arizona, California, Maine, Massachusetts, Montana, and Nevada—are expected to hold referendums on legalization in 2016. Internationally, the country of Uruguay recently legalized marijuana for anyone eighteen or older.

This book is not about promoting or discouraging the smoking of marijuana. This is about the reality of smoking pot and *harm reduction*. I discussed the idea of harm reduction the other day with a colleague. He is a licensed counselor for at-risk youth, and many of his teen patients smoke pot. We discussed the need for young people who smoke pot to be smart about it. Smart does not mean book smart. Smart means knowing how to be successful, thrive, and create a good life in the present, which leads to the future.

In the end, *One Toke* is a young person's survival guidebook to something millions of Americans do: smoke weed. Knowing how to *smoke smart* is essential for maintaining a balanced life, in which you feel good about your personal choices and accomplishments. And if you have not noticed, many people are out of balance. Balance is essential to survival. Without it, people, get sick. With balance, which takes practice, life's journey is simply more enjoyable. This balance will ideally allow you to blossom as an individual and pursue your dreams.

WHY START?

There are many reasons young people start smoking pot, but some of the most important reasons are:

1. Relaxing and escaping from the pressures of life.
2. Belonging to a community and making friendships.
3. Developing a personal identity.
4. Peer pressure.

For the most part, teens are on their own when it comes to smoking pot. Many parents will say and see nothing, unless there is a problem. Maybe your parents have a little marijuana chat with you, but if you are doing well with school, home, and friends, there is often less worry from Mom or Dad. That's fine. Teens figure things out as they go along.

People ask, "Aren't adolescent pot smokers generally unproductive, lazy, and goofy, messing up their short-term memory, among other brain functions?" Yes. And no. Science is still figuring out the long-term effects of smoking pot. A big concern is how a beginner handles smoking pot. The reality is that there are young people who are *smart* about smoking (and by smart, I mean having common sense and discipline). *How* you smoke pot (if you smoke pot) is important. Some young people make a mess of smoking pot and do poorly at school. Some young people do fine.

In a new groundbreaking study (March 2014) Peggy van der Pol of the Trimbos Institute of the Netherlands Institute of Mental Health and Addiction, determined that *how* pot is smoked affects addiction risk.

Because some people will thrive and get ahead in life, and some will not do well smoking pot, knowing how to smoke smart is essential. *How* you smoke pot means how often, where, and when.

VYO (Voice Your Opinion):

If you smoke pot, why did you start?

www.onetoke.org