

## Marijuana Messages in Pop Culture: What Parents Need To Know



### ●The Direct Impact Of Media On Youth:

Research has found that the three most important influences for youth come from peers, media and adults. Media are significant because youth spend so much of their time consuming media—watching TV, listening to music, going to the movies, and so on. Although adults have the most powerful influence, youth today spend substantially less time with adults than they have in previous generations.

Youth are given many strong messages from the entertainment and advertising world about what makes you cool. Marijuana use now has become a defining criterion for "belonging" among certain teen subcultures. Many youth acknowledge spending more time watching and listening to entertainment media and being with friends than with adult role models. They more often than not follow the norms of the peer group and the youth culture of their respective communities.

For example, a recent market research report stated that of the top 10 reported teen activities, watching TV, listening to music (CDs and tapes), listening to the radio, and "hanging" with friends are in the top 5. Even so, youth report that adults still have the most power with them.

The level and amount of media penetration varies among specific populations and subcultures. For example, research shows that African Americans from low-income families on average go to three to four movies a month, buy two to three rap CDs a month, and watch more than 70 hours of TV a week. VCR penetration in households with adolescents is more than 94 percent (compared to the national average of 71 percent), and most households have two VCRs. In fact, studies show that a large number of inner-city teens spend more time watching media programming than they do attending school, being with their parents, going to church, and reading combined. Within this context, the media often play an increasing role in defining acceptable behavior and values for youth particularly in relation to marijuana use.

Popular Youth Culture and Marijuana Rap, alternative, and rock music; music videos and feature movies; hip-hop and alternative radio stations; underground music clubs and live concerts frequently give youth the message that using marijuana is acceptable. The music industry often promotes marijuana images in marketing and packaging, implying "insider" status for users. Youth see marijuana symbols in music videos; on clothing, baseball caps, and T-shirts; on posters, stickers and buttons; and on CD and cassette covers. For example, lyrics referring to marijuana use have become a common, if not integral, ingredient in certain genres of rap music. While marijuana use and songs about marijuana were already prevalent among rappers and urban teens, some popular artists thrust the issue into the media spotlight, easing attitudes surrounding marijuana use. And, with the recent resurgence of "pot" themes in rock and alternative music, teens are continuously delivered the message that marijuana is cool.

In the age of the information superhighway, today's youth are becoming increasingly adept in using computers to play games and to access the Internet for information on just about anything they are interested in, including marijuana.

By surfing the Internet a teenager can access the numerous zines (electronic magazines) related to marijuana and other drug use; learn about a board game in which players buy and sell marijuana, hash, and mushrooms; and link up to other sites related to marijuana and other drugs.

#### Summary:

Young people are constantly bombarded with conflicting messages from music, films, and television. By educating ourselves about the issues that influence marijuana use, we will be able to provide our children the information that they need to make better choices.

Source: Reality Check, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services