SBIRT IN PRIMARY CARE

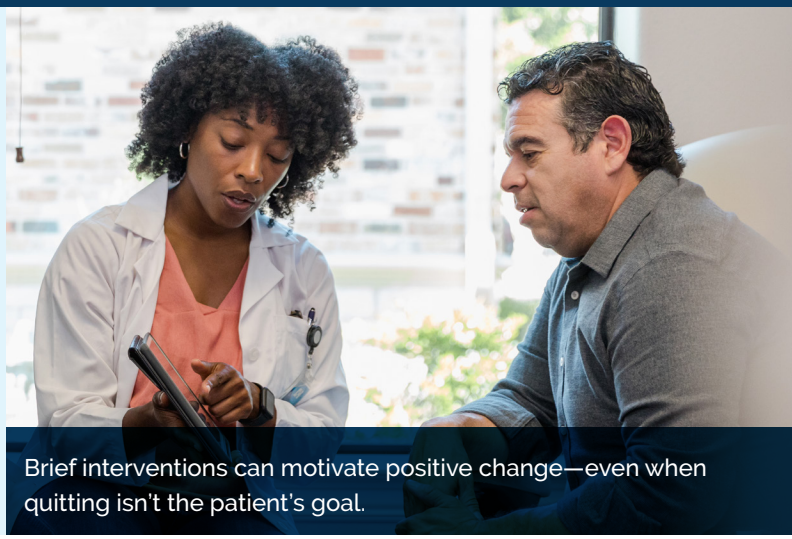
Brief Interventions for Marijuana Use

mosaic GROUP

Brief Interventions for Adults

As both recreational and medical marijuana become increasingly available and more common, primary care providers are in a key position to engage patients in open, nonjudgmental brief interventions about their use.

This quick-reference tool is designed to support productive, stigma-free conversations that promote patient trust, safety, and informed decision-making.



Brief interventions can motivate positive change—even when quitting isn't the patient's goal.

Conversation Prompts

- "With marijuana becoming more available, I like to check in with my patients about their use. What does your current relationship with it look like?"
- "I see you mentioned using marijuana. Can you tell me a bit more about how and why you use it?"
- "What does that look like day to day—where do you get it, and what do you use it for?"
- "What do you like about using it? Have you noticed any downsides or concerns?"
- "Some people find cannabis helps with things like pain or sleep, but it's not risk-free. Would it help to review what we know so far?"

Risks to Discuss

- Memory, attention and learning impairments.
- Onset or exacerbation of anxiety, depression, psychosis.
- Breathing and lung problems are more common when smoking marijuana.
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure, as well as other heart problems that may develop or exacerbate.
- Impairment in reaction time, coordination and attention when driving.
- May interact negatively with other medications metabolized by the liver.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS	HOW TO RESPOND
Marijuana is legal now, it's not harmful.	Legal does not equal safe. Alcohol is also legal but may have harmful effects. Legalization means adults have the right to use it but doesn't guarantee it's safe or without health risks. My job is to help you make choices that support your health, whether something is legal or not.
Marijuana comes from a plant. It's natural, so it's safe.	Marijuana bought on 'the street' can carry greater risk since it might be mixed with other substances. Even though it's natural, like tobacco or opium, cannabis can still affect your heart, lungs, and brain—especially with regular use.
You can't get addicted to marijuana.	Not everyone becomes dependent, but we do know that about 1 in 10 people using cannabis will develop a use disorder. That risk goes up with daily use or if you start young.
Marijuana is safer than alcohol or tobacco.	Each substance has its own risks. While it may not cause liver damage like alcohol or cancer like tobacco, it can still impair memory, motivation, mental and physical health.

Supporting Safer Choices

Including safer and healthier options in a brief intervention about marijuana use allows providers to meet patients where they are— especially those who may not be ready or willing to stop using. By offering practical guidance, providers can help minimize potential harm while maintaining a trusting, nonjudgmental relationship.

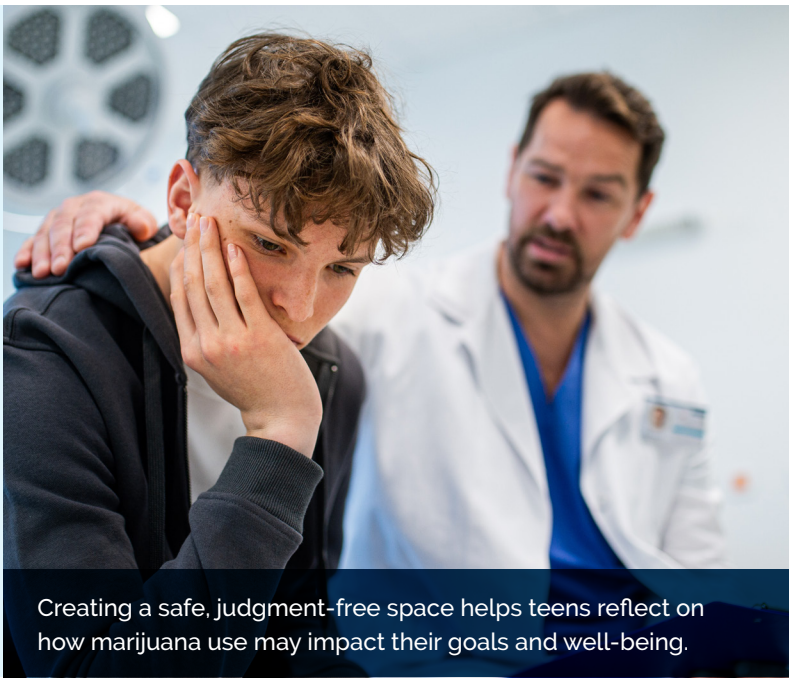
This approach encourages honest dialogue, supports informed decision-making, and prioritizes patient safety, even when abstinence isn't the goal.

MINIMIZING RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH MARIJUANA USE

- Cut back/use less frequently or a smaller amount when quitting is not the goal of the patient.
- Use a lower potency or balanced THC/CBD products.
- Purchase from a dispensary rather than a friend or someone 'on the street.'
- Choose edible marijuana products rather than vaping or smoking.
- Don't mix marijuana with other substances.
- Avoid driving or operating machinery while/after using marijuana.
- Store safely and keep out of reach of children.

Brief Interventions for Adolescents

When discussing marijuana use with adolescents, it's important to approach the topic with openness, curiosity, and respect for the teen's autonomy. Adolescents may view marijuana as harmless or socially acceptable, so rather than correcting or lecturing, providers should focus on exploring the teen's beliefs and experiences while offering accurate, age-appropriate information. Brief interventions should highlight how marijuana use can affect areas meaningful to teens—such as memory, motivation, school performance, sports, or mood—and help them weigh short- and long-term impacts. The goal is to build trust, encourage reflection, and support healthy decision-making rather than demand change.



Creating a safe, judgment-free space helps teens reflect on how marijuana use may impact their goals and well-being.

Conversation Prompts

- "A lot of teens are hearing different things about marijuana these days—what have you heard or noticed about it?"
- "Thanks for being honest about trying marijuana. Do you mind sharing how it makes you feel when you use it?"
- "If you ever wanted to cut back or stop, what kind of support do you think would make that easier?"

Risks to Discuss

- Affects memory, learning, and motivation while the brain is still developing.
- Can worsen anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues.
- Smoking increases the risk of coughing, wheezing, and lung problems.
- Raises heart rate and blood pressure, which may cause dizziness or strain.
- Slows coordination and reaction time, increasing risk while driving or doing other activities.
- Can lower focus and motivation, making it harder to stay engaged with school, work, or personal goals.