

Opinion: Pot or alcohol – a tough choice

By Aaron E. Carroll, New York Times

As my children, and my friends' children, are getting older, a question that comes up again and again from friends is this: Which would I rather my children use – alcohol or marijuana?

The immediate answer, of course, is “neither.” But no parent accepts that. It's assumed, and not incorrectly, that the vast majority of adolescents will try one or the other, especially when they go to college. So they press me further.

The easy answer is to demonize marijuana. It's illegal, after all. Moreover, its potential downsides are well known. Scans show that marijuana use is associated with potential changes in the brain. It's associated with increases in the risk of psychosis. It may be associated with changes in lung function or long-term cancer risk, even though a growing body of evidence says that seems unlikely. It can harm memory, it's associated with lower academic achievement, and its use is linked to less success later in life.

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