

***Addressing the Evolving
Landscape of Youth
Substance Use & the
Impacts on Mental Health***



**2026 VACSB
Connecting through
Purpose
May 7, 2026**

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People protect what they love.

– Jacques Cousteau



Learning Objectives

01

Understand the shift to ultra-potent THC concentrates, unregulated hemp-derived intoxicants, and commercialized psychedelics.

02

Identify the risks—including addiction, psychosis, and cognitive deficits—that today’s high-potency products pose to the developing adolescent brain.

03

Recognize "deception by design," specifically how kid-friendly branding and flavored products are used to exploit regulatory gaps and target youth.

04

Learn evidence-based strategies and communication tools to lead productive, honest conversations with young people

05

Create a practical roadmap for implementing community guardrails to protect communities and kids.



We are an *ally*
We are a *resource*
We are *hand-raisers*
We are *advocates*
We are *solution-drivers*
We are *relentless*
We are a *Voice*



“

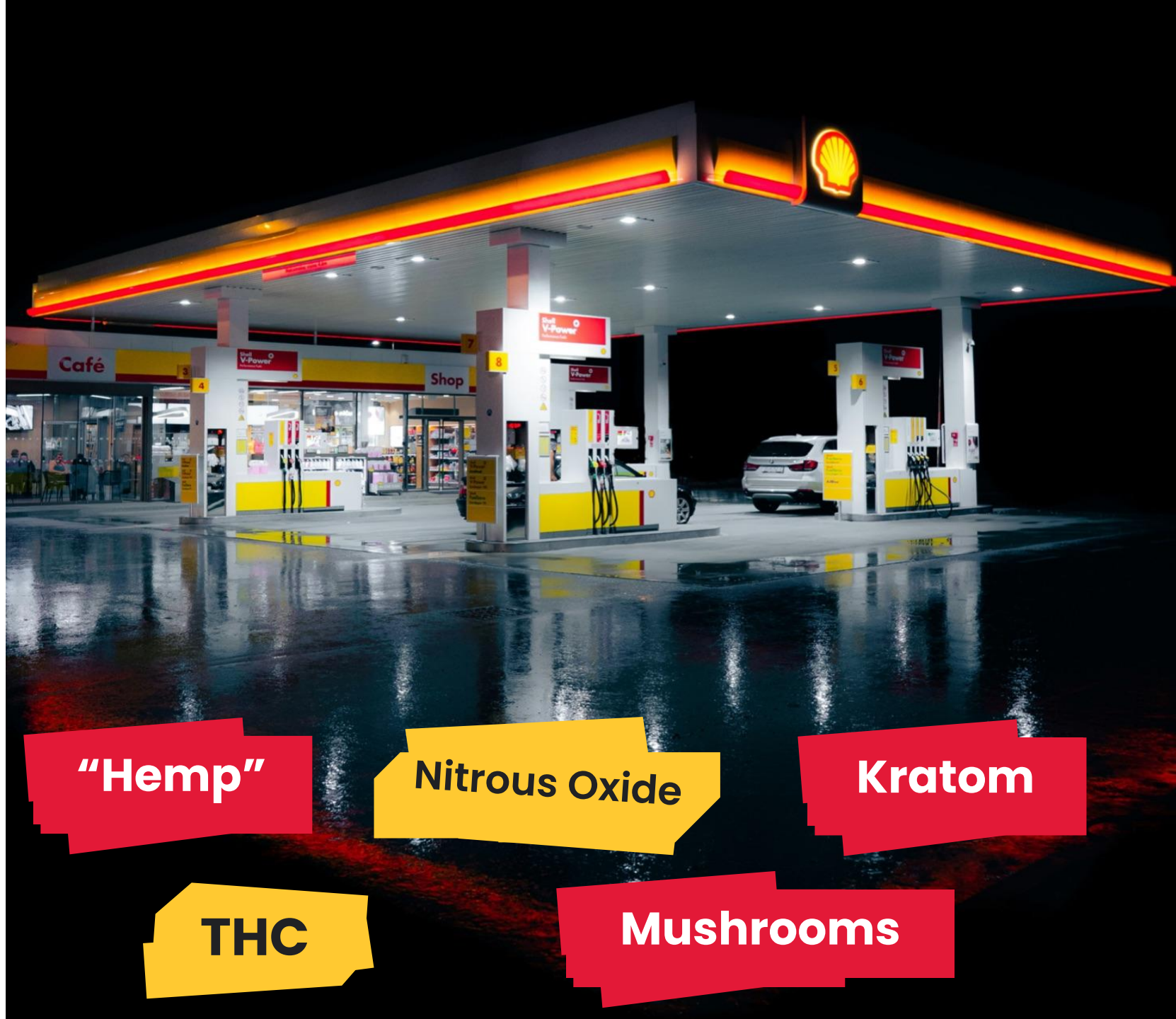
“Make a cigarette which is obviously **youth-oriented**. This could involve cigarette name, blend, flavor and marketing technique...for example, a flavor which would be **candy-like** but give the satisfaction of a cigarette.”

R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company Interoffice Memo

PROBLEM

in the neighborhood

- Legality
- Easy youth access
- Intoxicating
- Not safe/deaths
- Marketed:
 - alternative to controlled substances
 - anxiety
 - depression
 - pain mgt
 - fun
 - wellness



"Hemp"

Nitrous Oxide

Kratom

THC

Mushrooms



Smoke Shops *Then & Now*



Farmer's Markets *Then & Now*



Convenience Stores *Then & Now*



Shopping *Then & Now*



Measuring the Problem



Accidental Poisoning Data on THC

Substance	Stat	Source & Context
Marijuana	1,375% Increase since 2017 in children under 6.	<u>CDC 2025</u> : 3,054 cases in 2021 to 4,500 by 2024. 97% occur in the home
Hemp-Derived THC	10% of cases require Intensive Care - severe respiratory depression, slowed breathing, coma, hypotension, seizures particularly in infants/toddlers.	<u>FDA 2022</u> : Poison control centers reported an 82% increase in delta-8-THC cases in 2022 compared to 2021.

Accidental Poisoning Data on other Intoxicants

Kratom	1200% Surge in poison center calls, record high of 3,434 reports in 2025 (all ages)	<u>NIH: Increases in Kratom-Related Reports to Poison Centers - National Poison Data System, United States, 2015-2025</u> Poly-substance use causes more negative outcomes
Psilocybin	Surge in Calls: 2019-2023, poison center calls for psilocybin increased 723% for children under 12 years old , adolescents (13-19) by 317%	<u>Denver Health: USE OF PSYCHEDELIC SUBSTANCES IN THE UNITED STATES, 2024:</u> Exposures involve kids as young as 10 mo, Rising with normalization of psilocybin
Nitrous Oxide	2010-2023, US saw total (15-74) 1,240 deaths caused by nitrous oxide poisoning	<u>JAMA: US Nitrous Oxide Mortality, 2025)</u> 23 deaths in 2010, 156 deaths 2023: nearly 600% increase

Use of Intoxicants- National

Substance	8th Grade	10th Grade	12th Grade
Marijuana	11.0%	15.6%	25.7%
Hemp-Derived THC	2.4%	5.5%	9.2%
Inhalants (inc Nitrous Oxide)	3.6%	2.7%	1.5%
Hallucinogens (inc Psilocybin)	1.1%	2.3%	4.3%
Kratom	NA	NA	NA

Source: [2025 Monitoring the Future, Past 12-Month Use](#)

Use of Intoxicants- VA data

Substance	8th Grade	10th Grade	12th Grade
Marijuana	11.0%	24.2%	38.3%
Hemp-Derived THC	NA	NA	NA
Inhalants (inc Nitrous Oxide)	NA	NA	NA
Hallucinogens (inc Psilocybin)	NA	NA	NA
Kratom	NA	NA	NA

Trigger warning

The next slides will discuss suicide, mental health, addiction and substance use.



Why It Matters



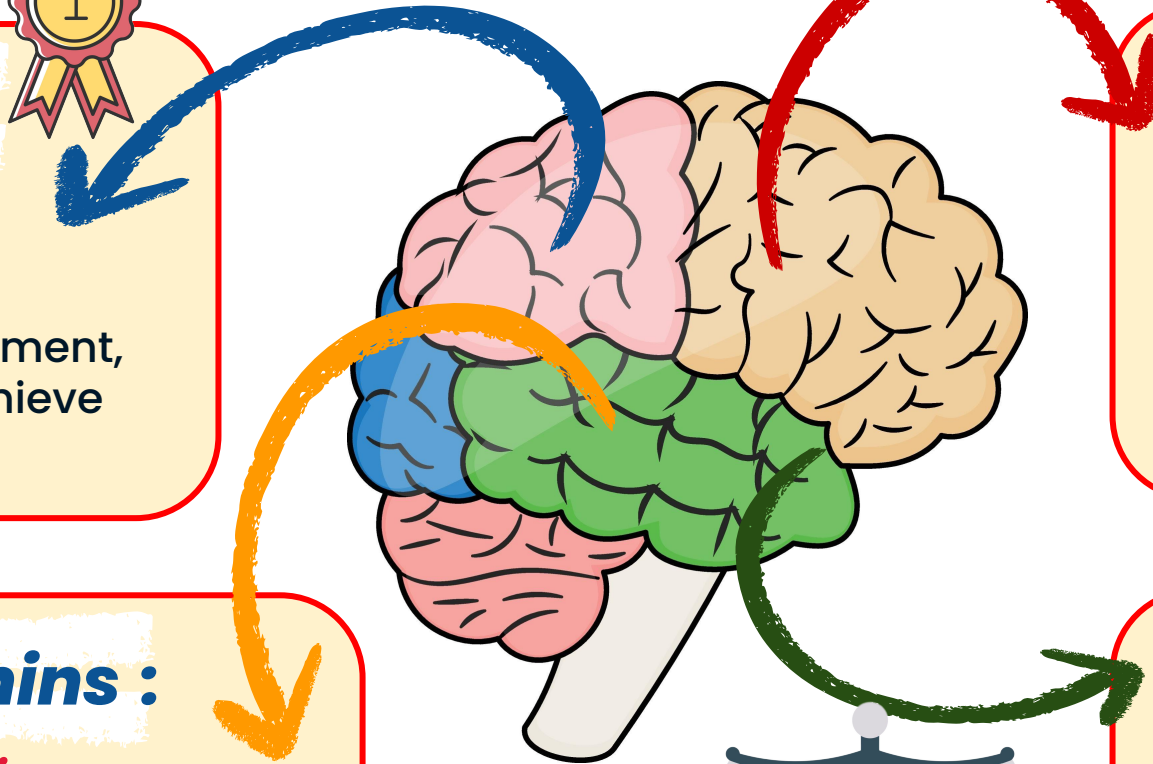
The Brain's Homeostatic Balance: The Four "Happy Chemicals"



Dopamine :

Driver of Rewards

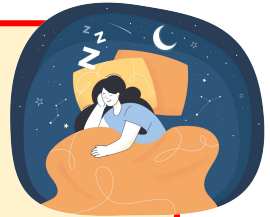
Regulates feelings of pleasure, accomplishment, and motivation to achieve goals. Key for focus.



Serotonin :

The Mood Stabilizer

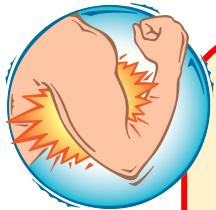
Helps regulate mood, sleep patterns, appetite, and digestion. Key for happiness and emotional stability.



Endorphins :

The Pain Reliever

Released during exercise, stress, or discomfort to dull pain and create a euphoric feeling. Key for resilience.



Oxytocin :

The Bonding Hormone

Fosters trust, social connections, empathy, and feelings of love and attachment. Key for relationships.



The brain and body feel good when these are properly balanced.

What are SUD & CUD?

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER (SUD)

- › A mental disorder involving repeated use of alcohol or drugs
- › Impaired control
- › Social problems
- › Risky use
- › Physical dependence
- › Can risk from mild to **severe**

CANNABIS USE DISORDER (CUD)

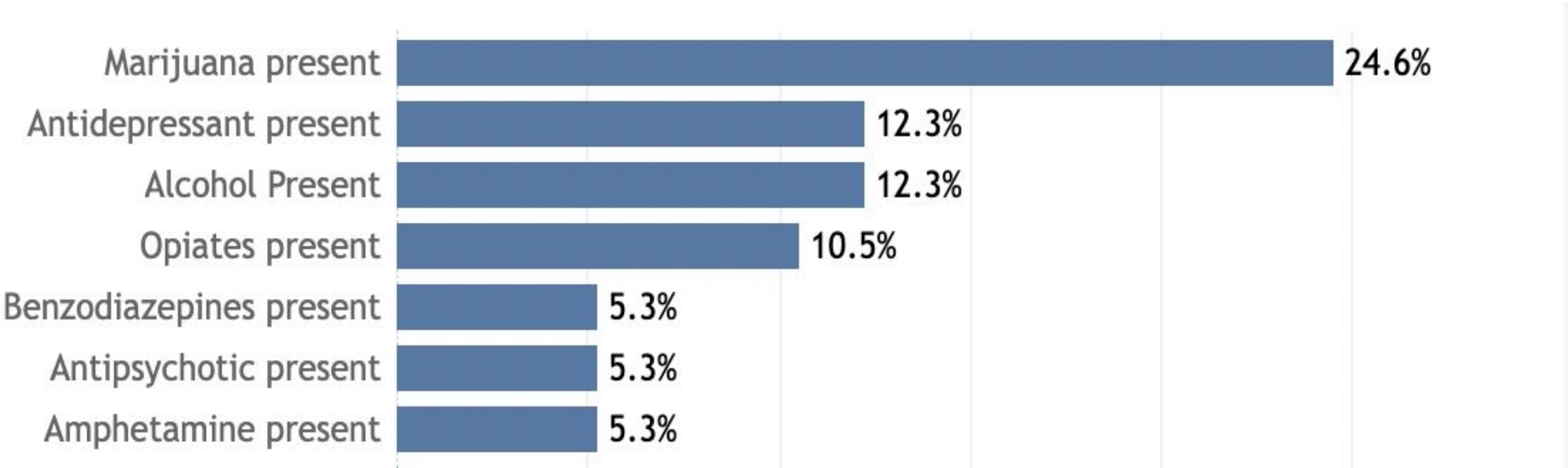
- › A *specific* SUD involving marijuana/THC
- › Cravings
- › Tolerance (needing more to get high)
- › Withdrawal symptoms
- › Continued use despite harms
- › Youth at higher risk



2023 Teen Deaths by Suicide

THC #1 substance in toxicology results,

10-18 YO



Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS)

Recurrent vomiting episodes

Relieved by hot showers

'Scromiting'

Very expensive large evaluations (\$77k)

Does not respond to typical meds

Multiple cases
of
death
have been
reported from CHS

**Stopping Cannabis
usage is the only cure.**

Cannabis Induced Psychosis (CIP)

Distorted perceptions of time/distance

Delusions - believing things that are not true

Anxiety, panic and/or paranoia

Hallucinations — seeing, hearing, feeling things that aren't real

Derealization/Depersonalization - person doesn't feel real/situation doesn't feel real

47%
more likely to
develop
schizophrenia

High-potency THC linked with a tripled risk for psychosis

Definition = over 15% THC

HIGH-POTENCY THC (15% THC or more) 3X INCREASED RISK OF PSYCHOSIS

DAILY USE (15% THC or more) 5X INCREASED RISK OF PSYCHOSIS

NOTE: 93% of CO, WA, OR products are over 15%

FACT:

THC use at 14

**is strongly
associated**

with

opioid use at 19





NOTE:

Early initiation of marijuana use, coupled with **increased frequency and potency**, is associated with a **higher risk** of developing cannabis use disorder (CUD) and other **negative health outcomes**, particularly in **adolescents**. [U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory: Marijuana Use and the Developing Brain](#)

Marijuana: What's Legal in VA

- › Medical cannabis sold by a **licensed processor/ dispensing facility** ([100,000 have medical card @ 1.13% of population 11/24](#))
- › Possession of cannabis for **personal use** in private residence
- › Public possession up to 1 oz. for personal use
- › [Home cultivation](#) of up to 4 cannabis plants
- › [Adult-sharing](#) – the private transfer of 1 oz. or less of cannabis between people 21+ without exchanging anything of value

...and what's not...

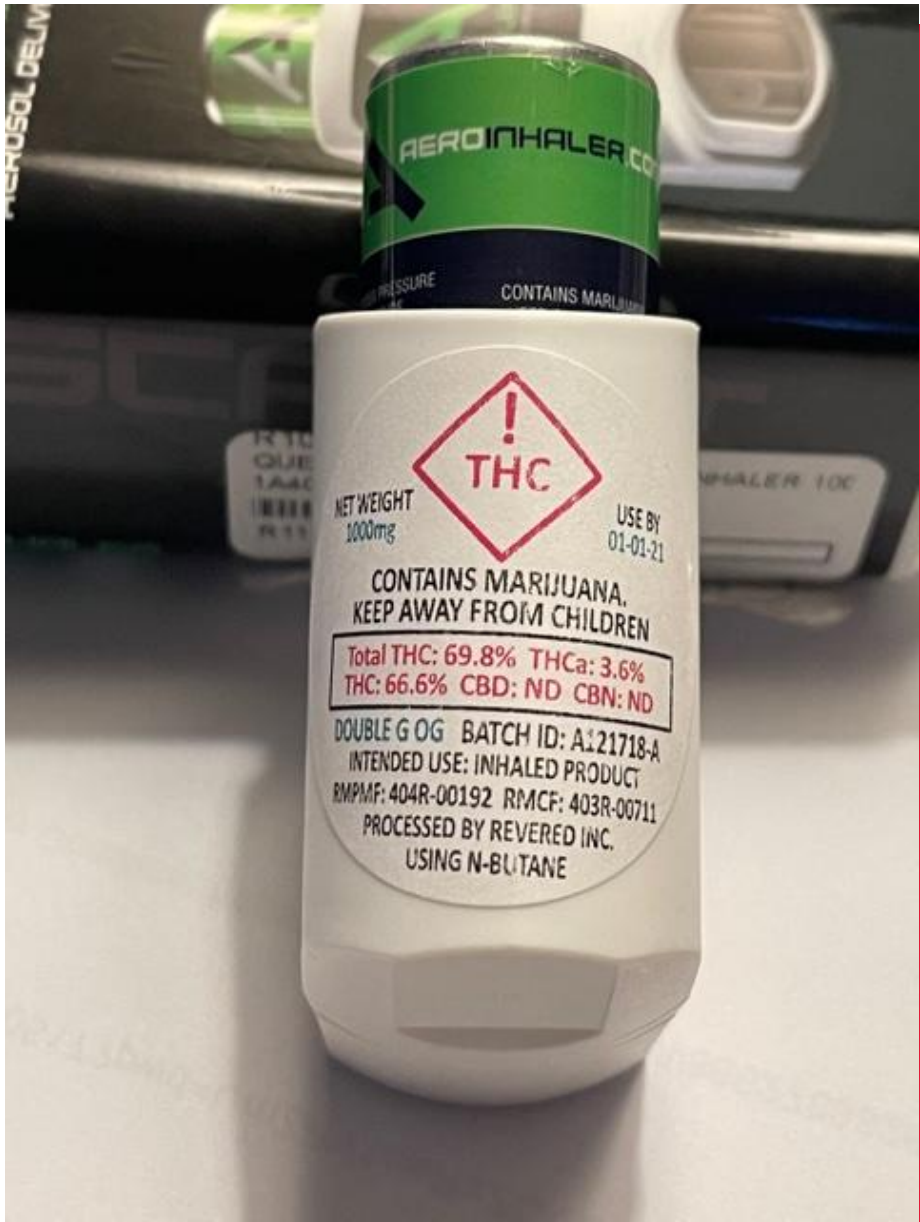
- › Selling/buying adult-use cannabis—retail sales begin January 2027
- › Growing plants visible to the public
- › Driving under the influence of cannabis
- › Carrying cannabis while providing transportation services—cab, Uber, Lyft
- › Storing cannabis open/accessible in passenger area of vehicle

P P
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psst... KID
FRIENDLY





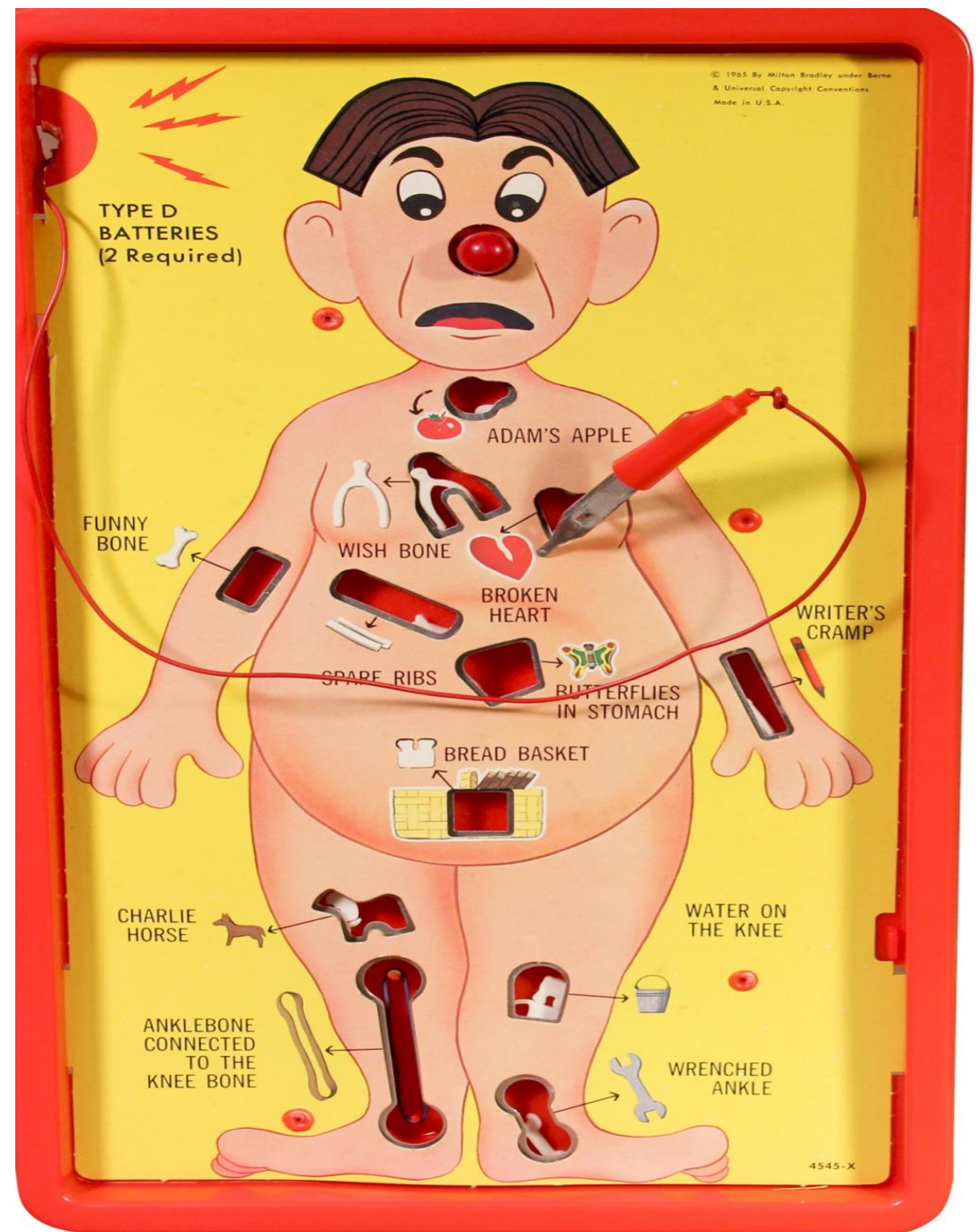


Make anything intoxicating!



THC products in ALL forms

- Eye drops
- Nasal sprays
- Smoking, vaping, dabbing
- Eating
- Drinking
- Inhalers
- Topical body products
- Lubricants
- Suppositories



Psychoactive Hemp-derived Compounds

THCA

THCM

THC-P

THC-H

HHC

THC-B

THCV

HHC-P

Delta 8

Delta 10

HHC-0

Delta 11

Delta 9

PHC

and growing...



Delta 9 THC

+

PHC

+

Delta 10 THC

+

THC-X

+

THC-B

+

THC-P

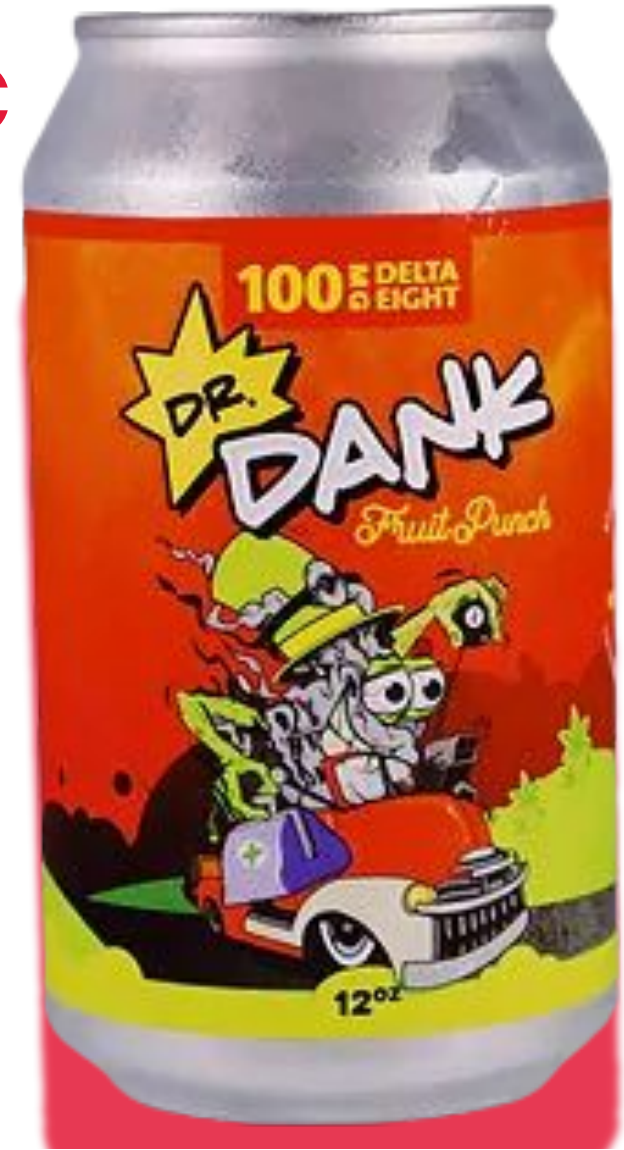


**"Mom's
Apple Pie"**

**500mg
THC**

Hemp Math: 0.3% is **A LOT** of THC

- Could have **1,065 mg THC** in 12 oz. can & remain under the 0.3% limit
- 1 fluid oz = 29.57 grams
- 12 oz beverage = 355 grams
- 355 grams x 0.003 (max THC of 0.3%) = 1.065 grams = 1,065 milligrams THC
- **10X-100X more** than in most legal marijuana beverages



12 oz. hemp-infused beverage

Problems of INTOXICATING HEMP

Varied age limit, ID checks?

Synthetic chemicals/derivatives

Marijuana substitute

Little research

*pending federal ban
November 2026



THC is THC is THC is THC is THC is THC is THC



Hemp Warnings from the FDA:

"Delta-8 THC products have **not been evaluated or approved by the FDA** for safe use in any context."

"Some of these products may be labeled simply as **"hemp products,"** which may mislead consumers who associate "hemp" with "non-psychoactive."

"Selling unapproved products with **unsubstantiated therapeutic claims** is not only a violation of federal law, but also can put consumers at risk."

Among FDA reports of adverse events related to Delta-8 THC:

- **55% required medical intervention** (e.g., ER and/or hospital admission).
- **66% described ingesting THC food products** (brownies, gummies, etc.).
- **82% of unintentional exposures involved pediatric patients.**
- Adverse events included **hallucinations, vomiting, tremor, anxiety, dizziness, confusion, and loss of consciousness.**

"Manufacturers are packaging and labeling these products in ways that may **appeal to children** (gummies, chocolates, cookies, candies, etc.). These products may be purchased online, as well as at a variety of retailers, including convenience stores and gas stations, where **there may not be age limits on who can purchase these products.**"

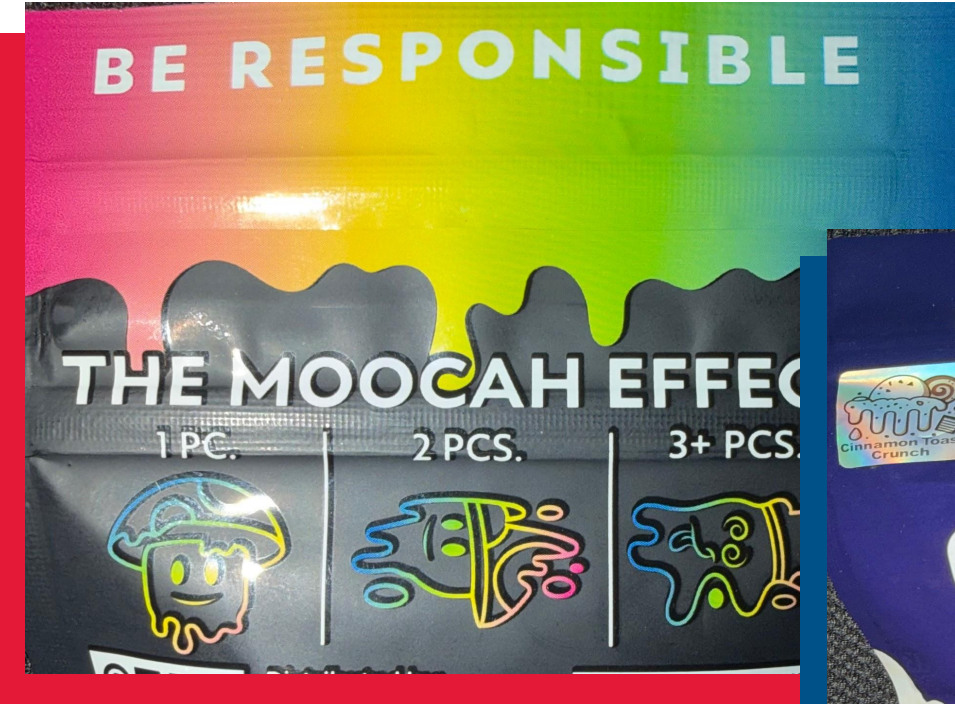
Psilocybin: The latest “natural medicine”



Words matter:

- **“Natural”** is synonymous with “healthy” for impressionable teens
- **“Medicine”** implies treatment by a physician
- **“Healing Center”** suggests that use is safe and healthy, providing a cure
...even though no diagnosis, condition, or doctor is required

Psilocybin



Psychedelic Warnings from the FDA:

Adverse Health Events Reported:

- Convulsions, coma, delirium, sleepiness, CNS depression, death
- 180 illnesses and 3 deaths from Diamond Shroomz products

Amanita Muscaria Does Not Meet Food Safety Standards

- Marketed as "psychedelic edibles"
 - Does not meet "GRAS" standards
 - Not approved for use in any conventional food
-
- **Mislabeled** - Products contained other drugs not labeled
 - **Children mistake these products as candy** - chocolate bars, cones & gummies

KRATOM *mitragynine(my-trag-i-nine)*



“This is a public health crisis waiting to happen.”

Christopher R. McCurdy, University of Florida medicinal chemistry professor & trained pharmacist



lemon iced tea
fruit punch
strawberry
cherry bomb



KRATOM - no longer a plant...
where have we heard that before?

“Our unique blend is designed to create a state of chilled energy, helping to clear your mind & elevate your mood, so you can be more present & in the moment.”



“This addiction completely destroyed my physical, mental, and emotional health.”

Key Virginia Kratom Laws as of 2026

- **Age Restriction:** Illegal to sell/distribute, give kratom to anyone under age 21
- **Labeling Requirements:**
 - must include a warning "*may be harmful to your health, has not been evaluated by the FDA, and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease*"
 - Must have clear, transparent labeling, listing all ingredients

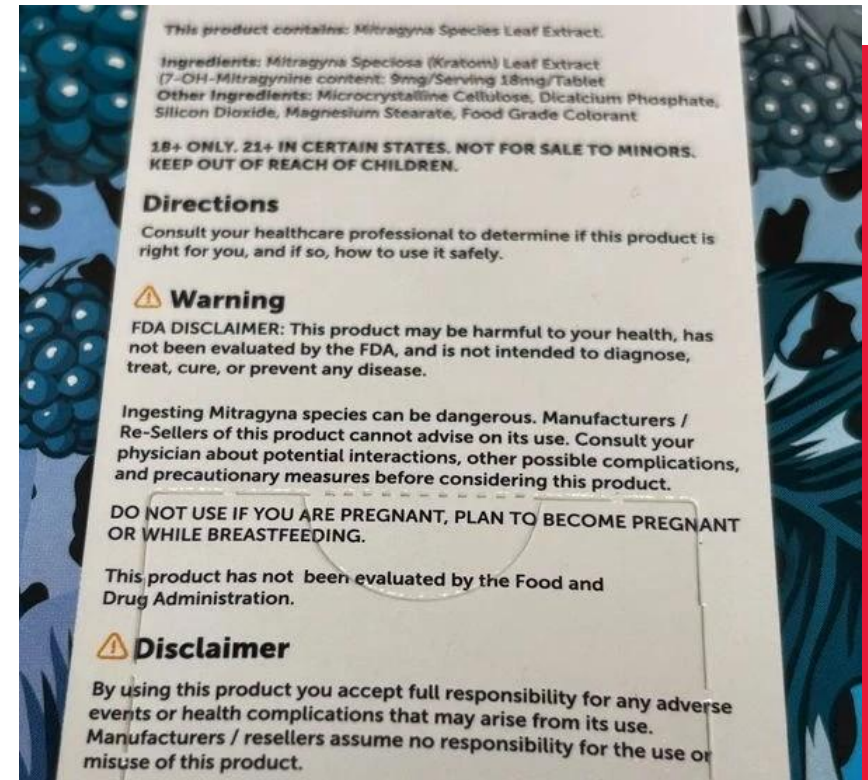


Image source:
<https://newschannel9.com/news/local/fda-hhs-sound-alarm-over-easy-access-to-potentially-addictive-kratom-by-product-7-oh>

7-OH Warnings from the FDA:

Adverse Health Events Reported:

- Fatal respiratory depression, seizures, anxiety & insomnia
- 1600+ poison control cases in 2024, 800% increase since 2014

Not FDA Approved / Evaluated

- 7-OH is an opioid, not a treatment for opioid withdrawal
- Anxiety, depression or other mood disorders

● Engineered to be Addictive

- 13X more potent than morphine, 500% higher than kratom leaf

● Risk to Children

- Gummies, candies and “eye-catching” products like ice cream cones

Nitrous Oxide

- Sold as whipped cream chargers, culinary products
- Available online, retail stores, vape shops, gas stations
- Marketed with appealing branding and flavors

Why This Matters for Youth

- Easy access, misleading marketing= increase risk of misuse
- Perception of being “safe” or legal lower perceived harm





photo credit Supreme Whip

Virginia Nitrous Oxide Regulations (SB360/HB648)

- **Prohibited Use:** Illegal to deliberately inhale for intoxication.
- **Youth Access Ban:** Unlawful to sell/distribute to **anyone under 18**
- **Mandatory ID Checks:** Sellers must conduct "diligent inquiry" via **photo ID** for all purchases
- **Product Restrictions: Ban flavored canisters** and any units exceeding 8g
- **Enforcement:** Violation of sales restrictions=**Class 1 misdemeanor**

FDA Advice on Nitrous Oxide:

Adverse Health Events Reported:

- Death, asphyxiation, paralysis, unconsciousness*
- Psychiatric disturbances—delusions, hallucinations, paranoia, depression
- Prolonged neurological effects, spinal cord or brain damage

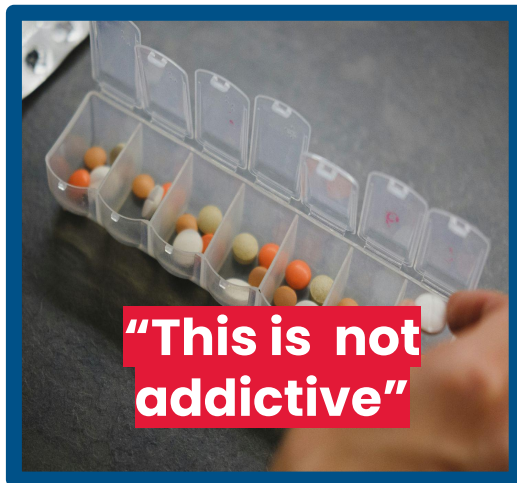
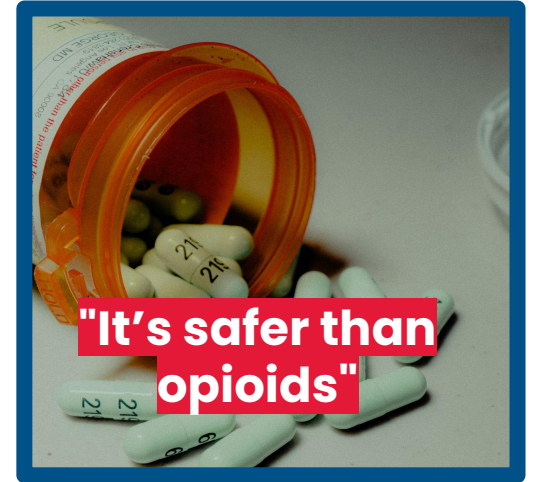
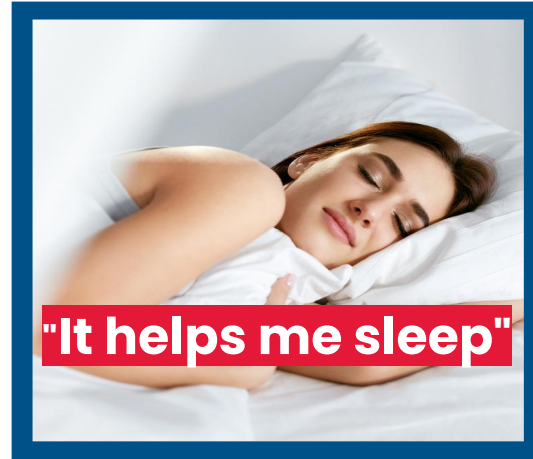
Warning to Consumers

- Not to inhale or recreationally use any flavor of nitrous oxide in any size canister, tank, or charger.

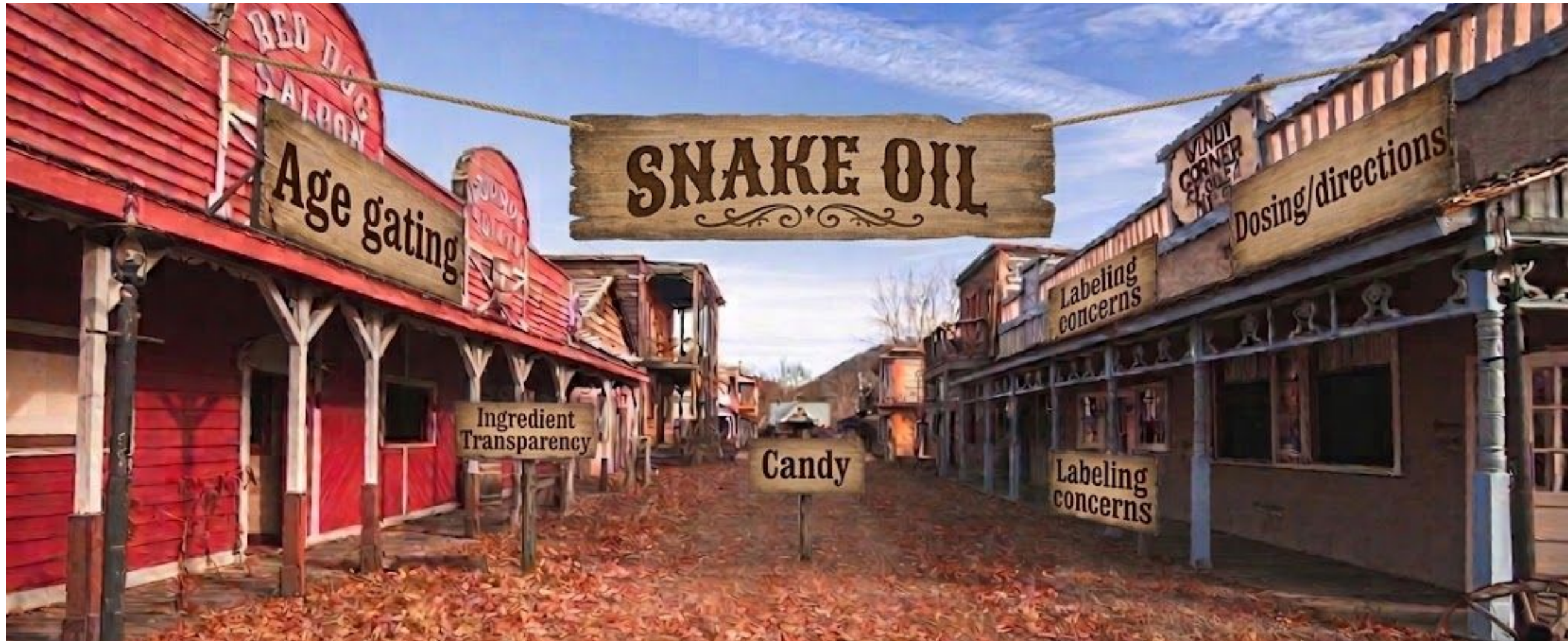
• High Risk to Children

- Kid-friendly flavors – often sold w/o age restriction

The "Wellness" Trap

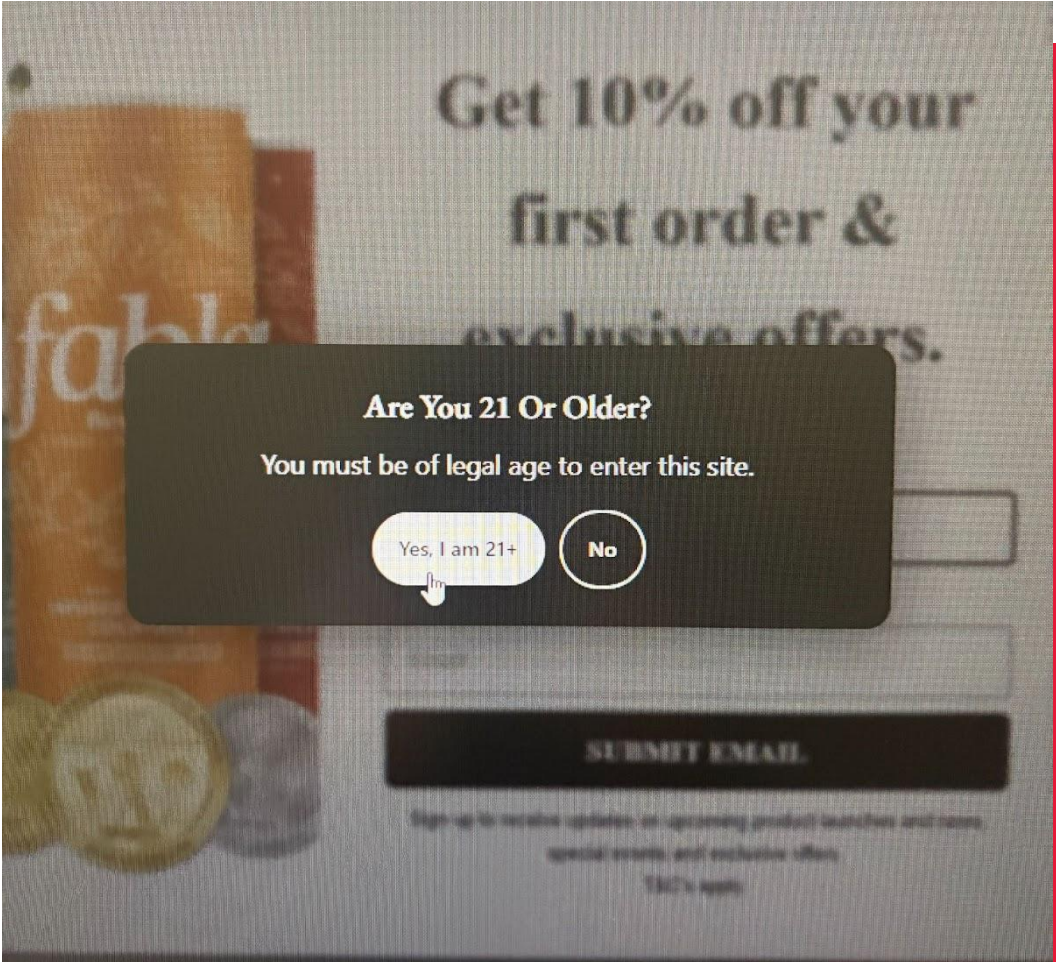
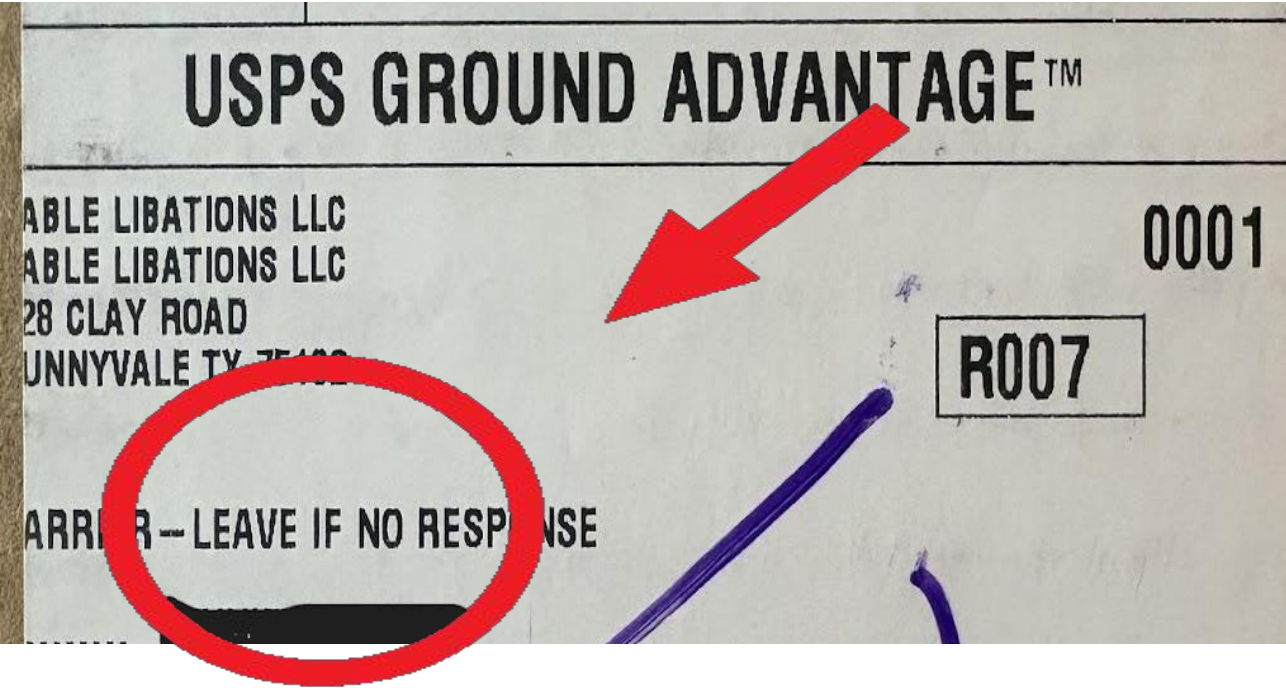


The Regulatory Wild West



Age Restrictions

Only as good as the ID check
Online Sales



Candy & Kid Friendly Flavors

THC: WTF?

Kratom

Is a confection
Mimics a candy
Candy-like flavor

Nitrous Oxide

Flavors

Psilocybin

Candy



Ingredients- what in the the world?

Supplement Facts	
5 servings per container	
Serving Size	1 Gummy
Amount Per Serving	
Calories	07
	% Daily Value
Total Fat 0g	0%
Total Carbohydrates 2g	<1%
Total Sugar 1g	
Includes 1g Added Sugars	2%
Proprietary Nootropic Mushroom Blend	22.5mg

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much of a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a diet of 2,000 calories a day. Use these values as general guides.



Directions of Use

55_{MG} CBD + 5_{MG} Δ9THC/Per Gummy

TAKE 1: RELAXATION **TAKE 3: FULL EXPERIENCE**
TAKE 2: EUPHORIA **TAKE 4: A WHOLE NEW WORLD**

SUGGESTED USE: Consume 1 gummy to start to establish individual tolerance. Increase dose in increments to achieve desired effect.




DOES NOT CONTAIN AMANITA MUSCARIA OR ANY OF ITS COMPONENTS.
DOES NOT CONTAIN PSYLOCYBINE
Never attempt to operate machinery or drive a vehicle while using this product.

NOT SAFE FOR KIDS

Nutrition Facts
2 servings per container
Serving Size 1 gummy

Magic MUSHROOM GUMMIES

DOSING RECOMMENDATION

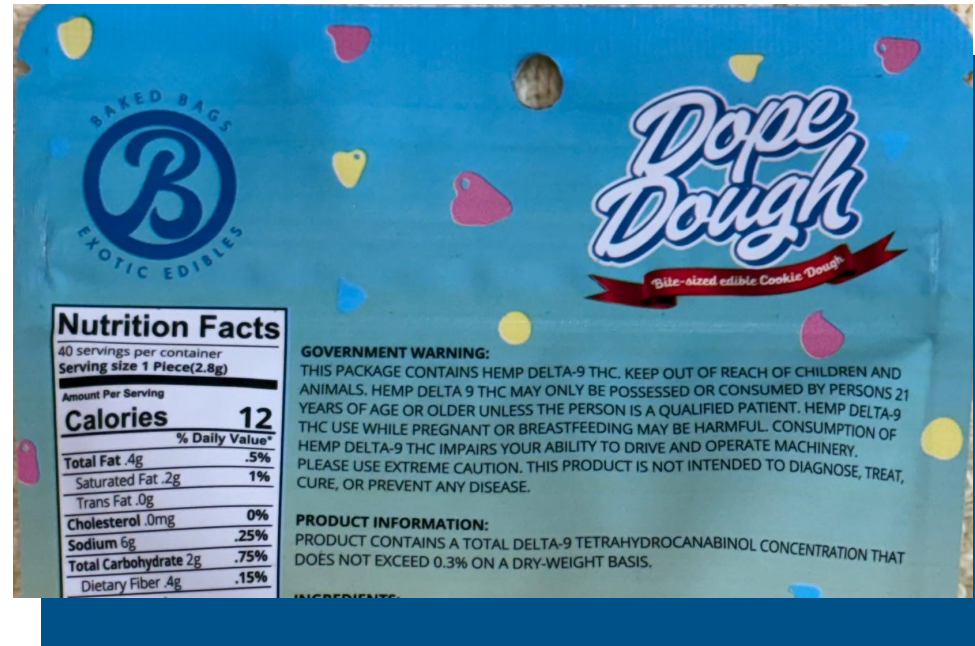
1-3 GUMMIES	4-6 GUMMIES	7+ GUMMIES
		
DAY AT THE OFFICE	DAY AT THE PARK	DAY ON THE MOON

No standardized warnings

⚠️ WARNING AND DISCLAIMER

DO NOT DRIVE VEHICLES OR OPERATE HEAVY MACHINERY AFTER CONSUMING THIS PRODUCT. INTOXICATION EFFECTS OF THIS PRODUCT MAY BE DELAYED. MAY CAUSE DROWSINESS. CONSULT WITH DOCTOR BEFORE CONSUMING THIS PRODUCT. DO NOT USE THIS PRODUCT IF YOU ARE PREGNANT OR NURSING. 21 AND OVER ONLY. KEEP AWAY FROM CHILDREN AND PETS.

THIS IS NOT AN FDA APPROVED PRODUCT



MUST BE 21 OR OLDER TO PURCHASE. KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN.
INGREDIENTS: SUGAR, CORN SYRUP, WATER, PECTIN, CITRIC ACID, FRUIT FLAVORS, SODIUM CITRATE, MCT OIL, SOY LECITHIN, HEMP EXTRACT OIL. CONTAINS: SOY.
STORING: STORE AT OR BELOW ROOM TEMPERATURE.
CONSULT YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER IF YOU ARE PREGNANT OR HAVE OTHER MEDICAL CONDITIONS.
MANUFACTURERS/RE-SELLERS ASSUME NO RESPONSIBILITY OR LIABILITY FOR USE OR MISUSE OF THIS PRODUCT, ANY ADVERSE EVENTS OR HEALTH COMPLICATIONS THAT MAY ARISE FROM USE.

THESE STATEMENTS HAVE NOT BEEN EVALUATED BY THE FDA. THIS PRODUCT IS NOT INTENDED TO DIAGNOSE, TREAT, CURE, OR PREVENT DISEASE.

WARNING: THIS PRODUCT CONTAINS HEMP EXTRACT. DO NOT USE IF PREGNANT OR NURSING. MAY CAUSE INTOXICATION. DO NOT OPERATE HEAVY MACHINERY OR DRIVE WHILE USING THIS PRODUCT.
EACH GUMMY CONTAINS: D9: 5MG
THCA: 5MG | THCP: 15MG | HHC: 475MG
TERPENES: 1000MG | TOTAL: 1500MG

Importance of Local Control

- Our town, our rules
- Local Safety = Youth Safety
- Can effectively bridge gaps
- Protections reflect local values



Regulate It!

-Psilocybin Time Place and

Manner Recommendations



Background:

- 3.8% of high schoolers have reported using psychedelics according to the 2023 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey.
- 4.5% of calls to poison control centers from psilocybin are for children less than 6 years of age.
- Rocky Mountain Poison & Drug Center has tracked 135 cases of psilocybin exposure during 2024 with ages ranging from 10 months to 92 years old. "Almost all the cases were used to get high, and only 6 cases were attributed to medical or self-improvement reasons."
- Psilocybin products may be removed from healing centers and administered "off-site" by a facilitator, opening up the risk of diversion and accidental ingestion especially by teens and young children.
- State regulations allow the manufacturing of commercial psilocybin edibles to include soft confections and chocolate increasing the attractiveness of these products to children and teens.
- Peer-reviewed research is limited regarding short-term and long-term physical and mental health impacts on the developing brain.
- Research shows that young people living near marijuana dispensaries have a more favorable view of marijuana. Elected city and county officials should consider that location could also minimize the perception of harm from psilocybin by youth.
- Research also demonstrates that the proximity and density of alcohol and tobacco outlets

Effective Partners

Medical & Public Health: Provide Clinical Truth

- **Impact:** Moves conversation from "politics" to "pediatrics."

Impacted families: Provide Personal Storytelling

- **Impact:** "demand better" drive public awareness/legislation

Youth-Serving Organizations (Schools, Nonprofits): Eyes/Ears

- **Impact:** See products, impacts on mental health, academic success

Community & Religious Leaders: Moral Compass/Trusted Voice

- **Impact:** Deep trust within families, facilitate education, reaching parents who might not engage with data

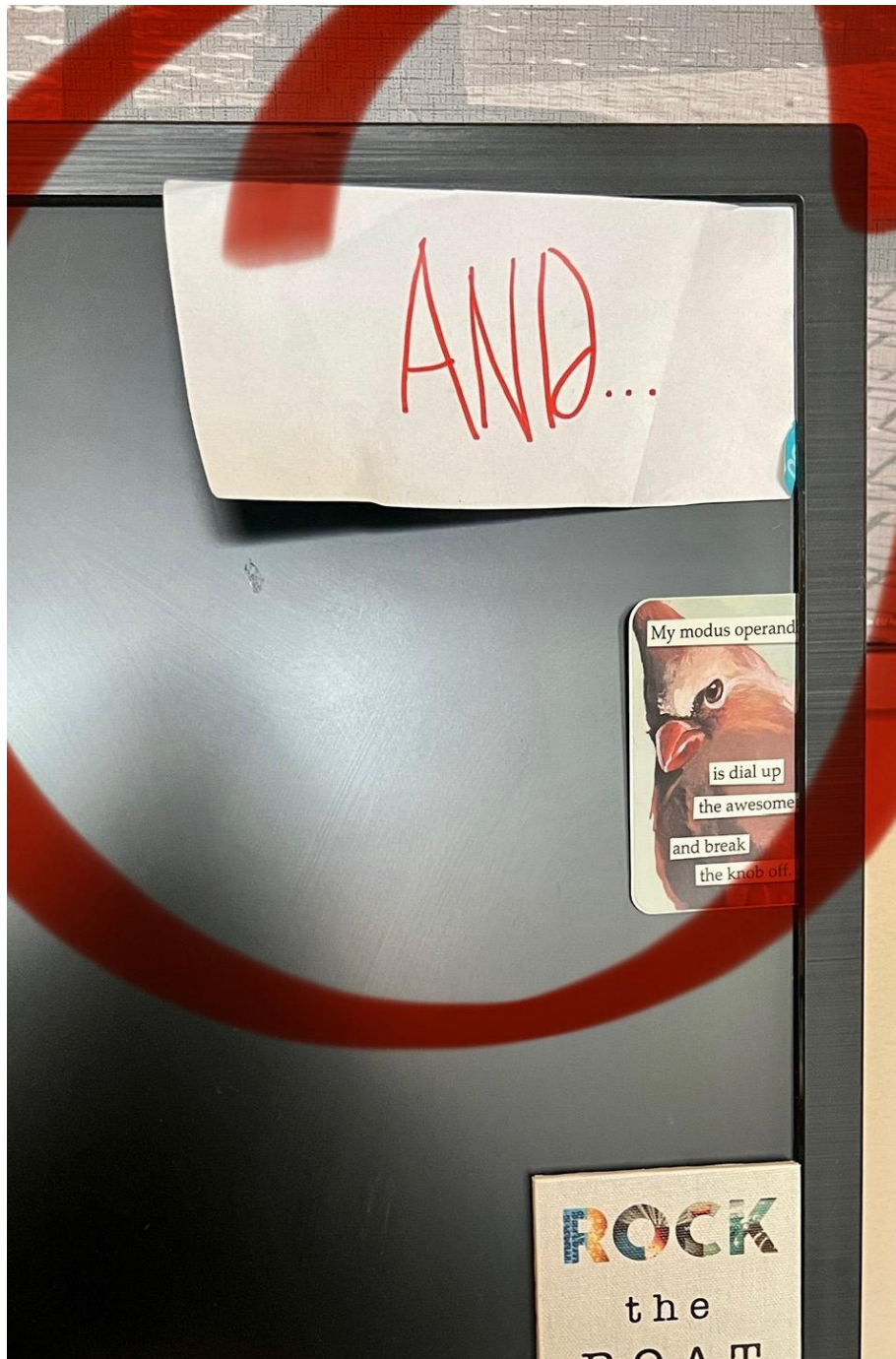
Law Enforcement/SROs: Public Safety/Enforcement Reality

- **Impact:** Provide pragmatic view on how/if policies work in field

Potential Community partners in VA

- VA Dept of Education (VDOE)
- VA Dept of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)
- Virginia Council of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (VCCAP)
- VA ABC (ABC)
- VA Cannabis Control Authority (CCA)
- VA Dept of Health (VDH)
- VA State Police (VSP)

- Community Coalitions of VA (CCoVA)
- VA Dept of Social Services (VDSS)
- Dept. of Behavioral Health & Dev. Services (DBHDS)
- VA Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY)
- Dept. of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS)



Parents are the **MOST** powerful influence on their children

- Youth who know their parents disapprove of their marijuana use are **72% less likely to use.**

It's NEVER too early to talk with kids



Elementary School:

- ★ Teach emotional regulation & positive coping skills
- ★ How to solve social problems in healthy ways
- ★ Support their academic success, especially reading

Middle/ High Schoolers:

- ★ Keep communication open, talk honestly
- ★ Build confidence with strong study habits, academic success, & activities
- ★ Encourage healthy friendships & remind many choose to stay drug-free

No substance use

- › Goal: Prevent or delay onset of problem use
- › Technique: Offer praise, provide feedback that most peers do not use substances regularly

*"You're making a **great choice** to stay away from drinking and smoking. Most kids your age aren't drinking or smoking"*

*"Avoiding substances **makes things easier.**"*

*"I can help answer any questions you might have about marijuana and **make sure you have the facts** you need to make educated decisions even if your peers are using it."*

Occasional substance use (less than monthly)

- › Goal: Prevent or delay onset of problem use
- › Technique: Praise honesty, brief advice

“As someone who cares about you, my hope is you will stop using it completely for the sake of your health.”

“Marijuana will interfere with your brain’s development, making it harder to do the things that are important to you.”

“Did you know there is no known amount that is safe for the developing brain?”

“Do you have any questions about how marijuana can affect your body, mood, or brain?”

Progression to regular use (monthly)

- › Goal: Empower the adolescent to be responsible for change and advise
- › Technique: Brief intervention, treatment options as indicated

"It seems that you depend on marijuana to help you manage stress and socialize. At the same time, it seems like marijuana use is causing tension for you at home and in school."

"I recommend that you quit. Marijuana does not reduce stress in the long term."

"Would you be willing to quit for a couple of months to see how that goes? That would give you the opportunity to see how you feel when you are not using it."

Moderate to severe substance use (weekly+)

- › Goal: Guide adolescent to recognize problems and facilitate services
- › Technique: Brief intervention, referral to treatment

"Because I am so worried about you, I'm thinking it's important to get more expert help."

"Thank you for being so open with me. When you think about your life, how's your use of weed working out for you?"

"I'd still like to work with you and will be available while you participate in the program and afterward. How does that sound?"

"I suggest getting connected with a program that works with people in your situation – thinking about cutting down or cutting out their use but conflicted – so you can get back to doing the things you said were important to you."

Resources

- **One Chance to Grow Up** (www.onechancetogrowup.org)
- **THCPHOTOS.org** (www.thcphotos.org)
- **One Chance YouTube**
(<https://www.youtube.com/@1Chance2GrowUp>)
- **SAMHSA-Talk they hear you** (<https://library.samhsa.gov>)
- **National Institute of Health/NIDA**
(<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/cannabis-marijuana>)
- **CDC** (<https://www.cdc.gov/cannabis/about/index.html>)
- **Operation Parent** (<https://www.operationparent.org/>)
- **Tea on THC** (<https://teaonthc.org>)
- **Virginia Department of Health**

What can you do today?

- › Sign our petition for **Maintaining Hemp Loophole Closure**
- › Invite One Chance to speak
- › Urge your elected officials to support kids
- › Share the harms of today's THC



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