

Dear Debra and friends,

I write this as a mother, from the other side of the world, who has two children, one a young teen, the other late 20s. I believe that keeping the communication lines well open, and giving my children a good 'listening to' rather than a good talking to, has been of most value when they were approaching and experiencing their teen years. They are in effect complete other people who need guidance and truth, and encouragement to grow their own good judgement. It certainly worked with the first, and I've got every reason to be optimistic about my youngster.

My opinion is that well-meaning people like you and others with influence or power can do just as much damage to the mental health of cannabis users - you have written elsewhere on this site of your personal dislike of cannabis users since the 1960s - as skunk cannabis. What your son William wrote below* particularly struck a chord, I doubt my interpretation is wrong. He is going to help you with your work anyway because that's how he'll get your positive attention, instead of the possibly unremittingly negative he received ever since using cannabis.

Perhaps you had a privileged upbringing and never noticed what corrupted hypocrites most people who seek and attain influence and power become. I certainly recall as a teen noticing it, and that view has not really changed in the intervening 35+ years. I've worked in the hospitality industry long enough to know how alcohol damages people so very much more than cannabis when used to excess. It continues to amaze me that, despite that undisputable fact, so many powerful or influential people focus on cannabis as the common denominator of all the social problems of today.

Your concern for the mixed-message that downgrading cannabis seems to ignore the fact that most people of every social strata appreciate some form of mind-altering substance and the market will never go away, be it for cannabis or alcohol or whatever. Obviously you have never been arrested and have no idea the way otherwise law-abiding citizens are treated, though I'm sure you and your authoritarian friends are glad it only happens to others' children. Fiddling with the classification again could no doubt provide some relief for your social conscience but it will also amplify youth as well as general alienation and disrespect for law and the concept of justice. To the detriment of everyone.

As a longtime cannabis user, whose mental faculties are and always have been intact, I much prefer the health and evidential education approach, instead of your preferred serious criminalisation of the issue, my children, and their future children.

Pauline, New Zealand

"As I try to pin-point my own stages of thinking through the days and months that brought me to where I am, I feel that as you become more distanced from your children the morals that you tried to instil in them are lost as they live for the moment, and long term thinking is non-existent and therefore as is all logical thinking. Skunk enhances this feeling tenfold. Sometimes I don't even know how I've survived. I've had so many lows that waiting for the next high always seemed to be the only natural thing left to do.

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