

Principles of Responsible Cannabis Use

When marijuana is enjoyed responsibly, subjecting users to harsh criminal and civil penalties provides no public benefit and causes terrible injustices. For reasons of public safety, public health, economics and justice, the prohibition laws should be repealed to the extent that they criminalize responsible marijuana use.

By adoption of this statement, the NORML Board of Directors has attempted to define "responsible cannabis use."

I. Adults Only

Cannabis consumption is for adults only. It is irresponsible to provide cannabis to children.

Many things and activities are suitable for young people, but others absolutely are not. Children do not drive cars, enter into contracts, or marry, and they must not use drugs. As it is unrealistic to demand lifetime abstinence from cars, contracts and marriage, however, it is unrealistic to expect lifetime abstinence from all intoxicants, including alcohol. Rather, our expectation and hope for young people is that they grow up to be responsible adults. Our obligation to them is to demonstrate what that means.

II. No Driving

The responsible cannabis consumer does not operate a motor vehicle or other dangerous machinery while impaired by cannabis, nor (like other responsible citizens) while impaired by any other substance or condition, including some medicines and fatigue.

Although cannabis is said by most experts to be safer than alcohol and many prescription drugs with motorists, responsible cannabis consumers never operate motor vehicles in an impaired condition. Public safety demands not only that impaired drivers be taken off the road, but that objective measures of impairment be developed and used, rather than chemical testing.

III. Set and Setting

The responsible cannabis user will carefully consider his/her set and setting, regulating use accordingly.

"Set" refers to the consumer's values, attitudes, experience and personality, and "setting" means the consumer's physical and social circumstances. The responsible cannabis consumer will be vigilant as to conditions -- time, place, mood, etc. -- and does not hesitate to say "no" when those conditions are not conducive to a safe, pleasant and/or productive experience.

IV. Resist Abuse

Use of cannabis, to the extent that it impairs health, personal development or achievement, is abuse, to be resisted by responsible cannabis users.

Abuse means harm. Some cannabis use is harmful; most is not. That which is harmful should be discouraged; that which is not need not be.

Wars have been waged in the name of eradicating "drug abuse", but instead of focusing on abuse, enforcement measures have been diluted by targeting all drug use, whether abusive or not. If marijuana abuse is to be targeted, it is essential that clear standards be developed to identify it.

V. Respect Rights of Others

The responsible cannabis user does not violate the rights of others, observes accepted standards of courtesy and public propriety, and respects the preferences of those who wish to avoid cannabis entirely.

No one may violate the rights of others, and no substance use excuses any such violation. Regardless of the legal status of cannabis, responsible users will adhere to emerging tobacco smoking protocols in public and private places.

Adopted by the NORML Board of Directors
February 3, 1996
Washington, DC