

Drug Policy Alliance

TALKING POINTS

These are some of the most common misperceptions about the War on Drugs, followed by the truth. Help set people straight by telling them the facts.

Q: Shouldn't we at least try to eliminate drugs from our society?

A: There has never been and never will be a drug-free society. The War on Drugs is a vicious cycle costing us more and more each year and overburdening the criminal justice system, all with an impossible goal of eliminating drugs from society. Our valuable resources should be focused on a different goal: drug policies that encompass reason, compassion, and justice while reducing harms associated with drug use and misuse.

Q: But drug usage rates are falling. That means our policies are working, right?

A: No. Historically, drug use rates tend to fluctuate over time, often with little relationship to our nation's punitive policies. Instead of celebrating a few percentage points, let's measure the success or failure of our policies based on the problems we most have to worry about – the death, the disease, the crime, and the suffering associated both with drug abuse and with our drug policies. Such a measurement would reflect the true impact of drug abuse and drug policies on our communities and reveal more practical solutions.



Q: Is it true that current drug policies unfairly target minorities?

A: Yes. Despite the fact that drug use rates are more or less consistent across racial lines, many punitive drug laws and enforcement practices unfairly target minorities. Although African Americans represent less than one in seven drug users, they are charged with more than a third of drug offenses and comprise a shocking 59% of those convicted of such offenses. African Americans are also sentenced to longer prison terms than other groups.

Q: Doesn't drug policy reform send the wrong message to children?

A: No. Drug policy reform teaches kids how to focus on creating a constructive society rather than a punitive one. American teenagers in the 1990s had more drug education than any generation in history, but the simplistic "just say no" message did not make them safer from the death, disease, crime, and suffering associated with drug abuse and drug policies.

When it comes to young people, let's work on sending them the right message: safety first. While we hope that youth will choose not to use drugs, we need to focus on preventing teens who do experiment from falling into abusive patterns, and we need to create fallback strategies that protect them from harm. Putting safety first requires that we provide teens with credible, science-based information about drugs. Teens will make smart choices when given accurate, honest information.

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Reason. Compassion. Justice.

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