

KEEP

OFF

THE

GRASS

Welsh Center for Action on Dependency and Addiction

The harm reduction resource for both cannabis
users and those that want to support them
make positive changes

Welsh Center for Action on Dependency and Addiction
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Intro

The Welsh Centre for Action on Dependency and Addiction is a specialist agency which seeks to reduce the harm caused by mood altering substances and behaviours. WCADA has been supporting the community since 1979 and now has agencies covering Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend.

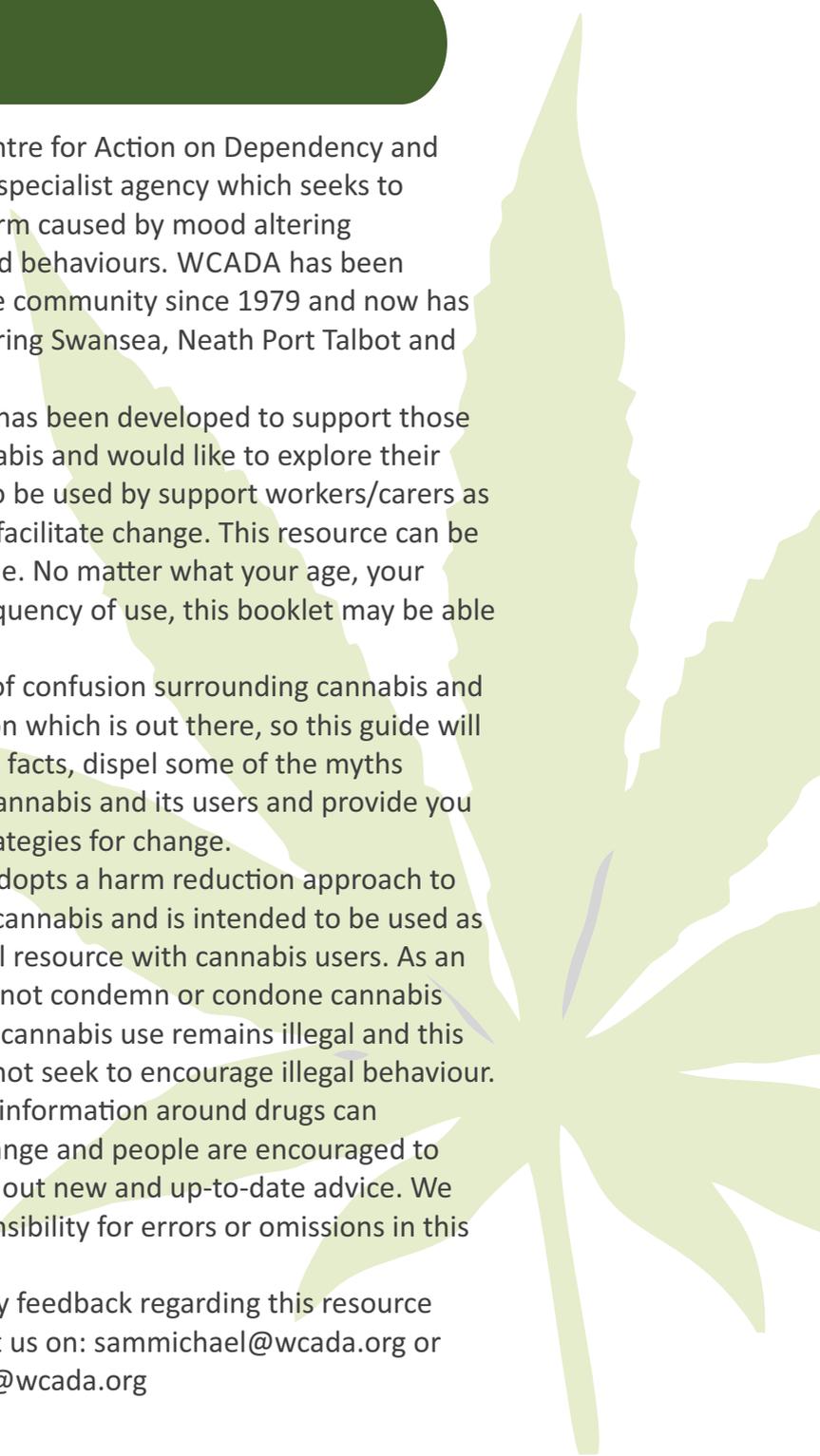
This resource has been developed to support those who use cannabis and would like to explore their use. It can also be used by support workers/carers as a way to help facilitate change. This resource can be used by anyone. No matter what your age, your gender, or frequency of use, this booklet may be able to help.

There is a lot of confusion surrounding cannabis and the information which is out there, so this guide will give you some facts, dispel some of the myths surrounding cannabis and its users and provide you with some strategies for change.

This booklet adopts a harm reduction approach to working with cannabis and is intended to be used as an educational resource with cannabis users. As an agency we do not condemn or condone cannabis use, however, cannabis use remains illegal and this booklet does not seek to encourage illegal behaviour. Legalities and information around drugs can frequently change and people are encouraged to regularly seek out new and up-to-date advice. We take no responsibility for errors or omissions in this booklet.

If you have any feedback regarding this resource please contact us on: sammichael@wcada.org or laurahancock@wcada.org

Thank you.



What is Cannabis?

Cannabis is a species of bushy green, flowering plants, whose sap and leaves contain the psychoactive compound Delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

There are 2 main strains of cannabis plant and these are Cannabis Sativa and Cannabis Indica.

There are also many other strains occurring around the world. Cannabis Sativa is thought to contain higher levels of THC and therefore produces more hallucinogenic effects.

Cannabis Indica is more likely to be higher in cannabidiol (CBD) and this causes more of a sedating and drowsy effect. There is also Cannabis Ruderalis which originates in Russia but is very uncommon.

The cannabis plants tend to grow in warm moist climates.

How does it work?

When THC enters the brain, it can cause the user to feel high or euphoric by acting on the brain's reward system.

The brain's reward system is made up of areas that control the response to pleasurable things like chocolate and sex, as well as to most street drugs.

THC triggers the reward system in the same way that nearly all street drugs do, by stimulating brain cells to release the chemical dopamine.

Effects vary dramatically among different users, include heightened sensory perception (e.g. colours seem brighter), giggling, 'the munchies' and in some cases altered perceptions of time. After a while, the euphoria subsides, and the user may feel tired or low in mood. Sometimes cannabis use may produce feelings of suspicion, fear, panic or anxiety.



SATIVA

Cannabis Sativa Sativa is characterised by leaflets that are more narrow, branches that are farther apart and colouration that tends to be more toward spring green. Sativa plants tend to be taller and produce fewer flowers.



INDICA

Cannabis Sativa Indica is characterised by broad leaflets that often overlap, branches that are closer together and colouration that tends to be more toward deep olive green. Indica plants tend to be shorter and bushier producing fuller, denser flower buds.



RUDERALIS

Cannabis Ruderalis is characterised by varied leaflets in the mature leaves, a shorter stature and generally small size. Ruderalis is rarely grown for recreational use as it tends to have lower THC content than Sativa and Indica.

Please complete the next 10 questions and think about your cannabis use over the last 3 months. Circle the number which resembles your use the most.

1. Has anyone said they are worried about the amount of cannabis that you are smoking?

- Never 1
- Sometimes 2
- Nearly always 3

2. Does the amount of money that you spend on cannabis concern you?

- Never 1
- Sometimes 2
- Nearly always 3

3. Does the thought of going without cannabis cause you any worry or anxiety?

- Never 1
- Sometimes 2
- Nearly always 3

4. Have you ever done anything you wished you hadn't in order to obtain cannabis?

- Never 1
- Sometimes 2
- Nearly always 3

5. Do you think your physical health is suffering because of your cannabis use? This could mean breathing difficulties or other health effects.

- Never 1
- Sometimes 2
- Nearly always 3

Your use; Lets have a look

6. How often do you think about stopping?

Never	1
Sometimes	2
Nearly always	3

7. Has using cannabis ever got in the way of you doing something that you'd previously planned to do?

Never	1
Sometimes	2
Nearly always	3

8. Do you find normal daily activities difficult to do unless you have used cannabis?

Never	1
Sometimes	2
Nearly always	3

9. Have you noticed an increase in anxiety?

Never	1
Sometimes	2
Nearly always	3

10. Are you finding you need to use more cannabis to achieve the desired effect?

Never	1
Sometimes	2
Nearly always	3

Add the scores together and take a look at the results

How much did you score?

10 ➡ 16

Your current cannabis use indicates no to low impact on your daily living. It's still worth thinking about your using behaviour and gathering more information around cannabis and its effects. It's also worth keeping a cannabis diary to monitor your use. We have included a one of these later on in the booklet.

17 ➡ 23

Your current cannabis use is starting to cause you some problems. This could be a time to seek advice and start to think about making changes. Using cannabis diaries at this point could give you an idea as to where you can make reductions. It's also a good idea to find out more information as to cannabis and its effects.

24 ➡ 30

Based on your scores your current cannabis use is causing significant problems in some aspects of your life. Now is a good time to seek support and advice around reducing or stopping your use.

Dispelling the myths



'Cannabis is natural and therefore safe'

This is an extremely common myth amongst cannabis users that think because THC comes from a plant then it is 'God's creation' and therefore safe. In most cases the cannabis plants have been sprayed with many chemicals such as weed killers and fertilizers which are extremely harmful to humans. And cannabis resin contains hundreds of chemicals which have been found to be carcinogenic (having the potential to cause cancer). Using cannabis regularly can cause alterations to the brain which can lead to weakened verbal communication skills, lowered learning capabilities and a shortened attention span.

'Cannabis does not cause mental health problems'

There is increasing evidence that cannabis can cause drug-induced psychosis, make pre-existing psychotic illnesses worse and even trigger first episodes of a psychotic illness. We explain more about this later on the booklet.

'The police won't arrest me for just using cannabis'

Cannabis is currently a Class B substance. This means there will always be repercussions if the police catch you with it. If you are in possession of cannabis, even if it's for pain relief the penalty is anything up to 5 years in jail. If you are supplying it to someone else, even getting some for your mates this can increase to 14 years in jail and an unlimited fine. Having a drug-related offence on your record is pretty serious and can stop you from getting certain jobs and visiting some countries such as the United States of America.

'Cannabis helps me sleep'

The truth is, there are some forms of cannabis that will help you sleep. However, cannabis can have an extremely addictive effect. And if a person becomes addicted to cannabis they can find it extremely difficult to stop. Cannabis is a street drug and is unregulated; therefore nearly every batch of cannabis that you buy can have different ingredients and have a different effect. Some forms of cannabis will make you high and unable to sleep at all. The other issue is that once you start using cannabis to sleep it can become extremely hard to sleep without it.

'Cannabis is not addictive'

Long-term cannabis use can lead to addiction. Potentially people can have difficulty controlling their cannabis use and cannot stop using it even though it interferes with many aspects of their lives. Some research shows that around 10 % of people who use cannabis go on to become dependent and that number increases heavily the younger you start using, particularly if you're in your teens it can increase to a r o u n d 2 0 % .

Effects of Cannabis

Short Term Effects

Giggling or hilarity

Bloodshot eyes

Feelings of well being

Altered perceptions of time

Lack of ability to solve problems

Poor motor skills

Some loss of concentration

Talkativeness

Short term memory loss

Slower reaction times

Anxiety or panic attacks
Reduced ability to perform tasks

Feelings of suspicion

Slower reaction times
Confusion

Increased sociability

Increase or decrease of sex drive

Dilated pupils

Changes in heart rate and blood
pressure

Heightened perceptions

'The munchies'

Long Term Effects

Increased risks of cancers particularly in the
throat, mouth, tongue and lungs

Apathy

A chronic cough

Dependence

An increased risk of psychotic illness.
Especially if the person has a history of
some mental illnesses

Shortness of breath
Reduced fertility in both women and men

Chronic Bronchitis

A risk of small weight babies or birth
defects if used during pregnancy
Reduced production of 'feel good'
chemicals

Depressed immune system – less likely to
fight off invading bacteria

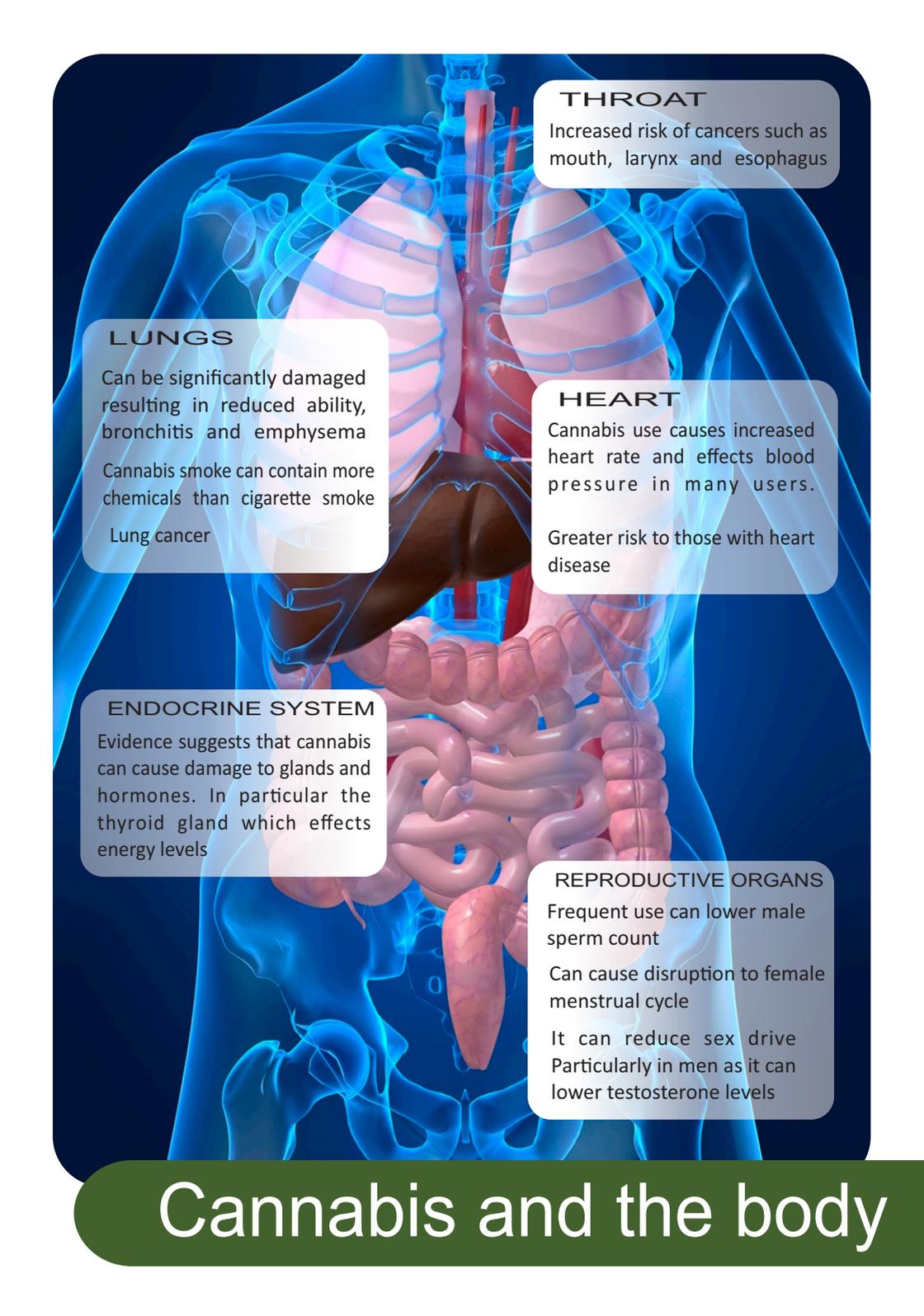
Depression
A highly decreased level of motivation to
perform tasks

Five reasons that I use cannabis are:

WHY DO I BOTHER?



Things I don't like about my use of cannabis are:



THROAT

Increased risk of cancers such as mouth, larynx and esophagus

LUNGS

Can be significantly damaged resulting in reduced ability, bronchitis and emphysema

Cannabis smoke can contain more chemicals than cigarette smoke

Lung cancer

HEART

Cannabis use causes increased heart rate and effects blood pressure in many users.

Greater risk to those with heart disease

ENDOCRINE SYSTEM

Evidence suggests that cannabis can cause damage to glands and hormones. In particular the thyroid gland which effects energy levels

REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS

Frequent use can lower male sperm count

Can cause disruption to female menstrual cycle

It can reduce sex drive
Particularly in men as it can lower testosterone levels

Cannabis and the body

Harm reduction advice

Avoid heavy consumption

AVOID USING POTENT BRANDS REGULARLY

Don't drive or operate machinery

Always carry condoms

Don't use to avoid problems



Avoid paranoia by using in comfortable surroundings

USE FILTERS INSTEAD OF ROACHES

Look after your mates

Don't hold the smoke in - it doesn't give you a better buzz
it just causes you more harm

REMEMBER Tobacco is addictive
and harmful

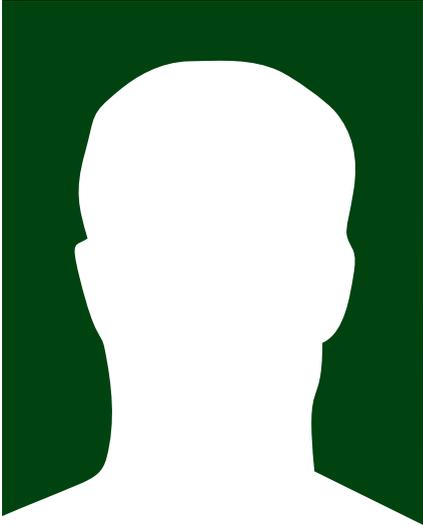
Think of a minimum of five ways I can reduce the harm cannabis can cause me

What can get in the way of making positive changes to my use?



FIVE STRATEGIES I CAN USE TO BREAK DOWN MY BARRIERS TO CHANGE

Meet Jake



Jake is a 22 year old male. He reports that he has used cannabis from the age of 14. He identified that his cannabis use had become a problem for him around the age of 16, when he began to smoke cannabis daily. He explained how by the age of 17 he had dropped out of college, only really associated with other people who smoked cannabis and started to supply these friends with cannabis as a way of helping funding his cannabis use.

When Jake first attended the agency he was not in education, training or employment lived at home with his parents and had no idea what he wanted to do with his life.

Above all else Jake explained that he was extremely bored and frustrated with his life. He explained that he did the same thing, went to the same places, spoke to the same people day in day out and didn't feel like there was much point to anything. He had come to believe that if he carried on smoking cannabis every day to the level he was, he would not be able to achieve the things he felt he needed to in order to improve his situation.

Case Study

Jake had tried to give up smoking cannabis completely a number of times throughout his life but found it difficult for the following main reasons:

All of Jake's friends smoked cannabis.

Jake found it extremely difficult to be around these people and not smoke cannabis, but if he didn't hang out with his friends he felt lonely and bored. This too made him want to smoke cannabis.

Jake found that he had started to use cannabis as a reward or a way to break up his day.

Without cannabis Jake felt that his day had even less structure than it did before, this made him feel lost. He had more time and nothing to do with this time, he found this frustrating. Also he had started to use cannabis as a reward for when he had completed a task, now he felt like he had nothing to look forward to at all.

Besides smoking cannabis Jake's only interest was playing computer games.

Unfortunately, Jake associated playing computer games with smoking cannabis. This meant he would have intense cravings to smoke cannabis most of the time he played on his computer, but if he didn't play on his computer he felt he had nothing else to do and so would get bored, being bored made Jake want to smoke cannabis.

Jake felt uncomfortable leaving his house without smoking cannabis.

Because Jake had spent most of the last few years sticking to the same place, people and things that he felt comfortable with and often used cannabis around, not smoking cannabis and going to different places caused Jake to be quite anxious. Jake hadn't spoken to anyone new when not under the influence of cannabis for a number of years and as a result he felt uncomfortable doing so.

Jake found it impossible to sleep when he tried to give up smoking cannabis.

Jake reported that he has always struggled with his sleep and that by smoking 2 joints before he went to bed he was guaranteed to get to sleep. The times he had tried to stop smoking cannabis had meant that he either wouldn't sleep for up to 3 days or he would take ages before he would finally go to sleep and as a result felt tired and miserable the whole time he was substance free.

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of dark green cannabis leaves on a lighter green background. The leaves are stylized and arranged in a grid-like fashion. A large, dark green arrow points from the bottom left towards the right, partially overlapping the bottom edge of the white text box.

If you are a long term cannabis user there is a strong chance you can identify with some of these barriers to maintaining changes to your cannabis use. It's usually a good idea to list any of the barriers you come across or ones that you can already identify as being potential barriers.

As a way of aiding his change in Cannabis using behaviour Jake decided that he didn't want to stop using completely but felt through using cannabis diaries he could start to look at making small reductions and changing some of his other behaviours.

Jake currently smoked 12 joints a day, he decided that he would like to make a reduction of 2 joint within the next 4 weeks. The reduction of 2 joints per 4 weeks continued for 3 months until Jake met his goal of 6 joints a day. Jake achieved this through the following changes in his behaviour.

Improving support networks

Jake decided in order to maintain his reduction he would need to have support from friend who didn't smoke cannabis. This would help him fill up some of his day and offer him some moral support at times when he really wanted to use. Jake decided that he would try to make contact with two friends he had hung out with in college before he dropped out.

Improve hobbies and interest

Jake decided that he would start going to a Cyber cafe, to play computer games. This meant he could play computer games in a place where he couldn't smoke cannabis but wouldn't be forced to talk to anyone if he didn't feel comfortable, but if he did feel able to speak the people there, he could talk to them about computer games, a topic he felt comfortable talking about. Jake was also lucky that one of his old college friends had agreed to go with him the first few times he went so he wouldn't have to get the bus alone.

Healthy rewards

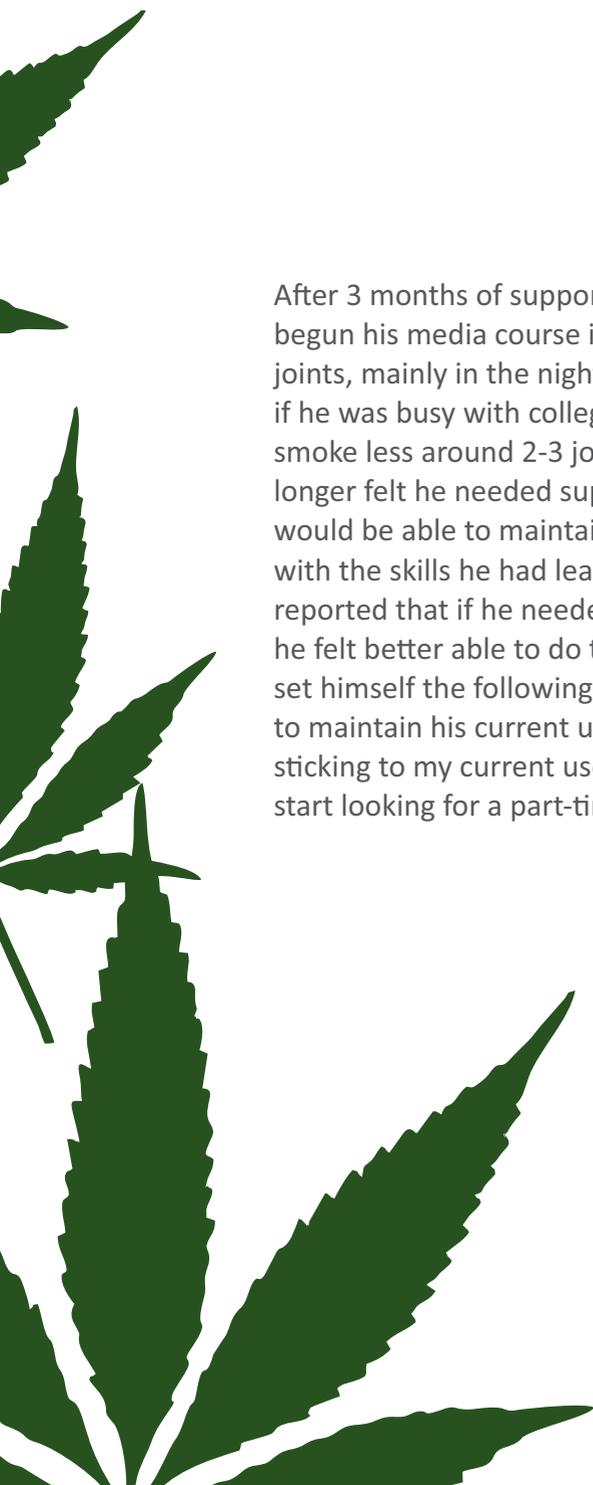
Jake had begun to identify that he was spending a minimum of £140 a week on cannabis. He had started put any money he had saved through his reduction in a jar. He would spend this money on computer games, clothes and meals out with friends.

Improving structure and setting goals

Jake had set the goal of enrolling on a media course at college, this meant that Jake would have to improve his sleep pattern and structure his days better. Jake achieved this by sticking to a strict sleep pattern he would go to bed at 11pm and would get up at 8am during the week. Jake still struggled with getting to sleep through his time accessing support. However he reported that he was only using one joint before bed and that he was finding it easier to sleep and get up then he had previously.

Improving confidence and self esteem

Jake found that through going to the cyber cafe and meeting new people in a comfortable setting he had started to feel better about his ability to talk to new people. This meant that some days Jake would leave his house without feeling like he had to have a joint first.



After 3 months of support from services, Jake had begun his media course in college. He was smoking 6 joints, mainly in the night, but reported that some days if he was busy with college work or friends he would smoke less around 2-3 joints. At this point Jake no longer felt he needed support from services and that he would be able to maintain his current pattern of use with the skills he had learned over the last 3 months. He reported that if he needed to make a further reduction he felt better able to do this on his own now. Jake had set himself the following goal to keep himself motivated to maintain his current use: In 6 months time after sticking to my current use and staying in college 'I will start looking for a part-time job.'

Cannabis and Mental Health

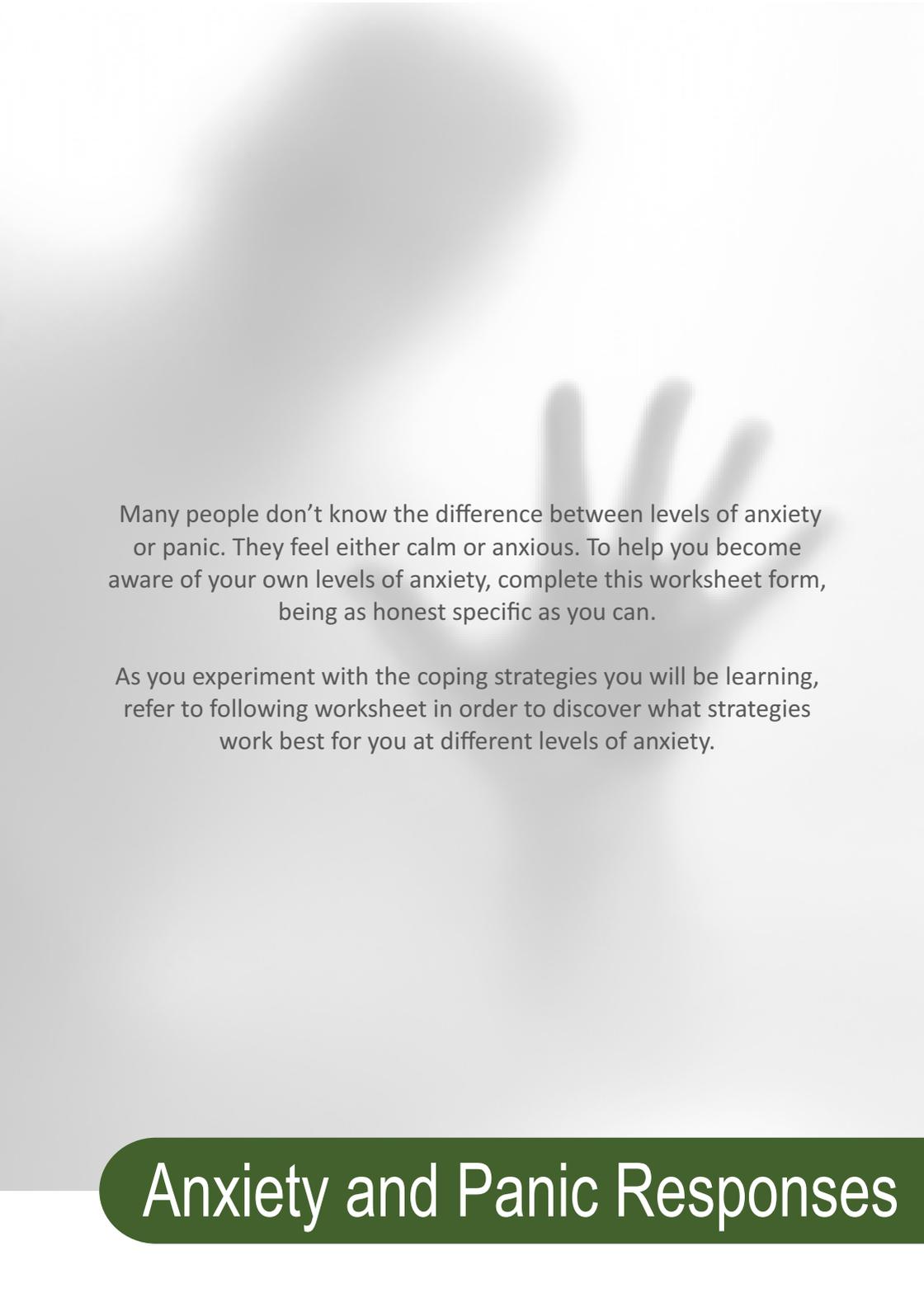
As time goes on there is more and more evidence to say that people with serious mental illnesses such as depression and psychosis, are more likely to use cannabis or have used it for long periods of time in the past. Using the drug regularly has appeared to double the risk of developing a psychotic episode or long-term schizophrenia. However, is it the cannabis causing these illnesses or are people using cannabis to self-medicate? The outcomes of the research which has been going on over the last few years strongly suggests that there is a clear link between cannabis use and mental health problems later in life, especially when cannabis use starts in adolescence. There is even more of a link within those that have a genetic vulnerability.

"A study following 1600 Australian school-children, aged 14 to 15 for seven years, found that while children who use cannabis regularly have a significantly higher risk of depression, the opposite was not the case - children who already suffered from depression were not more likely than anyone else to use cannabis. However, adolescents who used cannabis daily were five times more likely to develop depression and anxiety in later life." (*Royal College of Psychiatrists www.rcpsych.ac.uk*)

"Three major studies followed large numbers of people over several years, and showed that those people who use cannabis have a higher than average risk of developing schizophrenia. If you start smoking it before the age of 15, you are 4 times more likely to develop a psychotic disorder by the time you are 26. They found no evidence of self-medication. It seemed that, the more cannabis someone used, the more likely they were to develop symptoms.

Recent research in Europe, and in the UK, has suggested that people who have a family background of mental illness - and so probably have a genetic vulnerability anyway - are more likely to develop schizophrenia if they use cannabis as well." (*National Institute on Drug Abuse www.drugabuse.gov*)

It is important that you are offered a referral into specialist mental health services if you feel you need it. As previously mentioned, in many cases people who use cannabis experience mental health difficulties and a wrap around treatment service should be offered.



Many people don't know the difference between levels of anxiety or panic. They feel either calm or anxious. To help you become aware of your own levels of anxiety, complete this worksheet form, being as honest specific as you can.

As you experiment with the coping strategies you will be learning, refer to following worksheet in order to discover what strategies work best for you at different levels of anxiety.

Anxiety and Panic Responses

Anxiety Rating Scale

1. What has caused anxiety?

Date:

Time:

What brought on your feelings of anxiety or panic?

Using this scale, circle your anxiety level:

Not Anxious at all

Very Anxious

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2: Anxiety and panic responses

On the next page make a list for questions a,b and c:

- a. Physical sensations* - List the physical sensations you felt during your anxiety response, e.g. dizziness, shortness of breath, blushing, sweating, muscle tension. Circle the three that frighten you most.
- b. Thought and images* List the thoughts you had when anticipating or experiencing your anxiety response, e.g. I'm having a heart attack, I'm losing control, or something terrible will happen.
- c. Behaviours and actions* - List the behaviours you exhibited or actions you took as a result of your anxiety response.



PHYSICAL
SENSATIONS

Empty rounded rectangular box for notes under 'PHYSICAL SENSATIONS'.

THOUGHTS &
IMAGES

Empty rounded rectangular box for notes under 'THOUGHTS & IMAGES'.

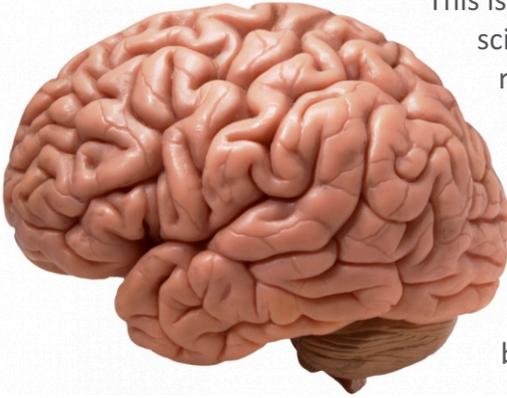
& BEHAVIOURS
actions

Empty rounded rectangular box for notes under '& BEHAVIOURS actions'.

10 Top Anxiety Tips

1. Remember, anxiety never killed anyone.
2. Worrying does not mean it's going to happen.
3. Focus on yourself. Don't allow the frightened you to take over.
4. Practice your slow, gentle breathing.
5. Some anxiety is normal and to be expected.
6. Progress is gradual, recovery takes time. Be patient with yourself.
7. Focus on what is really happening to you and around you, not what you fear might happen.
8. Wait for your fear to decrease and notice when it begins to fade.
9. Keep practicing, coping strategies take time to develop
10. Celebrate your successes, no matter how small. They will add up.

Effects on the Brain



This is a tricky one! Even though medical science has come a long way nobody really knows all of the intricacies of the brain and how it works. What we do know is that cannabis affects much more than just the way we feel.

Cannabis can trigger changes in both behaviour and brain function.

Cannabis can alter the balance of chemicals that affect energy levels, attention span, appetite and mood.

We also now know that cannabis affects learning and memory. One study in New Zealand found that prolonged cannabis use in young people who are still developing can reduce IQ. The more you smoke the greater the loss of IQ!! (National Institute on Drug Abuse www.drugabuse.gov)

Cannabis can also cause memory problems and reduce your concentration levels. It also affects your problem solving skills and coordination so things like operating machinery or driving a car are definitely a no go!

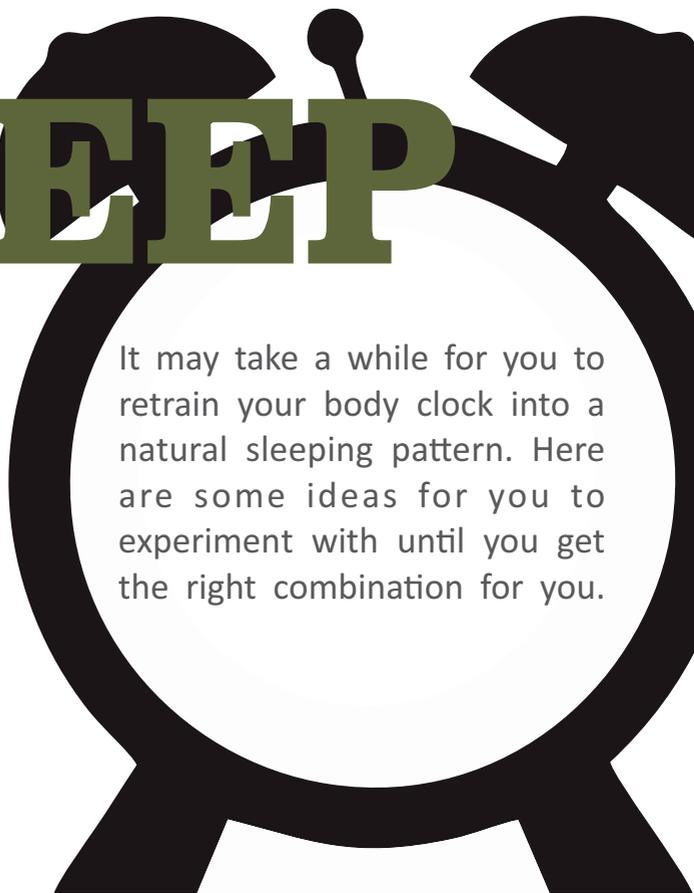
BETTER

SLEEP

AT

A

GLANCE



It may take a while for you to retrain your body clock into a natural sleeping pattern. Here are some ideas for you to experiment with until you get the right combination for you.

Set a regular bedtime and wake up time

Have a warm decaffeinated drink - warm milk is good

Secure the doors and windows so you feel safe

Use heavy curtains - where possible

Increase your daytime activity levels

Try not to take catnaps during the day/evening

Use appropriate bedclothes e.g. temperature needs

Comfortable mattress and pillow

Have a warm bath

Try lavender oil in bath or on pillow

If possible - move your sleeping area away from loud or disturbing noises

Remember to use the toilet before you go to bed

Read a magazine, book or listen to an audiotape for a while - don't watch TV or play video games

Use relaxation tapes/exercises

Use soft lighting

Clean sheets

Change into clean night clothes - not jeans!

Try soft relaxing music

Keep a note book by the side of the bed - write down the problems or things which wake you - then let them go! Problems always seem worse in the middle of the night, you can deal with them tomorrow

If you wake in the night, get up for 5-10 minutes, maybe have a warm drink. Try not to toss and turn in bed or to smoke a cigarette as this is a stimulant and make things worse. Then try and go to bed again.

Counting sheep works!

Sleep Habits

Have a go at filling this out

Good Sleep Habits

**Sleep Habits which
are not so good**

**Small goals to help me
improve sleep**

What I've done well

Sleep Diary

Name :

Start Date:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Bed Time (to the nearest quarter of an hour)							
Wake Time (to the nearest quarter of an hour)							
Total sleep time (hours)							
Number of Awakenings During the Night							
Amount of cannabis used: Morning							
Amount of cannabis used: Afternoon							
Amount of cannabis used: Evening							

Cannabis Withdrawal syndrome

There has been increasing evidence over the last 10 years for a cannabis withdrawal syndrome. Clinical studies have shown that between 50% - 95% people suffer withdrawal symptoms when abstaining from cannabis. Typically symptoms appear during days 1-3 of abstinence, peak between days 4-6 and can last between 4-14 days. (Ref) Some of the withdrawal symptoms could include:

anxiety	strange dreams
irritability	low mood
aggression	In rare cases, physical
changes in weight	discomfort such as
sleep difficulties	abdominal pain and chills

However, in many cases people do not experience any of the above. There are no pharmacological interventions available at this time, although studies are being done.



Cannabis smokers often smoke tobacco also and so it is important to remember that you could be experiencing tobacco withdrawals instead of or as well as cannabis withdrawals. If you are in any doubt, see your GP to discuss your options for help giving up nicotine.

Common Side Effects	Rare Side Effects <small>(Around 10%)</small>
Irritability	Shaking or Trembling
Aggression	Depression
Sleep Difficulties	Chills
Weird Dreams	Abdominal Pains
Anxiety or Nervousness	Sweating
Restlessness	
Anger	

If you do decide to just stop using cannabis plan the day you're going to stop in advance. Discuss this with your positive support network and plan ahead.

Have a go at filling the following diary, it will help you to manage any withdrawal symptoms and provide you with a back-up plan when you are ready to stop.



Safe people and support networks

There are different types of social support, some of which are more helpful than others. Sometimes, a person who has been enlisted as social support will engage in a form of behaviour that they think is helpful, but to the person with substance misuse problems, may seem really annoying or unhelpful.

Negative Social Support

"Aldo's" wife smells his clothes when he comes home. She thinks she is helping by testing him, but this just makes Aldo want to smoke.

"Julie's" mother regularly checks her eyes for signs of cannabis use. This really makes Julie mad as she feels her mother doesn't trust or believe her, and it undermines her confidence

Positive Social Support

- Understanding
- Encouraging
- Help with problem solving
- Information giving
- Help with tasks
- Help in emergencies
- Support when you are craving

write down some people
who I can access as
positive support

Top Tips for Developing Social Support

- Access support through specialist services
- Don't ask anyone who is using substances to be your support
- When asking for support be specific about what you want
- It's easier when you know what you want from them
- Make sure the people you ask know what 'positive social support' is

Triggers

Triggers' associated with using cannabis are a major source of cravings. Triggers can be both internal and external. Have a look at the following table below which may help you:

Internal	External
Low Mood	Certain Smells
Stress	Tastes
Loneliness	Music
Boredom	TV Programmes
Anger	Activities
Anxiety	People
Sadness	Places

Think of some of your personal triggers which could lead to cravings and record the results below:

Cravings are a totally normal part of changing something like your cannabis use. Almost anyone who stops or reduces will occasionally think about using again. Cravings can be powerful and intense and 9 times out of 10 cravings occur when we are at most risk of lapsing.

It is very important to think of cravings as warning signs and to take action. Cravings can be sudden, or linked to things like people, places, music etc. As time goes on cravings become less frequent and less intense until they eventually stop.

The best way to discover your own triggers to cravings is to write them down and monitor them. Initially you may feel this is hard but it gets easier with time.

Cravings

Cravings Worksheet

Try and relax - Think of some ideas as to what helps you relax. Try and list some examples:

Be positive! - Remind yourself why you're doing this and how well you've done. Try to work out two or three positive phrases that you can keep for when you're experiencing cravings

Distraction - Think of some activities which use a lot of concentration to mentally distract you. You need to use up some of that frustrated energy - but whatever it is you choose, make sure you enjoy it! Give some examples:

Work out the triggers for the craving - Once the craving has eased try and figure out what set it off

Craving Questionnaire

How many cravings have you had in the last week?

On average, how often do they occur?

Several times a day *Everyday* *Weekly* *Less than weekly*

Think of each of your cravings and make a note of how many would fall into each of the rating categories (1 being mild cravings and 10 being unbearable)

Cravings rated 1-4

Cravings rated between 4-7

Cravings rated between 8-10

Have a think about the situations you were in when you had your cravings (e.g. home, travelling, TV, work). Does any occur more than once?

Think about the moods you were in just before the cravings began (e.g. Confident, bored, sad, lonely, tired and stressed). Can you see a pattern?

Women only

Check the calendar and see how many times you have cravings around the time that you're pre-menstrual or around ovulation?

Pre-menstrual

Ovulation

Anything else? Can you think about anything else about your cravings? it could be worth making a note of.

Top tips to cope with cravings



DON'T PANIC
It will pass

Distraction

DELAY

DON'T REACT TO IT IMMEDIATELY

PLAN ALTERNATIVES

DEVELOP A
BACKUP PLAN

Practice relaxation techniques

REWARD YOURSELF

Talk to friends and family

**UTILISE
SUPPORT**

READ YOUR HANDOUTS

High Risk Situations

What are High Risk Situations?

High risk situations could be times, places, or any other situation where you could be at high risk of lapsing. For alcohol users a high risk situation could be going into a pub for example. It is important that you recognise what your high risk situations are so you are prepared for them when they happen. Evidence shows us that if you make a 'back up plan' to prepare for high risk situations you are less likely to lapse or relapse. Try and list below what you recognise has your 'High Risk' situations. Once you have done this you can develop your 'back up plan'.

List 5 situations which I would consider 'high risk'

Top tips for coping with high risk situations

Identify and monitor situations you think are high risk to you

Develop a *personal back up plan*. Prepare, prepare, prepare!

Try and be assertive. Ask your keyworker for advice how to do this

Remember to reward yourself when you've coped well

Keep in touch with your support and discuss your progress

Diversions are good. Look for other things to do

If in doubt get out! If you're finding a situation hard - LEAVE

Coping with a lapse - Top Tips

Rather than giving in to smoking cannabis at the first hurdle, use your lapse as an "alarm bell" to start using the skills you've learned

Distract yourself in any way you can, if you need to get out of a situation, get out.

Contact your positive support network and let them know that you are struggling

Recognise what you've done well and the positive achievements

Don't focus on feelings of guilt or shame

Do something nice for yourself

Remember, you are only human, Think about what you could do differently in the future

My Personal Backup Plan

List five ways I can manage a slip if I have one:

Relapse Prevention Personal Plan

Three people I have identified to be my positive social support

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Three triggers that lead to cravings are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Three strategies I can use to deal with cravings are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Three ways in which I can reward myself for doing well are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Three positive things I can say about myself are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Relapse Prevention Personal Plan

Three diversionary activities I am going to get involved in are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Three ways I can change my routine to support my changes are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Three ways I can be more assertive are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Three ways I have learned to solve problems are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Three techniques I have learned to cope with anxiety are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Summary

This booklet has been put together to help anyone who uses or anyone who helps cannabis users make a change to their cannabis use. It is not exhaustive and there is lots more information available on the internet and through other resources. It can be used to facilitate groups or used on a 1-1 basis. You can use it from start to finish or just take the parts that you will find useful. It's also important to remember that it's important to involve other professionals such as the mental health team or your general practitioner if you experience any physical or mental health effects. If there is anything that you are uncertain about just ask your keyworker.

Thank you for taking the time to read this book and we wish you great success in maintaining the changes you have chosen.

All information was correct at time of print.

References

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