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This leaflet can help you assess your cannabis use, its impact on your life and how to make changes if you decide to.

Smoking cannabis may cause you problems in different areas of your life and the negative effects can begin to outweigh the reasons you started to smoke cannabis in the first place.

Some cannabis smokers will decide they want to cut down and stop; some will find this easy, others will find it hard. Are you in control of your cannabis use? Are the pros still outweighing the cons? Read through this leaflet and decide for yourself.

DEPENDENCY

During the last few years it has become clear that cannabis use can result in dependency and lead to problems.

Are you spending too much time, energy and money on weed? Does a lot of your day revolve around dope? Do those close to you complain that you're stoned all the time?

> Cannabis can lead to problems – could you stop if you wanted to?



SMOKING

Your lungs were not meant to take in hot, noxious gases, so smoking cannabis is bad for you.

If you smoke cannabis with tobacco, you expose your lungs to two harmful drugs and this increases the risks. Smoking can lead to illnesses like bronchitis, emphysema and cancer.

Many cannabis users also become long-term cigarette smokers. Giving up tobacco may be more difficult as a result of your cannabis use.

If you intend to go on smoking, you can reduce the risks to your throat, chest and lungs by not holding smoke in your lungs or inhaling too deeply. Inhaling deeply won't get you more stoned: your lungs will just breathe in more toxins.

> Smoking cannabis can damage your health and other people's health too – show some respect and don't smoke around others, particularly children. Ideally, cut down and stop.



MENTAL HEALTH

Have you ever felt tense or agitated after smoking pot? Have you ever had uncontrolled thoughts or become confused after a joint? Have you seen a friend really lose it?

Some people experience unpleasant effects when they use cannabis, such as anxiety, panic attacks or paranoia. Usually these symptoms stop once the cannabis has worn off.

If you have had a mental health problem before or if you have a history of mental health problems in your family, cannabis can trigger serious mental health problems (such as schizophrenia). There is also concern that people who use cannabis a lot when they are young may be vulnerable to mental health problems later in life.

If you already have a mental health problem, cannabis will probably make your symptoms worse.

> *If cannabis is affecting your mental health, stop using it.*

DEBT

One of the commonest problems with cannabis is spending too much money on it!

Look at how much weed you're going through each week. Do you spend more than you meant to? How can you cut the cost?

> *How much money do you spend on cannabis every week? Think what else you could buy with that amount of money.*



RELATIONSHIPS

Cannabis can make people boring, lifeless and isolated. Smoking dope all the time can lead to problems in both your personal life and at work.

- > Do you have a vibrant social life, or do you watch a lot of TV?
- > Is your partner giving you earache about your lack of motivation?
- > Have you lost interest in seeing friends?
- > Do you continue to smoke cannabis just because your partner does?

> If you feel this is happening to you, cut down, use less often and stop.

THE LAW

CANNABIS IS A CLASS C DRUG. It is illegal and harmful. The maximum sentence for possessing cannabis is 2 years in prison and an unlimited fine. The maximum penalty for supplying cannabis is 14 years in prison and an unlimited fine.

People aged 18 and over are no longer automatically arrested for possessing cannabis. However, you will be arrested if:

- > you are caught regularly;
- > you smoke in public places;
- > you use cannabis near premises where children and young people go.

It is an offence to be in charge of a motor vehicle while under the influence of cannabis. Sentences include disqualification from driving, fines and imprisonment.

If you are under 18 years of age

People under 18 will still be arrested for possession of cannabis. This means the police and the Youth Offending Team (YOT) can see if there are any underlying problems associated with a young person's cannabis use. The police can give reprimands and warnings at the police station – they will keep them on file in case the person is caught again. Offenders may end up in court in the future.

> A criminal record can cause serious problems at home, college or work, and in later life.

SELF-CONTROL TIPS

- > Avoid overdoing it, by having days off between using cannabis.
- > Don't buy extra, thinking you will save some for tomorrow – you probably won't.
- > Break up your pattern of use – this will make it easier to control and reduce risks.
- > If you are trying to cut down and stop, avoid any places, people or events that remind you of cannabis. Plan to do something else at the time of day you usually have a joint.
- > Try to identify all the things you associate with using cannabis and make an effort to avoid them until you feel OK about not smoking.

FURTHER ADVICE AND HELP

Visit www.knowcannabis.org.uk, you can complete an online 5-minute self-assessment quiz to find out more about your cannabis use. There's also a self-help course that can help you reduce or stop your cannabis use. It's confidential – you don't need to give your name or details about where you live.

Get hold of A Guide to Cutting Down and Stopping Cannabis Use. Call the Know Cannabis order line 0870 241 4680 – or you can order a copy online at www.knowcannabis.org.uk

Call the FRANK helpline on 0800 77 66 00.
You can get confidential information and advice about any illegal drug including cannabis.

