

## HANDOUT FOR TEENS/YOUNG ADULTS WITH CANNABIS USE DISORDER:

Hi,

If you're reading this, someone probably thinks you have a problem with Cannabis.

I've sat with thousands of people struggling with substance use disorders over the past few decades and here's what they tell me.

Sometimes, they're experiencing a legal problem related to marijuana, like a UPM charge, or have just experienced a car accident while under the influence. Some of them have are on academic probation from high school or college and face failing. Some have been suspended from team sports, or lost jobs related to chronic lateness, poor attendance, or positive urine drug screens secondary to their cannabis use. Occasionally, marijuana has turned on them, making their anxiety worse, and they're experiencing panic attacks for the first time.

I've been meeting more teens and young adults experiencing their first psychotic episode, during which time, they totally lose touch with reality and need to drop out of school and be hospitalized briefly in a psychiatric hospital (people are at increased risk for a psychotic episode, particularly if they've been using heavy amounts for long periods before the age of 21 and have a family history of Schizophrenia or Bipolar Disorder).

When I meet people with Cannabis Use Disorder for the first time, they're typically sad, mad and, sometimes, ashamed.

Sad that they're faced with giving up cannabis, a drug that they truly enjoy. It's part of their daily routine, social life, culture and structure. Feels like a friend, something to reward themselves at the end of a long day. They may use it to escape boredom, fall asleep, or deal with difficult feelings like anger, loneliness, sadness, anxiety.

They tell me "everybody does it," "it's natural," "it's medicine," and feel it's unfair that they have to cut it out of their life. Often times, they have addiction in the family (alcohol or drugs), which predisposes them to become addicted themselves. Harvard says genes are 50% of the problem. So, it's not your fault and I understand that it feels grossly unfair. You might not be in this situation if you were growing up in the 1980's, when the potency of THC in cannabis was 10x lower and cannabis was far less addictive. I'm sorry you're at this place.

Addiction changes the brain over time in the following ways:

- the euphoric recall is VERY strong in the beginning...the brain and body remember the first high and are obsessed with using...this can result in cravings which can be difficult to manage
- the ability to think through consequences and restrain yourself, especially when faced with certain triggers, is impaired temporarily;
- stress management is difficult in the beginning of abstinence before the brain heals; and
- you may suffer insomnia and high levels of irritability and anxiety during withdrawal, which can last 6 weeks

**THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT ABSTINENCE HEALS THE BRAIN OVER TIME. YOUR BEST DEFENSE AGAINST CRAVINGS IS TIME AWAY FROM LAST USE OF CANNABIS...YOUR BRAIN WILL RE-WIRE ITSELF OVER TIME AND IT WILL GET MUCH, MUCH EASIER.**

Prescribed medications my patients have found helpful during withdrawal:

Neurontin (Gabapentin) is an anti-seizure medication that raises GABA in the brain and can help lower irritability and anxiety and can decrease cravings.

NAC (N-Acetyl-Cysteine) is an over-the-counter medication that can help lower cravings in some people.

Mirtazapine (Remeron) and Trazodone can be helpful with insomnia.

Ask your prescriber to tell you more about these medications if you're interested.

Use them only under the direction and supervision of your prescriber.

CAN THERAPY HELP?

Research says that Cognitive Behavior Therapy with Motivational Enhancement Therapy AND Contingency Management can be helpful in moving toward abstinence.

Working with an addiction expert, trained in CBT/MET and CM can help with coping with cravings, managing difficult feelings, stress management, drug refusal skills and developing non-drug ways to have fun.

Attending a group of young people in recovery can be helpful in reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness in the beginning.

WHAT'S THE PAYOFF/WHAT ARE SOME BENEFITS OF STOPPING CANNABIS USE?

Here are some things my clients have said:

"I'm enjoying things I used to enjoy."

"I'm getting along with my family a lot better...we're fighting less and they're starting to trust me again."

"I feel better about myself...improved self-esteem."

"My motivation is definitely back...I stopped procrastinating...I get things done now."

"I feel more like myself again."

"I'm less angry, definitely less angry."

"Definitely less anxious, better mood."

"I stopped lying and I feel better about that...it's a lot less complicated this way."

"The 2 things most important to me are having a good career and having a family...if I continued to smoke weed every day, that was never going to happen."

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