



Understanding Cannabis

Also called marijuana, pot, weed, grass, gunja, yarndi, mary jane.

Cannabis is a depressant drug which means that it slows down and interferes with the functioning of the brain and the body. Cannabis may also have hallucinogenic effects including distortions of the senses, mood and thought.

Supporting someone who is using Cannabis

It can be difficult for families and friends when someone they care about is using cannabis. If you have only recently found out that a friend or family member is using cannabis try not to panic. Most people's use doesn't become a problem and they usually stop or cut back their use on their own. This brochure provides information to help a friend or family member.

Cannabis can look like:

- Dried plant matter
- Dried resin (hashish)
- Hash oil

The strength or potency of each form varies depending on how much THC it contains.

Cannabis effects:

People commonly use cannabis to induce a feeling of euphoria, to feel relaxed, or to assist with sleep and appetite. Other short-term effects include, red eyes, dry mouth, increased heart rate, low blood pressure, reduced coordination, confusion, anxiety, paranoia and hallucinations. Cannabis use can also increase the risk of developing mental health problems including paranoia, depression, anxiety, hallucinations or psychosis, particularly if there is a past or family history of mental health concerns. People who use cannabis regularly may experience decreased motivation, memory and learning problems, reduced sex drive, cravings, confusion, depression, anxiety, paranoia and hallucinations.

Tips for family and friends

Cannabis can change the way your friend and family member thinks, acts, and behaves. A normal response may be for you to feel worried, helpless or upset. The following tips may help you with these feelings:

- **Be aware.** Not everyone is ready to stop or cut back their cannabis use and some people may not be ready to change. Talking about the problem can be difficult. However, it is important to share your concerns.
- **Support change.** Not everyone's goal is to stop and it's important to support your friend or family member who is trying to change their use. Some positive changes could be using less, using in a safer way or improving their health and wellbeing.
- **Slip-ups.** It's important to remember that most people when they are making changes have a 'slip-up'. Having a slip-up doesn't mean that a person is going to return to a previous level of use and is a normal part of the recovery process. It's a real opportunity to learn and be ready to encourage them to keep going and not give up.
- **Provide support.** It is normal for people who are stopping or cutting back to experience low mood, anxiety, poor sleep and irritability. Some things that can help are encouraging them to develop good sleep habits, eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, avoid 'triggers' (i.e. people, places or events associated with using).
- **Stay connected.** It is important to keep your friend or family member involved in social activities if possible. However, you may need to think about replacing activities which may involve cannabis.



Tips when talking with family and friends who are using cannabis.

It can be challenging for families and friends when discussing a person's cannabis use. Some people are worried about how their friend or family member will react. Here are some hints and tips that may be helpful in guiding the conversation.

- **Put yourself in their shoes.** Before starting, think about how you would like to be approached, and reflect on the situation. Try and think about what you would like to say before starting the conversation.
- **Arrange a time and place.** Choose somewhere convenient, quiet and where you won't be interrupted. Don't try and talk to the person if they have been using drugs.
- **Start by listening.** It may be helpful to understand why they are using cannabis. Avoid lecturing or blaming a person for their cannabis use.
- **Avoid name calling.** When talking to a person avoid negative labels such as "pot head", "addict", or "stoner".
- **Explain your concerns.** Discuss their actions clearly and calmly, and explain why you are worried rather than criticising them as a person. Let the person know how their drug use is impacting you by using "I" statements, rather than "you" statements.
- **Try to ask questions.** Ask them if they would like any support and reassure them that professional help is available.

Here are some ways to help look after yourself

It is important for people to look after themselves and here are some things that may help.

- Make sure that you are getting enough food, rest and exercise, and don't stop doing things that you enjoy.
- Remember that people are responsible for their own actions. You can encourage people to change, but you can't make others do things they don't want to do.
- Talk to an understanding friend about the problem or seek support. Talking to someone such as a professional counsellor or doctor can be a great help.

- Attend a peer support group or join an online support group which are voluntary self-help groups for friends and family members. Some peer and online support groups include Family Drug Support, Al-Anon and SMART Recovery.
- Provide clear boundaries and expectations about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in your house, family and relationships. This can help to ensure that everyone feels safe and secure.

What help is available?

Adis 24/7 Alcohol and Drug Support is a 24 hour, 7 day a week confidential support service for people in Queensland with alcohol and other drug concerns, their loved ones and health professionals.

Talk to us. Anytime, anywhere.
1800 177 833

What should I do in an emergency?

If someone is expressing thoughts about self-harm, has collapsed or lost consciousness, call an ambulance on **triple zero (000)**. If they have stopped breathing commence CPR. If they are breathing normally, place them into the recovery position and continue to monitor them.

