



**concerned about
someone's cannabis use?**

**fast facts
on how to help**

Orygen
YOUTH Health

ncpic
national cannabis
prevention and
information centre

y

ou may have noticed that a friend, son, daughter or other family member is smoking cannabis. While most people who smoke cannabis do not go on to develop serious mental health problems, others may suffer some negative effects from the drug that will significantly affect their life. This booklet provides some basic information on what to look out for if you believe that someone you know may be experiencing mental health problems linked to their cannabis use. It also provides some tips on how to respond appropriately.

how do I know my friend or family member has a problem?

It must be remembered that cannabis use is illegal across Australia. If someone is caught with the drug, fines and criminal convictions are a real possibility.

Sometimes the person using the drug is unable to identify that cannabis is affecting their life adversely and it can be left to a friend or family member to highlight the problem.

Whether or not someone has a problem with cannabis is best judged by how their cannabis use affects their life and the lives of those around them. **A number of problems can be caused or made worse by involvement with cannabis:**

- altered perception of space and time, i.e. not being in touch with reality
- problems with concentration and memory (both in the short-term and long-term)

- reduced coordination, delayed reaction time and poorer decision-making skills, making it dangerous to drive
- anxiety or panic attacks
- feelings of paranoia, distrust, fear or suspicion (mostly about other people's motives towards you)
- decreased motivation or energy to finish tasks
- poor school or work performance
- family and relationship problems
- financial problems

Problem cannabis use may occur whilst using alcohol or other drugs. Mixing cannabis with other drugs, including alcohol, increases the risk of harm.

mental health problems can be caused or made worse by cannabis use

There is good evidence that:

- the younger you are when you begin to use cannabis, the greater the risks of mental health problems
- the greater the amount of cannabis consumed, the greater the likelihood there is of developing a mental illness. This association is particularly true for those with a family history of mental illness, but also affects those who do not have such a history

Some of the mental health problems associated with cannabis use include:

- **depression**
- **panic attacks**
- **psychosis**
- **aggression (mainly when cannabis is used with other drugs or during withdrawal)**
- **suicidal thoughts or behaviours**

what can I do?

- get as much information as possible (go to the NCPIC website)
- be prepared – reflect on the person’s situation. Put yourself in their shoes. How would you like to be approached about a problem you have?
- decide what you want to say before you talk to the person. It may even be a good idea to practice the conversation with someone you trust, or even in the mirror
- arrange a time and a place to talk where you won’t be interrupted. Try to choose a time when they are calm (and not stoned)
- don’t blame or lecture about their cannabis use. Don’t use negative labels like ‘addict’ or ‘loser’
- talk about their actions and why you are worried about them, rather than criticising them as a person

- talk to them about their cannabis use by asking about areas of their life it may be affecting (e.g., friendships, school)
- ask them if they want more information on cannabis and where to get help
- reassure them that professional help is confidential

For more information read ‘Helping someone with problem cannabis use: mental health first aid guidelines’ which can be found on the NCPIC website

If you would like more information on cannabis and where to get help, contact the Cannabis Information and Helpline

1800 30 40 50 or
www.ncpic.org.au

NCPIC is an Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing initiative.
©National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre.

Publication date: July 2011