

**Rachel**

“My boyfriend has only had his P-plates for a few months and he loves his car. He had driven us to a party a couple of weeks ago and because he was driving he wasn't going to drink. He's really scared of losing his license and you see police all over the place on a Saturday night so he was being really careful.”

“Halfway through the night one of his friends offered him a bong and like an idiot he had a few cones. When I told him that he couldn't drive home now we had a major fight. He didn't believe that police could now test for dope and I ended up giving up on him. He even said that smoking dope made you a better driver because you drove more carefully. I couldn't believe that he didn't drink but he would have a few cones – that's just stupid!”

**Is driving whilst under the effect of cannabis illegal?**

Cannabis, like other drugs such as alcohol, negatively affects your driving ability. As a result, driving under the effect of cannabis is illegal in all states and territories of Australia and may result in a fine, license suspension or imprisonment.

**Are there tests that can identify whether you are driving under the influence of cannabis?**

Roadside saliva tests undertaken by police can detect the presence of THC (one of the active components in cannabis), methylamphetamine (speed) and MDMA (ecstasy). Blood tests, which are far more accurate, are usually used to confirm the results of the saliva tests.

**Does cannabis affect driving skills?**

Driving under the influence of cannabis increases the risk of a motor vehicle crash two to three times. Also, if cannabis is used with alcohol at the same time, even at low doses, it could have a worse effect on driving than either cannabis or alcohol alone.

**Are roadside drug tests across Australia?**

All states and territories in Australia can conduct roadside drug testing in some shape or form. In the Northern Territory, saliva testing can only be carried out on motorists if they are involved in a motor vehicle crash, are driving a large vehicle such as a truck and are suspected to be under the influence of a drug or alcohol, or if they are pulled over for a random breath test. All other states and territories can conduct random roadside saliva testing for illegal drugs (correct as of April 2013).

**Does smoking cannabis make you drive more carefully?**

Cannabis does not improve your driving skills but is much more likely to worsen them. Cannabis can negatively affect reaction time, attention, decision making, time and distance perception, short-term memory, hand-eye coordination and concentration.

**How long after taking cannabis can THC be detected on a saliva test?**

The saliva tests are designed to only react to active ingredients in the drug. This will vary with the drug and the quality and quantity of the drug which has been used. Unlike a blood test, where a person who has smoked cannabis can be detected weeks later, the roadside drug test can only detect THC for a short time after.

**What drugs do roadside drug testing test for?**

Roadside drug testing can detect THC, one of the active components in cannabis, methylamphetamine, also known as speed, ice, crystal meth, or base and MDMA, also known as ecstasy.

## James

“Most of the people I know don’t smoke cannabis but of those that do, they smoke hydro. There’s one guy that doesn’t and he says he would never use hydro stuff because it’s more dangerous. He smokes ‘bush buds’. He says that it is natural and that it doesn’t contain any fertilizers or chemicals. He says that hydro has changed the plant and made it more dangerous.”

“Hydro sounds like it is a lot stronger and that you don’t need as much to get you stoned. It must be pretty strong because when I hang out with those guys and they get smashed, they get really smashed. They basically smoke the stuff, giggle a bit eat a lot and then go to sleep. Doesn’t seem like too much of a good time – they can’t even talk to each other!”

## What are ‘bush buds’?

‘Bush buds’ is a term used by regular cannabis users to describe cannabis that has been grown naturally, i.e., not hydroponically.

## Is cannabis stronger than it used to be?

It would appear that the strength of cannabis has increased to some extent over the last 25 years. It might seem stronger as these days more people smoke the stronger parts of the plant such as the flowering heads or ‘buds’ rather than just the leaves as they used to. Also, using a bong is more popular now which may increase the amount of cannabis and thus THC smokers are exposed to.

## What is the active ingredient of cannabis?

The main active ingredient in cannabis is called delta-9 tetrahydro-cannabinol, commonly known as THC. This is the part of the plant that gives the ‘high’.

## What parts of the cannabis plant contain more THC?

The flowering tops or ‘buds’ of the female cannabis plant have the highest concentrations of THC, followed by the leaves. The seeds and stalks have much lower levels of THC. Hashish, made from the resin (a secreted gum) of the cannabis plant and hash oil, thick oil obtained from hashish, contains more THC than the dried flowers and leaves.

## What is ‘hydro’?

‘Hydro’ refers to cannabis that has been grown hydroponically, or indoors, using artificial light sources such as lamps. Some people think ‘hydro’ is stronger than naturally grown cannabis, but studies have not found any convincing evidence to support this. It is possible that hydroponic growers choose cannabis varieties which are more potent anyway, or grow the plants to reach their full genetic potential which might make people think it is stronger.

## What sort of chemicals and fertilizers are used on cannabis?

People who grow cannabis to sell on the black market try to maximize their profits by growing as much as they can in the shortest time possible. A wide range of chemicals and fertilizers are used, many of which we know very little about, particularly in terms of what effect they will have on the smoker’s health. There have also been some cases where growers and sellers have added substances such as lead particles and glass beads to enhance the weight and appearance of the cannabis.



## Ronnie

**“Everyone knows that passive tobacco smoking is dangerous but I go to a lot of parties where there are some people smoking dope and I worry that their smoke could be affecting me.”**

**“One of my friends is an elite athlete and she gets drug tested. She was at someone’s house once and there were a whole group of guys smoking and she says that after a while she started to feel quite sick and dizzy. She was worried that it could have been the cannabis. She was also worried that just because she was in the room that she could have got a positive result in a drug test.”**

## Would I test positive to cannabis if I breathed in other people’s cannabis smoke?

Cannabis can be detected in a saliva test from passive smoking up to 30 minutes after exposure. The evidence for urine tests and hair tests is not as clear. It is important however, to not only remove your risk of being tested positive to cannabis if those around you are smoking it, but also to protect your health by staying away from cannabis smoke.

## Are there other problems associated with hanging out with people who smoke cannabis?

Apart from the effects of passive cannabis smoking, being around people who smoke cannabis regularly may lead to someone experimenting with the drug as they may come to see it as something normal and acceptable. They might not have as much interest or time to be involved in other, healthier activities and this could lead to other things suffering, such as sport or their school work.

## What is passive smoking?

Passive smoking is when the smoke from a substance someone is smoking is breathed in by people around them. It can include the smoke breathed out by the smoker (‘mainstream smoke’) as well as the smoke coming from the burning substance (‘sidestream smoke’).

## Which is worse, tobacco or cannabis smoke?

Both tobacco and cannabis smoke are harmful. They both contain carcinogenic chemicals such as tar and have been linked to cancer and respiratory diseases. Usually, a greater volume of cannabis smoke is breathed in, inhaled more deeply and held in the lungs longer than tobacco smoke is, making the risks of health problems occurring higher. Adding to this, the water in bongs makes the smoke cooler and therefore easier to smoke.

## What are the effects of passive cannabis smoking?

Any type of passive smoking, be it cannabis or tobacco, will expose a person to the negative health effects of that smoke. Respiratory diseases such as bronchitis and lung cancer have been linked to passive smoking. Although the effects of cannabis will be lower from passive smoking than active smoking, they will still exist.





## Ming

**“One of my best friends was a regular cannabis smoker. He had been smoking for a couple of years when we started to see changes in his behaviour. He was always paranoid when he smoked, but then he started to be paranoid all the time – even when he hadn’t been smoking.”**

**“We would be at somebody’s house and having a bit of a laugh and he would suddenly become very aggressive, accusing someone of talking about him behind his back. No-one knew what he was talking about and when we tried to talk to him about it he would not listen to reason.”**

**“One night he completely lost it and we ended up having to call his parents. We found out later that he had had a ‘psychotic episode’ and had been hearing voices. He stopped smoking dope apparently but we don’t see him anymore.”**

## Are young people at greater risk of mental health problems from using cannabis than older people?

People who start using cannabis at a young age and use it frequently are more likely to experience mental health problems. Because young people’s brains are still developing, it is important that they do not put their brains at risk by using drugs such as cannabis.

## Can someone recover from a psychotic episode?

Usually, the psychotic episodes people experience after using cannabis are short-term and go away once they stop using. In some cases, however, cannabis use can trigger a mental illness such as schizophrenia, particularly in a person who has a predisposition to it or a family history. This is why it is very important that young people avoid experimenting with or regularly using cannabis, in case they are vulnerable to developing a mental health problem.

## What is a psychotic episode?

A psychotic episode is usually a short-term, temporary period of time when a person has difficulty in telling the difference between what is real and what is not. They might hear voices that are not really there (hallucinations), or believe things that are not true (delusions). Sometimes their thinking or speech is muddled which makes it hard for people to understand them.

## Does cannabis cause mental illness?

There is no evidence that says cannabis causes mental illness, however it has been linked to illnesses such as schizophrenia, depression and anxiety. Evidence has shown that cannabis use may trigger schizophrenia in those who are already at risk of developing the disorder and that people who use cannabis have higher rates of depression. In terms of anxiety and panic disorders, although cannabis can cause short-term symptoms of anxiety, it is not seen as an important risk factor for chronic, long-term anxiety disorders.

## Can using cannabis cause violent behaviour?

In itself, cannabis is not a direct cause of violent behavior. If cannabis has triggered a psychotic episode and the person feels threatened or is suffering from delusions or hallucinations they may act violently. Additionally, if they are experiencing withdrawal symptoms they may be irritable and more prone to aggression.

## How can you help someone who smokes cannabis who is experiencing a psychotic episode?

The most important thing to remember is to check for danger and ensure that your safety is not at risk. A person who is affected by drugs in this way can be extremely dangerous – never put yourself at risk. Call 000 so that they can be treated quickly and safely.

If you believe you are not in danger and you can reason with them, try to calm them down, reassure them that these feelings will pass in time, take them to a safe, quiet place and tell them that you are here to help them. If there is nothing you can do then it is important to get more help as soon as possible.

## Charlie

“A couple of Saturdays ago we were down in the local park having a few drinks and a few cones when we were busted by the local cops. We must have been a bit smashed because none of us even saw them coming.”

“We all got busted for having the weed and got given a cannabis caution. One of the other guys already had a caution and was pretty worried about getting another one. The policewoman who took down our name and address said that all of our information would go onto a police computer. She said that it is not the same as having a police record but if we got into trouble again we could find ourselves in court. My mate is really worried.”

## Are the laws the same across Australia?

Each state and territory has its own laws so it is important to know the cannabis laws in your jurisdiction. There may also be different laws for young people and adults, resulting in different consequences.

## Are the laws the same for young people as they are for other Australians?

The laws for cannabis offences are not exactly the same for young people and other Australians such as adults. Diversion schemes are often used to divert young people from the court system and work on reducing the risk that they will reoffend. These are different in each Australian state and territory but can include education programs, counselling, official cautioning and warning systems.

## Do all your records of your juvenile history get destroyed when you turn 18 years of age?

Records of criminal history as a juvenile are not destroyed when you turn 18 years of age. If you have received a caution as a juvenile that will be kept on the police computer and is not destroyed.

## Is cannabis illegal?

Using, possessing, growing or selling cannabis is illegal across Australia, however the penalties for cannabis offences are different in each state and territory. Penalties include fines, being charged with a criminal offence or even being sent to jail.

## What does decriminalised mean?

Decriminalised means that the offence will not result in a criminal charge and can be dealt with by a civil penalty, such as a fine. It is important to remember that this does not mean the offence is legal or that there will be no consequences. States and territories that have decriminalised minor cannabis offences include South Australia, Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory.

## What is the cannabis cautioning system?

The cannabis cautioning system allows police to have an alternative to charging adult offenders for minor cannabis offences so they do not receive a criminal record. It is different in each state and territory but can include a system of cautions if people are found with small amounts of cannabis for personal use or equipment like bongs. Usually, the system requires people to attend education or health sessions about cannabis. The cautions are not unlimited however, and if a person keeps reoffending, more serious consequences may follow. New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania all operate cannabis cautioning systems.

## What does having a criminal record mean to your daily life?

Many jobs, including nurses, doctors, teachers or people working in the armed services, require employees to have a criminal records check. Having a drug conviction could result in a person not being eligible for some employment positions. In addition, people with a criminal record may have difficulty in gaining entry and visa approval to certain countries, including the USA and many parts of Asia. There is also a certain social stigma attached to people with a criminal record which can be hard to deal with, especially for young people.

## Ahmed

“One of my best friends went to a party with another group of her mates. One of them went off to the toilet and when she came back she didn’t look very well. Within a very short time she had gone very pale and started to vomit.”

“The others tried to look after her but became quite frightened. An older girl and guy at the party turned up and said that she would be okay and that she was just ‘greening out’. Apparently she had met up with some older people when she had gone to the toilet and had a few puffs on a joint. Sometimes people have a bad reaction to cannabis and that’s what happened to this girl. Thankfully, the older girl and guy stayed with them for a while and waited until the sick girl felt better. My friend was pretty freaked out by it – she didn’t know that could happen.”

## What is “greening out”?

‘Greening out’ is a term that refers to the situation where someone feels very sick after smoking cannabis. If this happens, users can go pale/green and feel sweaty, dizzy and nauseous.

## Is ‘greening out’ the same as an overdose?

‘Greening out’ is similar to an overdose, with some people even reporting passing out after using cannabis. Combining cannabis with alcohol appears to make the likelihood of someone ‘greening out’ greater.

## Isn’t cannabis a “soft drug”?

In the past, people used to think that cannabis wasn’t as dangerous or addictive as other so-called ‘harder’ drugs such as heroin or cocaine. There is increasing evidence however, that shows that cannabis is linked to mental health issues, health problems such as lung diseases and that it can cause dependence and withdrawal. Different drugs affect different people in different ways. For some people, cannabis is a particularly dangerous drug.

## Don’t you have to use cannabis for a long time for problems to occur?

Using cannabis can have unpredictable effects. Everyone reacts differently to cannabis and so it can’t be said that only those who use it for a long time or in high doses will be badly affected or experience any problems with it. It is important to remember that cannabis is a drug which has been linked to mental health problems including depression, and that young people in particular have been shown to be particularly vulnerable to its effects.

## What should you do if someone you know is ‘greening out’ after using cannabis?

If someone has a bad reaction after using cannabis, take them to a quiet place with fresh air, sit them in a comfortable position and give them a glass of water or something sweet (such as juice or a piece of fruit). If they start vomiting it is important not to leave them alone, even for the shortest time. Stay with them and lie them down on their side, not on their back, so they do not choke on their vomit. If you feel they are getting worse or you are really worried about them, get medical assistance.





## Brad

“I went away with a group of friends and we were all playing drinking games, I fell asleep on the couch and everyone else went to bed. About an hour later my friend came into the lounge room. She thought I was asleep and lit up a bong and had four cones from it one after the other then went straight back to bed.”

“I asked her about it privately the next day and she tried to deny it. I told her I saw the whole thing and she admitted she can’t go to sleep without smoking weed. I had no idea she was so dependent.”

## What does dependent mean?

When someone becomes ‘dependent’ on a drug it means that they need more and more of a drug for it to have the same effect. It also means if they stop taking it, they may experience withdrawal symptoms such as irritability, trouble sleeping and feeling depressed. Wanting to stop but not being able to, or spending too much time obtaining, using or recovering from cannabis use are other signs of dependence.

## Can you become dependent on cannabis?

In the past, people didn’t see cannabis as a drug of dependence in the same way as heroin or alcohol, but cannabis dependence is now well recognised in the scientific community.

## What treatments are available to young people who may have a problem with cannabis?

Counselling is one of the most popular treatments for people who have problems with cannabis. It can teach effective strategies to cope with cravings, avoiding high-risk situations where they might relapse and use cannabis, and help them to work out why they want to cut down or quit.

## Not everyone becomes dependent on cannabis. Does that mean there’s something wrong with a person if they end up having a problem?

Different drugs affect different people in different ways. Cannabis has been shown to be a drug of dependence and so whether or not you become dependent is more to do with your habits of use, rather than there being something wrong with you individually.

## What can someone do if they become dependent on cannabis?

Seeing a counsellor can help cannabis-dependent people reduce how much they use, as well as improve their wellbeing. Speaking to a health professional, such as your family GP, is another thing you can do to get help and advice.



## Nicky

“I went with one of my best mates to a dance party a couple of months ago. When we got to the stadium there were a whole pile of police there, as well as some sniffer dogs. Neither of us use drugs so we weren’t worried about them.”

“When the dog came up to my mate it sat down and the police asked him to step out of the line. Even though he told the police that he didn’t have any drugs he was still searched. He had his pockets emptied and had to take his shoes and socks off. When they didn’t find anything the police told him that he was free to go. My mate then asked them why the dogs sat down in front of him.”

“They said that if we had been with other people who had been smoking cannabis in the days before the party, there was a possibility that there were still traces of the drug on our clothing. The night before we had been at a mate’s house where some of the guys were smoking – we had no idea that just because we were hanging out with people that smoked cannabis we could get pulled over. We didn’t get busted but it was pretty scary there for a while.”

## Could a sniffer dog detect cannabis on your clothes even if you haven’t used the drug?

Dogs have a highly developed sense of smell which therefore makes it possible for them to detect cannabis on your clothes if, for example, you had recently been with friends who had been smoking around you.

## Is cannabis illegal?

Using, possessing, growing or selling cannabis is illegal across Australia, however the penalties for cannabis offences are different in each state and territory. Penalties include fines, being charged with a criminal offence or even being sent to jail.

## What will happen if a young person is caught with cannabis?

Young people who are caught with cannabis face legal consequences. Diversion schemes are often used however, to divert young people from the court system and work on reducing the risk that they will reoffend. These are different in each Australian state and territory but can include education programs, counseling, official cautioning and warning systems.

## What drugs can sniffer dogs detect?

Drug detection (or ‘sniffer’) dogs can be trained to detect many things, from drugs to explosives and even to counterfeit DVDs. Cannabis, heroin, amphetamines and cocaine are among the types of drugs sniffer dogs have been trained to detect.

## How can you protect yourself from having this sort of thing happening to you?

Obviously staying away from people while they are smoking cannabis will prevent sniffer dogs from detecting traces of the drug on your clothing. It is important to remember that sniffer dogs’ highly trained sense of smell means that even the tiniest amount of cannabis in your clothes will be detected.





## Annie

“I don’t normally smoke weed but I was away with some friends and we all tried some weed cake. The lady we bought it from said just to take half a piece. I did and nothing happened. The other two guys I was with were really mellow and laughing and having a good time. I ate a bit more of the cake, then a bit more. Of course it all hit me at once.”

“I got really paranoid and freaked out. The walls started closing in and I couldn’t see colour anymore. I was screaming out for my boyfriend but he was too stoned to help me. Then I just started going through cycles of paranoia and screaming, followed by intense laughing for no reason. It lasted for about six hours and was so awful. When I eventually fell asleep I slept for 14 hours and missed half the concert I had paid \$100 for tickets.”

## Is eating cannabis a safe way of using cannabis?

There is no safe way to use cannabis. All methods of use have some degree of risk. One of the greatest risks is linked to the smoking of the drug, i.e., the user inhales burned matter, increasing the risk of a range of health problems. When a cannabis user eats the drug they remove this risk. All of the other health risks linked to cannabis still exist however, such as possible mental health problems and dependence.

## What is the most dangerous way of using cannabis?

The most harmful way of smoking cannabis is through a bong. Although inhaling smoke through water makes it cooler, this makes it easier for the smoker to inhale a greater volume of smoke more deeply into the lungs. This increases the surface area for tar and other carcinogens to affect the respiratory system.

## How do people use cannabis?

Cannabis is usually smoked. It can also be cooked or baked in foods and eaten, or drunk in tea.

## What is the most popular way of using cannabis?

The most common way to use cannabis is by smoking it. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as:

- a pipe
- a joint (a ‘roll your own’ cigarette)
- a waterpipe or ‘bong’
- a vaporiser

Bongs are the most common method in Australia, especially among young people. They can be made from a variety of materials such as glass, plastic and aluminium. The cannabis is packed in a ‘cone’ and burned, and water is used to cool the smoke before it is inhaled.

## What should you do if a friend “freaks out” after using cannabis?

Everyone who uses cannabis will have a different experience. Sometimes these experiences may be extremely frightening. If this happens to someone you know, try to do the following:

- try to calm the person down
- reassure them that these feelings will pass in time
- take them to a safe and quiet place and stay with them
- let them know that you are here to help them. If there is something you can do for them, do it
- if they calm down, try to distract them with other things that may take their mind off things





Worksheet 2: Possible impacts in each story

	<b>Biological impacts</b> <i>Physical and physiological responses. For example, decreased heart rate</i>	<b>Psychological impacts</b> <i>Feelings, emotions, thoughts and behaviours. For example, feeling sad and crying</i>	<b>Biological impacts</b> <i>Interactions with others, relationships, legal issues, work, school, sport etc. For example, being part of a football team</i>
Ahmed			
James			
Nicky			
Charlie			
Brad			



	<b>Biological impacts</b> <i>Physical and physiological responses. For example, decreased heart rate</i>	<b>Psychological impacts</b> <i>Feelings, emotions, thoughts and behaviours. For example, feeling sad and crying</i>	<b>Biological impacts</b> <i>Interactions with others, relationships, legal issues, work, school, sport etc. For example, being part of a football team</i>
Ming			
Rachel			
Ronnie			
Annie			



<b>Key messages for communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using cannabis can have unwanted physical, social and emotional consequences. These can be immediate, short- or long-term</li> <li>Age of first use, quantity used and frequency of use strongly influence long-term patterns of use, health outcomes and potential dependence</li> <li>Cannabis is illegal in Australia</li> </ul>
<b>Activity Overview</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This activity is designed as an online activity but can be facilitated with hard copies as well. It encourages students to identify the multiple affects cannabis can have on a person's health. It extends to discussing consequences of these impacts in the short and long term. Students can develop a more detailed understanding of how cannabis works in the body and explore psychological and social impacts as well</li> </ul>

## For more information please access these NCPIC fact sheets and other resources

- [Impacts of cannabis use for young people](#)
- [Cannabis and Mental Health](#)
- [Cannabis and Aggression](#)
- [Cannabinoids and appetite](#)
- [Cannabis and sport](#)
- [Cannabis and motivation](#)
- [Cannabis information](#) – including short and long-term effects
- See also: *Information for Teachers* in this package (downloadable PDF on website)

