

Educative outcome	At the completion of this activity, students will be able identify and assess adverse outcomes from smoking cannabis in two scenarios. They will be able to identify when and how to call for help and develop strategies and skills in managing a crisis situation until help arrives. Students will become familiar with a resource called the <i>Helping Someone with Problem Cannabis use Mental Health First Aid</i> guidelines and identify local resources available to them
Task	Students are given scenarios and use an accompanying worksheet to consider appropriate help-seeking responses in the short- and long-term
Duration	50 minutes
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worksheets for students with scenarios

Introduction:

Explain that this session is about helping someone who has had an adverse reaction to, or suffered a severe consequence from smoking cannabis.

Brainstorm: Ask the class if anyone has ever done a first aid course? What is first aid? What is its purpose?

First aid is the help given to an injured or ill person until medical treatment is available.

Today's session on cannabis is about helping a person who has had an adverse reaction to cannabis or suffered an injury as an outcome of using cannabis. Remind students they may never need to practice this skill but, like CPR, it is a good skill to have.

Activity:

- Divide the students into pairs
- Provide students with the first scenario
- Ask students to read through the scenario, identify the issues and then decide what the friend in the scenario could do to help. Use the worksheets for each scenario
- Follow the same procedure with the second scenario
- Students present their ideas to the rest of the class and teachers facilitate a discussion

Summary and concluding remarks:

- Ask students to compare and contrast the two scenarios. How are the risks different and how does this affect the response by the friend?
- Provide students with a link to or a copy of [Helping Someone with Problem Cannabis use Mental Health First Aid guidelines](#)
- Encourage students to think about how they would respond in situations like that in scenario one and scenario two and ask them to write a private reflection about what they would do. This might also be an opportunity to encourage students to write down questions they may have (for example "What if...."). These could be anonymous and addressed by the teacher during the next discussion

Extensions

- Ask students to identify how they would know if a person has a 'problem' with cannabis and discuss strategies in *Helping Someone with problem cannabis use: Mental Health First Aid Guidelines*

Teacher answer sheet: Taking care of Jen

Jen is with 6 friends who are staying the night at her best friend's house. They are planning to stay in and watch DVDs. One girl, Melissa, has bought a joint with her that she stole from her brother's room. Melissa thinks it is cannabis and is offering everyone a chance to try it. Everyone seems keen to try it. Jen knows of lots of people at school who have tried it but she has never tried smoking before. Jen has heard that cannabis is 'natural' and can't do anyone any harm. They are not using any other drugs or alcohol and everyone is in a happy mood. None of them have tried cannabis before.

Jen decides she may as well give it a go.

Jen doesn't feel much affect from smoking. She figures it is because she didn't really inhale that much because she didn't want to start coughing. However, Melissa who seemed to have had the most has starts to look really sick and says she wants to throw up. She won't sit still and keeps pacing around the house as if she is scared of something. Melissa keeps telling everyone to stop talking about her behind her back, but her friends insist that they are not talking about her.

What do you think has happened to Melissa?

Sometimes people can have adverse or bad reactions to cannabis. This can involve physical symptoms, like feeling sick as well as mental symptoms such as paranoia, fear, aggression or agitation. It seems Melissa has had an adverse physical reaction – she feels like she wants to throw up. However she is still talking and moving around. Most importantly she is conscious and oriented (that is, she knows where she is and who she is with). Mentally, Melissa has become paranoid that everyone is talking about her. She is also really restless and keeps 'pacing around'. Most of these symptoms should pass quite quickly. Melissa will have a 'peak' affect approximately 30 minutes after smoking and these affects should reduce or cease by about 3-4 hours.

What can Jen and her friends do to help Melissa?

- *Keep Melissa calm. Reassure Melissa that they are not talking about her and want to make sure she is alright. They may need to repeat that several times and keep reassuring her even though she doesn't seem to be believing them. Even though Melissa might become angry, Jen needs to remain calm and speak to her in a quiet and direct way*
- *Jen could take Melissa to a quiet room in the house and distract her with something – conversation, TV, music, doodling or drawing, writing (depending on what Melissa responds to)*
- *Jen needs to stay with Melissa all the time. If Melissa feels unwell, it is important she doesn't lie down and go to sleep (especially on her back)*
- *Jen could call an older person that she trusts to come over and help*
- *If Melissa gets worse, becomes unconscious or unmanageable (that is threatens to do something dangerous to herself or to others) then Jen needs to call for medical help*

See 'What to do if the person is in a cannabis-affected state' from [Helping someone with problem cannabis use: Mental Health First Aid Guidelines, p8](#).

Discuss at what point an ambulance might be called and what would happen.

Identify local resources that could be useful in helping Melissa.

What other resources are available locally for a person who has experienced problems with cannabis? (Consider GPs, counsellors, community centres, drug and alcohol services – online and face-to-face resources can be identified).

What to do if the person is in a cannabis-affected state

- Stay calm and assess the situation for potential dangers. Try to ensure that the person, yourself and others are safe.
- Talk with the person in a respectful manner using simple, clear language. Be prepared to repeat simple requests and instructions as the person may find it difficult to comprehend what has been said. Do not speak in an angry manner.
- Try to dissuade the affected person from engaging in dangerous behaviours, such as driving a vehicle or operating machinery. Tell the person that it is dangerous to drive even though they may feel alert.
- Encourage the person to tell someone if they start to feel unwell or uneasy, or to call emergency services if they have an adverse reaction.

See also 'Panic' and 'What to do if the person is aggressive' from *Helping someone with problem cannabis use: Mental Health First Aid Guidelines* p10 and 1.

Panic

If the person is anxious and panicky, take them to a quiet environment away from crowds, loud noise, and bright lights and monitor them in case their psychological state deteriorates.

It is important that you remain calm and you do not start to panic yourself. Speak to the person in a reassuring but firm manner and be patient. Speak clearly, slowly and use short sentences. Rather than making assumptions about what they think might help.

Do not belittle the person's experience. Acknowledge that the terror they feel is very real, but reassure them that they are safe and that their symptoms will pass.

The symptoms of panic attack sometimes resemble the symptoms of a heart attack or other medical problem. It is not possible to be totally sure that a person is having a panic attack. Only a medical professional can tell if it is something more serious. If the person has not had a panic attack before, and doesn't think they are having one now, you should follow physical first aid procedures.

For more information on helping someone see ***Panic attacks' First Aid Guidelines.***

What to do if the person is aggressive

If the person becomes aggressive, assess the risks to yourself, the person and other. Ensure your own safety at all times so that you can continue to an effective helper. If you feel unsafe, seek help from others. Do not stay with the person if your safety is a risk. Remain as calm as possible and try to de-escalate the situation with the following techniques:

- Talk in a calm, non-confrontational manner.
- Speak slowly and confidently with a gentle, caring tone of voice.
- Try not to provoke the person; refrain from speaking in a hostile or threatening manner and avoid arguing with them
- Use positive words (such as "stay calm") instead of negative words (such as "don't fight") which may cause the person to overreact.
- Consider taking a break from the conversation to allow the person a chance to calm down.
- Try to provide the person with a quiet environment away from noise and other distractions.
- If inside, try to keep the exits clear so that the person does not feel penned in and you and others can get away easily if needed.

If violence has occurred, seek appropriate emergency assistance.

See also 'Tips for effective communication' from *Helping someone with problem cannabis use: Mental Health First Aid Guidelines* p5.

Tips for effective communication

- Stay calm and reasonable
- Ask the person about their cannabis use rather than make assumptions about their use
- When the person finishes talking, repeat back what you have heard them say and allow them to clarify any misunderstandings
- Focus the conversation on the person's behaviour rather than their character
- Use "I" statements instead of "you" statements (e.g. "I feel worried/angry/frustrated when you..." instead of "You make me feel worried/angry/frustrated...")
- Stick to the point (i.e. focus on the person's cannabis use) and do not get drawn into arguments of discussions about other issues
- Do not criticise the person's cannabis use
- Do not call the person an "addict" or use other negative labels

Teachers answers: Medical emergency

Jack is skating with some older boys at the skate park. He really likes these guys and thinks they are really cool. One of the guys, Adrian, asks James if he would like to smoke weed with them and points to some bushes in the nearby park. Jack says he has never smoked before. Adrian says it isn't a problem because they are all really experienced and will show him how to smoke 'properly'.

Jack decides to try it.

Jack only has a small amount and feels little effect. After everyone has had a smoke, they all head back to the skate bowl. They sit around for a while then Adrian decides to try going for a skate. He says he always skates when he's stoned and it makes him more careful. Jack was sitting watching and saw Adrian make a turn and fall. He hit his head and slid down the bowl. Everyone just sat there expecting him to get up, but he didn't move. They realised pretty quickly that something was wrong and could see that Adrian was bleeding from a mark on his head. They couldn't wake him up.

What has happened to Adrian?

Adrian was cannabis affected when he was skating. Cannabis can affect vision and co-ordination and this has probably had a significant impact on Adrian. It can also make people more relaxed so he wasn't weary of falling. He may have been slower to react than usual and didn't have the reflexes to break his fall. He has obviously taken a pretty strong hit to the head and isn't waking up.

What do Jack and his mates need to do to help Adrian?

This is a medical emergency. Adrian is unconscious and is bleeding. They need to call an ambulance immediately.

One of the other guys says they should wait a bit before calling an ambulance to see if Adrian wakes up. Why do you think he wants to wait?

Discuss how he might be worried if the ambulance is called about what will happen to all of them because they have been smoking. Talk about whether police will be called etc. Discuss the importance of disclosing cannabis use to the paramedics when they arrive.

What do you think will happen if an ambulance is called?

Explore students' beliefs and expectations and discuss. Talk about making a 000 call and what happens. Below is a list of the types of questions that will be asked when someone calls 000.

Identify local resources that could be useful in helping Adrian.

What other resources are available locally for a person who has experienced problems with cannabis. (Consider GPs, counsellors, community centres, drug and alcohol services – online and face-to-face resources can be identified)



Calling an Ambulance

In order to get an ambulance to the scene of an emergency as quickly as possible, any person calling triple zero (000) will be asked a standard set of questions by an ambulance control centre.

Listed below are examples of the important questions asked by 000 operators

- 1. What is the exact address of the emergency?**
(The operator will ask for the suburb name and nearest cross street).
- 2. What is the phone number you are calling from?**
(This information is important in case the operations centre needs to call back to obtain further information).
- 3. What is the problem, tell me exactly what happened?**
(Should the caller not understand the question it will be rephrased and repeated).
- 4. How old is s/he?** (Approximate age if unsure)
- 5. Is s/he conscious?** (Yes or no answer required)
- 6. Is s/he breathing?** (Yes or no answer required)

Once you have answered these questions an ambulance is sent. It is important that you remain calm and do not hang up until the operator has obtained the required information.

Additional questions may be asked by the operator, who will also provide further assistance or instructions depending on the situation.

For example, if you ring about a person suffering from chest pain you may be asked the following additional questions regarding the patient.

- **Is s/he completely awake?**
- **Is s/he breathing normally?**
- **Is s/he changing colour?**
- **Is s/he clammy?**
- **Does s/he have a history of heart problems?**
- **Did s/he take any drugs or medication in the past 12 hours?**

Answering these questions to the best of your ability ensures we have the most accurate information about the patient's condition and can tell the paramedics who are on the way.

Key messages for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most young people do not try or use cannabis • Using cannabis can have unwanted physical, social and emotional consequences. These can be immediate, short- or long-term • Attitudes, values and beliefs vary among individuals and communities • Age of first use, quantity used and frequency of use strongly influence long-term patterns of use, health outcomes and potential dependence • Cannabis is illegal in Australia • Accessing credible information about cannabis is essential to making informed decisions
Activity Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This activity is based on the <i>Helping Someone with Problem Cannabis use Mental Health First Aid guidelines</i> Resource developed by Orygen Youth Health Research Centre in partnership with NCPIC. It has been designed to enable students to develop skills and strategies to assist a person who has had an adverse outcome from using cannabis

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

- [Helping Someone with Problem Cannabis use Mental Health First Aid guide](#)
- See also: *Information for Teachers* in this package (downloadable PDF on website)

