

Cannabis and Psychosis

A course in six modules

Modules...

1

2

3 & 4

5

Please select

6



Module 1

Introduction

Your experience

The facts





What's it all about?

This is a web-based package designed to ensure you have all the information, good and bad, about the health risks of cannabis use for young people who have experienced mental health difficulties.

People use cannabis for all kinds of reasons – to get high, for something to do with mates, or to calm down.

But it also carries risks. It can make you feel panicky, sick, paranoid and suspicious, and worse. If you have used over a long period of time, it can have even more severe physical and psychological health effects.



audio extract 1



audio extract 2





What's on offer?

This course will give you a chance to talk about some of the things you have experienced and will give you some information about your health, and the risks of using cannabis, so you can make an...

...informed choice

The course...

runs over 6 modules
each lasting around 30 minutes

With the aim of...

learning about your health
getting to know the impact of using cannabis
helping you to make an informed choice about cannabis use in the future.



What's the deal?

**First, let's agree some ways to make this course work best...
Here are some things that are important for every session...**

Confidentiality

What is discussed will remain private and confidential, and will not go beyond the clinical team. But confidentiality can be broken if there is a risk of severe harm to yourself or others.

Not being high or drunk

When you come into these meetings it's important that you are not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The reason for this is it makes it difficult for you to talk with staff and take in information.

Attend sessions

It's important that you receive this information about your health, and how cannabis may be affecting you. Is there anything you feel would help to make it easier for you to attend all your sessions?

Any other ideas???





Your story...

How do you understand what has happened to you, and the experiences you have had that have led you to being seen by a mental health service?

What do you call this experience?

What was it like to go through such an experience?

How and why do you think this has happened to you now?

What is the meaning of this experience for you?

How would you describe to a friend what happened to you?

Do you believe it could happen to you again?

**your
story**





Your experience & psychosis

People understand the kind of experience you have had by the term psychosis. Psychosis is a condition where a person experiences some loss of contact with reality.



audio extract 3



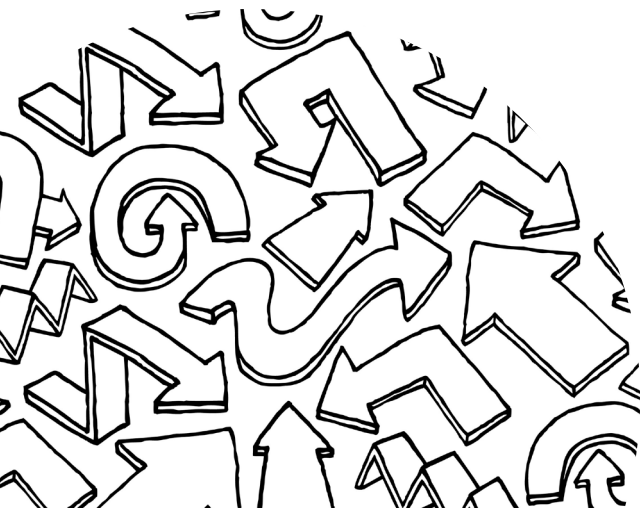
What is psychosis?

In psychosis, one or more of the brain's basic functions can become confused. So...

- thinking becomes jumbled; beliefs develop without any real evidence to support them
- feelings & emotions can be numbed or exaggerated
- unusual perceptual experiences may cause a person to sense things that cannot be experienced by others
- behaviour may change and someone may act in an unusual manner that others find difficult to understand

Have you experienced symptoms like this?

Psychosis can happen to anyone, and it can be treated.





What is First Episode Psychosis?

This is the first time someone experiences a psychotic episode.

People experiencing a first episode may not understand what is happening to them at the time. The symptoms can be highly unfamiliar, leaving the person and those around them feeling confused and distressed.

Is this similar or different to your own experience? In what way?

Factfile

Anyone can get psychosis

Slightly more men than women experience psychosis

Most experiences of psychosis begin in people aged 15 - 30

About 3 out of every 100 young people will experience a psychotic episode





Cannabis: The effect on your mental health

So why is it important to talk about cannabis in relation to your mental health?



It's important to know how cannabis can affect you, so you can make an informed decision about using it.

Cannabis use can have a big impact on your health, both physically and psychologically, and if you have experienced psychosis you are likely to be much more sensitive to the effects of cannabis than you may have been before.

make an informed decision...have a big impact on your health...make you much more sensitive...



Are you at risk?

“

I was on medication for hearing voices. The doctors said ‘Don’t smoke cannabis’... I went out and used cannabis loads. I started hearing voices saying I was going to die, and I got really confused. I went back to hospital, and I was stuck like that, hearing things and thinking I was going to die, for 2 months!

Josh, 17

”

We are all different in our make-up: Some of us are more susceptible to certain things, and we have to modify our lifestyles to manage this. For example, people with diabetes can’t eat and enjoy sugary foods like others do because it will make them unwell.

In a similar way, you may be more affected by using cannabis and may need to change your lifestyle.

You may be, at risk if:

- you have experienced psychosis already
- there is a history of psychosis in your family
- you experience increased mental health symptoms when you smoke even just some of the time

That’s the end of this session.

What’s one message you can take away from the information in this session?

Next Steps

The next session is going to look at:

How cannabis affects your health. Particularly, we will think about how cannabis can impact on you differently in relation to your mental health difficulties.

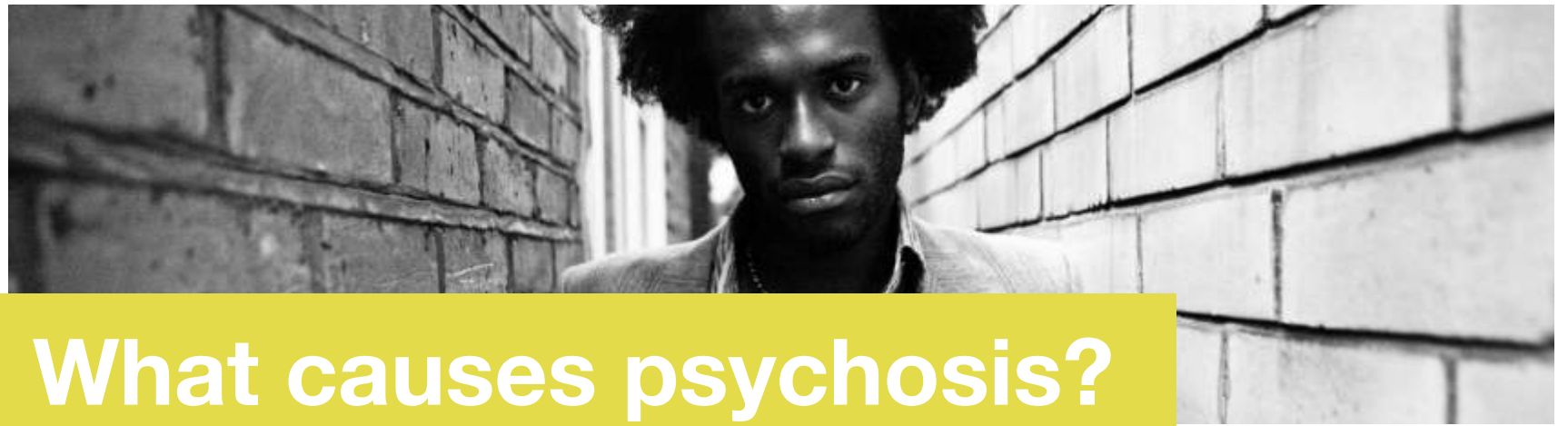
We will consider how you may be sensitised to the effects of cannabis which can lead to a relapse and recurrence of your symptoms.

Thank you for your time.

Module 2

.....
Cannabis & mental health
.....





What causes psychosis?

Last time we discussed what psychosis is and your views on it. In this module we take a closer look at the connection between cannabis and mental health. We all have different ways of responding and coping with stress, and this is determined by our genes, by our environment, and by our past experiences. Some people have what is called a “vulnerability” to psychosis.

This means that genetic make-up and the environment can make someone more susceptible to psychosis because of the impact these things have on a person's coping strategies. Cannabis may be adding to the problem because a change in your brain chemistry very often means you are sensitised to its effects. It can then contribute to your symptoms and make things worse for your recovery. It also increases the chances of relapse and hospitalisation.



Cannabis isn't dangerous, right?

Most people who use cannabis don't experience any obvious harmful effects ...So What's the Problem?

You may think, that cannabis:

Gives you a buzz

Makes you feel happy and confident

Helps reduce anxiety and stress

Helps you forget your worries

Helps you relax in social situations

Helps you manage side effects of medication

Manages the effects of symptoms like hallucinations and paranoia (But it may just be making these symptoms worse!)

But what are the effects on your psychological health?





What are the negative effects of cannabis?

Short-term:

- Anxiety or Paranoia
- Memory and concentration problems
- Increased risk of accidents
- Extreme paranoia
- Persistent hallucinations

Long-term:

- Increased risk of throat or lung diseases
- Dependence
- Financial problems
- Social Isolation
- Less Motivation
- Less Concentration
- Poorer job prospects
- Other mental health problems, like depression and anxiety

One of the biggest risks of continuing your cannabis use is:
a relapse in your mental health



Vulnerability to cannabis

What are the effects on your mental health?

Using cannabis triggers mental health problems in people who seemed to be well before, or it can worsen any mental health problems you already have. Research has shown that people who are already at risk of developing mental health problems, such as depression or schizophrenia (e.g. because somebody else in the family has it), are more likely to start showing symptoms if they use cannabis regularly.

The younger you are when you start using it, the more you may be at risk. This is because your brain is still developing and can be more easily damaged by the active chemicals in cannabis.

What do you think are the risks?

Take a look at the FRANK video for some more information.

Do you have any questions or comments from what you just saw in this video clip?



FRANK video



audio extract 1





Where's the Link?

Many things can contribute to what you have experienced, and cannabis could well be playing a part.

- Cannabis generally makes psychotic symptoms worse
- People often report that they experience more hallucinations, delusions and other symptoms
- Continued cannabis use lowers the chances of recovery from a psychotic episode
- It generally slows down recovery so that more medication, taken for much longer periods, is needed to manage symptoms
- This can also lead to the need for more frequent use of crisis services and may require more frequent and longer stays in hospital
- All this can make it much harder to get back to 'normal' things and more difficult to get on with life as you would like to.

hallucinations
hallucinations
cannabis
psychosis
psychosis



Feeling the effects

“

“I’d always done a lot of (sniffing) glue as a kid. I was very interested in glue, and then I went to lager and speed, and I drifted into heroin because as a kid growing up everybody told me, ‘don’t smoke marijuana, it will kill you’ . . .”

Irvine Welsh, author of “Trainspotting,” recalling his own experience with drug abuse

”

Some people have a sensitivity to cannabis that may be intensified after experiencing an episode of psychosis. Due to a change in brain chemistry, you may be more sensitised to the effects of cannabis after your experience, and this may make you much more prone to relapse.

If you have experienced psychosis, should you avoid drugs like Cannabis?

Yes...Health research and professional guidance suggests you should avoid it!

Next Steps

The next session is going to look at:

In the next session we will look at cannabis in your life, and consider the positive and negative impacts of cannabis in different aspects of your life.

Thank you for your time.



Modules 3 & 4

Impact on life –
.....
the 'good' and the 'bad'
.....





Introduction



In earlier sessions we looked at the link between cannabis and psychological health. In modules 3 & 4 we will look at how using cannabis affects various areas of your life – both positively and negatively.

Looking at a full range of factors including your family, friends, physical health, mental health, the law, work and finances – we will weigh up both the good and bad things about using cannabis. Looking at this pie chart, think about how cannabis affects different areas and click on each wedge for some ideas.

Modules 3 & 4 are combined, so they can be completed in one session or split between two. It's up to you... In your handouts there is a table where you can note down the impact for each area you discuss.

negative impact

no impact

positive impact

-3

-2

-1

+1

+2

+3

intense

moderate

mild

neutral

mild

moderate

intense

But what are the effects on your psychological health?





Impact on mental health

‘Back to reality’ video

We have previously looked at the link between cannabis and mental health; let’s now look to see what others have to say about their experience by taking a look at a video clip. You can stop the video clip whenever you like – if you want to ask a question, or make a comment. It would be good to know what you think of what they have to say, and whether you can see similarities or significant differences to your own experiences.



play from disk



Back to pie chart



Your views?

What's your opinion of the stories told in the DVD?

What did you make of their experiences of psychosis?

Were they similar in anyway to yours? Or how were they different?

What did you think of how they related cannabis use to their mental health difficulties?

What would you tell others if you had to give some advice like that offered by those in the video?

In your handouts rate the impact of cannabis on your mental health...

Discuss

 [Back to pie chart](#)



Impact on Family

If you are using cannabis a lot, it can really affect your relationships. Maybe things feel relaxed and good with your friends, but it may be creating more stresses at home with your family.

- What do your family think of your use of cannabis?
- What do they think about its effect on your health?
- Are your relationships affected by your cannabis use?

Impact Rating:

To what extent is using cannabis having a positive/negative impact on your family life?

In your hand-out rate the impact of cannabis on our relationships with your family.




 [Back to pie chart](#)





Impact on Friends

Many people say they started using cannabis because that is what their friends were doing, and it was the norm in their social group. With time, it is often what people get together with their friends to do, and it becomes part of normal social life.




audio extract 1





audio extract 2



- Do all your friends smoke cannabis?
- What do you think your friends would say/think if you decided to stop using?
- How would you feel being around your friends if you weren't using cannabis?

It can be hard to say to friends that you don't want to use cannabis because of your mental health. If you are concerned about how your friends will respond, or if you think they won't understand, could you try another response, like saying 'you decided to quit because it's bad for your health' or 'you've had enough for now'?

Impact Rating:

To what extent is using cannabis having a positive/negative impact on your social life?

On your worksheet rate the impact of cannabis on your friendships...

 **Back to pie chart**



Physical Health

Cannabis can affect more than your mental health. It can really affect your physical health too.

It's not only your brain that is affected, but the chemicals can affect other parts of your body too. Cannabis really increases the risk of lung problems, and doubles your chances of getting cancer particularly mouth, gum and throat cancers. With long-term use, you are more likely to get illnesses like Asthma, Bronchitis, wheezing & coughing, raised blood pressure and it affects sperm production and ovulation. If you're pregnant, cannabis affects the growth of your unborn baby too, and can lead to birth defects..

Cannabis can be addictive, and it can be difficult to give up. You may need specialist input to assist you if you decide to give up as you may experience withdrawal symptoms and cravings that are difficult to manage.

Impact Rating: To what extent is using cannabis having a positive/negative impact on your physical health? On your worksheet rate the impact of cannabis on your physical health...



Back to pie chart





The Law

Cannabis is an illegal drug.

There is a lot of confusion over this, but cannabis is a Class B drug, which means it is illegal to have any (possession) or to sell or give it to others (supplying).

Maximum sentence for possession:
5 years in prison + unlimited fine

Penalty for supplying:
14 years in prison + unlimited fine



On your worksheet rate the impact of cannabis for law...



Back to pie chart





Money

One big area where cannabis impacts on your life is your finances!

Let's take a minute to calculate how much money you spend on cannabis in a week.

Cannabis (e.g. leaf, heads, hash) £	per week x	weeks = £	per year or
Cannabis (e.g. leaf, heads, hash) £	per month x	months = £	per year



What else could you have spent this money on?

Don't forget there are hidden costs too – tobacco, papers, bongs, etc.
And maybe days off work too which all add up.

Impact Rating:

To what extent is using cannabis having a positive/negative impact on your financial life?

On your worksheet rate the impact of cannabis on your finances...

 **Back to pie chart**



Activity & use of your time

Do you feel unmotivated and sluggish? Struggling to get up in the morning and keep your commitments for work or college?

The effects of cannabis can hugely reduce your motivation to do anything. If cannabis increases your symptoms of anxiety, low mood, paranoia or hallucinations, it can be very difficult to attend to day-to-day activities.

Time smoking/stoned (per week) hours x weeks = hours/year

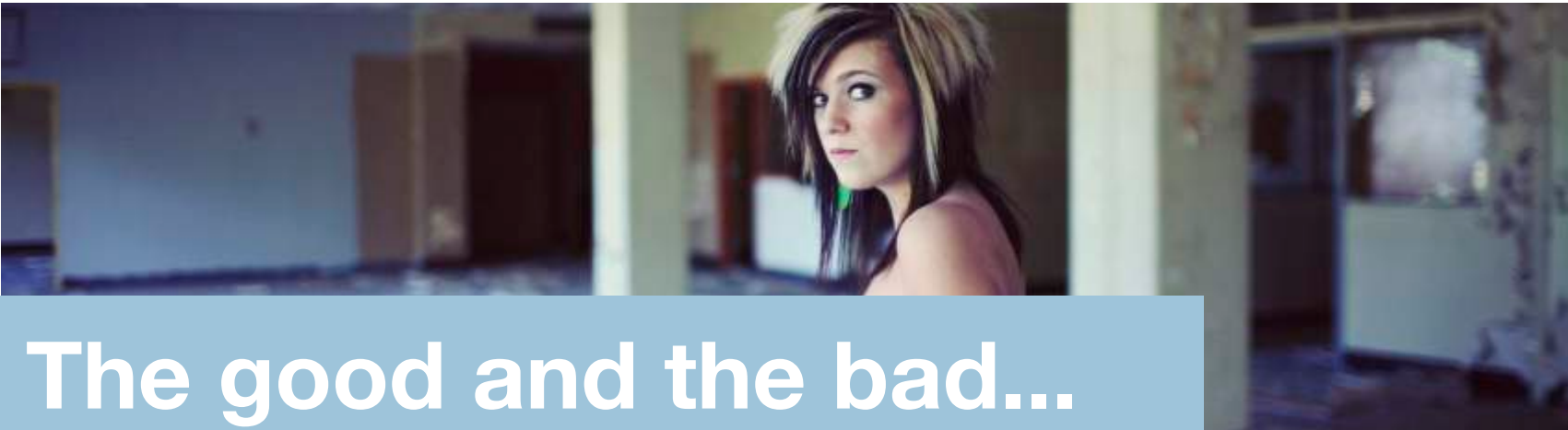
What else could I have done in that time?

Impact Rating: To what extent is using cannabis having a positive/negative impact on your work life? On your worksheets the impact of cannabis on your spare time...



Back to pie chart





The good and the bad...

Short term effects of stopping cannabis	
The good things	The not so good things

Long term effects of stopping cannabis	
The good things	The not so good things

Please refer to the printed guides for instruction on how to save these responses

Next Steps

The next session is going to look at:

The risks involved in continuing to use cannabis.
We will consider these risks in light of all the different areas of your life that we have considered in this session.

Thank you for your time.

Module 5

Personal Hazards

.....
Harm minimisation
.....





Think, Know, Reduce

What are
your goals
around
cannabis?

Think

In the last sessions we looked at all the areas of your life where cannabis has an impact, we considered the good and the not-so-good things, and began to consider the hazards of continued use. Regardless whether you want to give up cannabis or not, it is important to develop strategies to help minimise the harmful impact on your mental health.

Know

The only way to guarantee no harm is to not use cannabis. Any use of cannabis may be putting you at risk of relapse, and could lead to further episodes. But even if you keep using cannabis, there are things you can do to minimise the harmful impact on you.

Reduce the harm

Are there particular hazards that occur around your cannabis use that relate to the different areas of your life? (Risks related to your physical and mental health, your family, friends, the law, your ability to work, your financial situation, etc).



Personal Hazards

if you decide to continue using cannabis, think about some of the risks you might face.

You may want to consider risks associated with obtaining, using and being intoxicated. For example, think about some of the health risks, and the potential of increased psychological symptoms, and how you might manage them.



If you are thinking of stopping your cannabis use, then think about some of the situations that you might find difficult in achieving and maintaining your abstinence.

For example, how will you feel about refusing if you are with friends who are using?



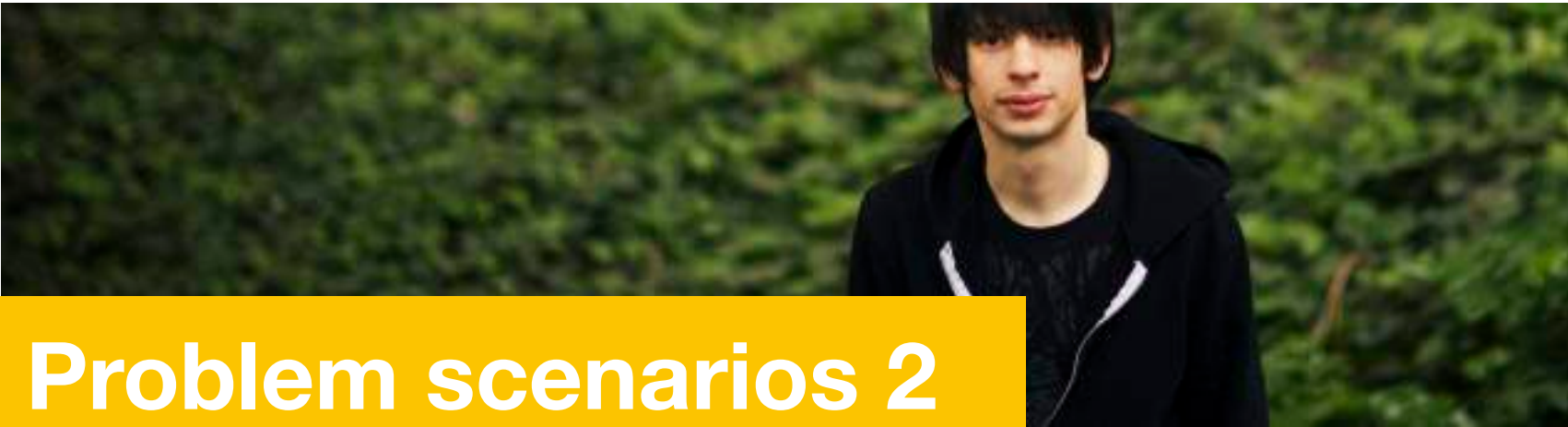
Problem scenarios

Can you identify particular scenarios in your life that you may encounter problems or risks from using cannabis?

Life Area	Hazardous situation	Degree of hazard (0-10)
Family		
Friends		
Physical Health		
Mental Health		
Finances		
Work/Activity		
The Law		
Other		

Degree of Hazard: 10 = Severe, 7 = Moderate, 4 = Mild, 0 = Nil

Please refer to the printed guides for instruction on how to save these responses



Problem scenarios 2

Once you have come up with a number of scenarios that may pose a risk to you, next consider some steps you can take to manage those risks.



audio extract 1



Can you come up with some strategies that can minimise the harm to yourself and help to manage the hazards.

Life Area	Hazard combat strategy
Family	
Friends	
Physical Health	
Mental Health	
Finances	
Work/Activity	
The Law	
Other	

Please refer to the printed guides for instruction on how to save these responses

Next Steps

In the final session:

We will recap what we have covered in all the previous sessions, and discuss anything that isn't clear or that you would like to talk about further.

Thank you for your time.



Module 6

Summing up

.....

Quiz

.....

Where to from here?





Summing up...

Now you have completed all the sessions. We have given you a lot of information about your health and the effects of cannabis.



So now you can make an informed choice!



Let's recap...

...on what we have covered

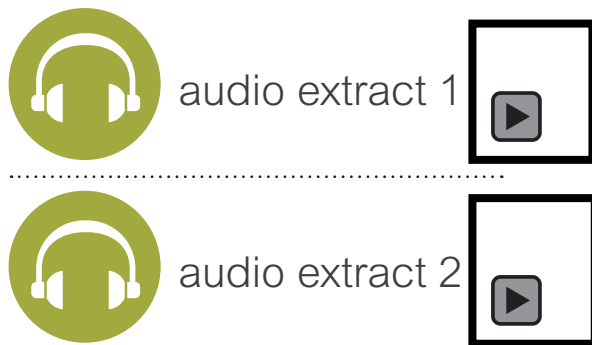
Session 1: We talked about your experience and how you understood what had led to you being seen in the mental health service. Then we looked at some information on psychosis.

Session 2: We looked at the effect of cannabis on your health, and thought about the link between cannabis and your mental health. We showed the DVD “Back to Reality” about other people’s experience of this.

Session 3: Here we looked at all the areas of your life where cannabis is having an impact – both good and bad. We thought about your physical and mental health, as well as family, friends, your finances, work, and the law.

Session 4: We thought about the good things and the not so good things about continuing or stopping cannabis use. We looked at some of the risks associated with use, and why this may be important for you to consider now.

Session 5: Here we identified different risk scenarios related to all the areas of life we had considered earlier. We thought of ways you could manage the hazards whether or not you are thinking of quitting.





Summing up...

Before we end these sessions, here's a game to make sure you have all the key facts to hand:

The 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' powerpoint quiz...launch from disk





It's up to you...

Now that you know what you know, it's up to you to decide!

If you want to find out more information about the things we have covered, you can talk to your care co-ordinator. There are a number of ways we can support you if you do want to quit.

Also you can look at these websites for some more information about cannabis use and your health:

www.talktofrank.com or call FRANK on 0800 77 66 00.

You can also get **Cannabis – too much too often?**

The FRANK guide to cutting down and stopping cannabis use, by calling 08701 555 455.

www.knowcannabis.org.uk where you can find out more about the effects of cannabis and how to go about cutting down and stopping.

www.csip.org.uk/mentalhealthandcannabis for more on the research into the links between cannabis and mental health problems.