

one drug | different patterns of use | different benefits | different risks

BACKGROUND

Cannabis reality check is in part a risky cannabis use screen reflecting lower-risk cannabis use guidelines developed for Canadians. Sensitive to age-related factors, the screen looks at risk (a) to long-term health and (b) for immediate harms. Questions on the participant's use of cannabis in a typical week for them serve to indicate levels of risk in each of these areas and cumulatively. But the screen begins with a non-scored wellness question which recognizes perceived benefits that use may be providing. A clinician's acknowledgment of these can help open the door to a mutually appreciative and more balanced conversation in the debrief session.



STEPS IN SCORING

Situate the participant's answers from the questionnaire sheet in the applicable places on the scoring results sheet

1 Based on the age indicated at the top of the screening questionnaire sheet, select the appropriate column on the scoring results sheet

The research evidence supporting the lower-risk cannabis use guidelines distinguishes risk thresholds for different age brackets: younger teens (13-15), older teens (16-18), emerging adults (19-24), more mature adults (25+).

2 Based on the number of days in a week the person uses cannabis (indicated in response to Q2 on frequency) and on the amount the person tends to consume on those occasions (indicated in response to Q3 on extent of effects felt), assess and indicate the level of risk to long-term health

If you familiarize yourself beforehand with the scoring results sheet and begin by checking to see if the participant's responses break any of the conditions starting at low risk and moving from there, you will find that you can quickly assess the risk level.

We recommend using a highlighter to mark the applicable factors in the appropriate column and then highlighting the corresponding risk level in the first column.

3 Based on the quantity of cannabis the person tends to consume on occasions of use (indicated in response to Q3) and on the frequency of use in inappropriate situations (indicated in response to Q4), assess and indicate the level of risk for immediate harms

Again, not difficult if you have familiarized yourself beforehand with the scoring results sheet, have done the previous assessment in step 2, and follow a comparable strategy. Use a highlighter as above to indicate risk level for the participant.

4 Based on the scores in steps 2 and 3, assess and indicate the participant's overall risk level

Use the highlighter to indicate this to the participant in the bottom box. Record the overall risk level on the bottom of the questionnaire form and return it to the site planner. Provide the scoring results sheet with the highlights indicating the various levels of risk to the participant along with a copy of the Reality Check resource card.

5 Discuss the results with the participant and seek to encourage them to reflect and plan appropriate action when needed

This conversation can unfold as you score each section, or you might share the fully completed scoring sheet with the participant and then briefly explain the results and explore any questions the participant may have. The best starting place is with their response to the first question which provides opportunity to convey appreciation for benefits the person perceives from their use and perhaps get a sense of factors that motivate their use.

TIPS FOR THE DEBRIEF

You are there as a friendly helper. An approach that is empathetic, non-judgmental and collaborative is more likely to induce reflection, impart hope and inspire a positive course of action. Your role is to increase intentionality and confidence.

Use open-ended questions that encourage the participant to think about issues and share those thoughts. For example, you might say

- Any surprises for you in these results, or reactions you have?
- So, how do you think this information might be useful to you?

Be curious and engage in reflective listening that invites the participant to amplify (or correct) ideas put forward. For example, you might say

- You've been getting some welcome benefits from your cannabis use. What other means of obtaining those might be preferable if cannabis can't continue to deliver them as well as you want or if you want to cut down on it for other reasons?
- So, which of those not-so-suitable situations are you occasionally using cannabis in?

Encourage "change talk" that engages the participant in exploring the value and possibility of change. As people articulate ideas about changing, they become more likely to attempt changes.

- If the participant has made even a passing reference to a desire to cut down, you might say, So you would feel more positive about things if you cut down.

- Or if the participant has spoken of an over-reliance on cannabis, you could say, You seem concerned about relying too much on cannabis. How do you see yourself making headway on that?

Be attentive to possible connections with the participant's results on other screens and help them explore those connections. For example you might say

- As we discussed earlier, you've had some challenges with alcohol use. What steps do/can you take to avoid combined impairment effects that can cause some significant problems for you?

Help the participant leave with a strong sense of their ability to manage their use and to draw on community support. For example, you might say

- You've been managing your use in various ways already, so you are especially well-positioned to make changes that make sense to you.
- Family, friends, and local professionals can all be an important part of a caring support network for you. Who do you have in your life that can help support you?

