

ACTIVITY: UNDERSTANDING CANNABIS AND LIFE IMPACTS — REDUCING THE NEGATIVE, BOOSTING THE POSITIVE

Grade Levels: 7–12

Activity Overview:

Through creative brainstorming, role-playing, and discussion, students explore the impacts of cannabis on different aspects of life, and ways to improve health and well-being.

Materials:

- Chart paper (one sheet per group)
- Markers (a variety of colours to share, including one green and one red per group)
- Optional: [Life Impact Scenarios](#)



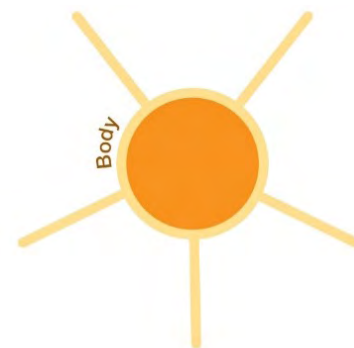
Activity Description

Part 1: Investigate

- Provide time for students to do some research on the effects and impacts of using cannabis.
 - You can direct them to evidence-based sources and stories of lived experience of substance use, including:
 - [Cannabis use, effects and risks](#) (Health Canada)
 - [Are There Risks to Vaping Cannabis?](#) (Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) video)
 - [Cannabis use and mental health: Hannah's story](#) (Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada video)
 - [Cannabis use and mental health: Augustin's story](#) (Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada video — in French)
 - [How to Prevent and Reduce Substance Use Harms for Youth: What Youth Say Works](#) (CCSA report)
 - [Cannabis Research](#) (CCSA)
 - [What does research say about treating medical conditions with cannabis and cannabinoids?](#) (CCSA poster)

Part 2: Brainstorm

- Divide students into small groups and give each one a sheet of chart paper and a collection of markers.
- Provide a quick description of how to prepare their sheets for brainstorming by drawing a graphic organizer (see sample):
 - Draw a small circle in the middle — this represents a young person.
 - Divide your page into sections (approximately 5–7) by drawing straight lines starting at the circle and extending to the edge of the page.
 - Label each section with one area of a young person's life. You can include the following (or others you think of): Body, Mind, Emotions, Relationships, Goals & Responsibilities.
- Walk students through the following brainstorm activity:
 - As a group and based on your research, take 10 minutes to brainstorm how cannabis use (or substance use in general) might affect these various aspects of a young person's life. For positive impacts, write in green. For negative impacts, write in red.
 - After 10 minutes, swap sheets with another group. Review what has been noted.
 - Take five minutes to add additional ideas to this new brainstorming sheet. Prompt students to add other impacts around the edges of the sheet beyond those major sections, including effects on money, spirituality, legal impacts, identity, etc.
 - Return sheets to their original group and review what's been added.
- Discuss the positive and negative effects of cannabis on various aspects of a young person's life as a full class. What stands out? Did anything come up that you didn't expect or haven't thought about before?



Part 3: Role Play

- Assign each group one area of impact (body, mind, relationships, etc.).
- Give groups five minutes to identify a relevant scenario a young person might experience related to cannabis use and that aspect of life (see the [sample scenarios](#) if you need ideas).
- Provide additional time for students to prepare to act out the scenario in a way that helps to reduce the negative impacts as much as possible and increase health and wellness in that area.
- Invite each group to act out their scenario for the rest of the class and end with a discussion using the reflection questions below.

Want to share your learning with the rest of your school community?

School-wide expansion of learning:

- Share your role play as part of a school-wide assembly.
- Create a brainstorm wall in your school where students can add suggestions of ways to boost health and well-being.
- Plan an activity to engage students in discussions during National Addictions Awareness Week (check online for dates).



Inclusion Considerations

- **Content:** Acknowledge that there may be differences in how people, families, and cultures perceive “positive” and “negative” effects of cannabis use.
- **Activity Format:** Provide other options for how students can participate in the role play part of the activity if they are not comfortable acting out the scenario (directing the short scene, gathering the props or set pieces, reading a voiceover, etc.)



Reflection Questions

1. In each scenario, what action(s) may have led to negative outcomes? Are there options other than the one performed in the role play that could lead to positive health and wellbeing in that situation?
2. During your brainstorm, where was there agreement and disagreement about positive and negative effects? Where can you find trustworthy information to find out more about these areas?
3. What skills could you build to help you make choices that boost your well-being and reduce the negative effects of cannabis in your life?

For additional information about cannabis to support students’ conversations about its potential positive and negative impacts, check out CCSA’s [Understanding Substance Use: Educator's Guide](#) (Part 3: Understanding Cannabis Vaping, pp. 31–41).

Health

Ari heard that cannabis can help them sleep, and it sort of did at first, but now they're having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep when they use cannabis. What could they do now?

Mental Health

Jalen has been feeling anxious and overwhelmed with school lately. A friend suggested trying cannabis to "take the edge off." Jalen tried it once and felt relaxed, but the next day their anxiety was worse. What could they do now?

Goals & Motivation

Noor has a dream of going to college on an athletic scholarship. Lately, they've been using cannabis more and have been missing practices or not performing their best. What can help them get back on track?

Identity & Self-Image

Mika used to be really confident in who they are, but since starting to use cannabis more often, they've started feeling disconnected from themselves and unsure of what they care about. How can they reconnect with their values?

Academic & Focus

Alex recently started using cannabis before doing homework or studying, thinking it would help them focus. Now their marks are slipping. What strategies might help them succeed again?

Financial

Niko earns money from babysitting and used to save for things they really wanted. Lately, more of that money is going toward cannabis. They've noticed they don't have money for clothes, going out with friends or their phone bill. What are their choices now?

Legal

Riya is going on a family trip, and they need to cross the border to another country. They know it is illegal to cross with cannabis, but they are considering packing some edibles without their family knowing. It's time to pack. What should they do?

Legal & Consequences

Sami is 15 years old and was caught with a cannabis vape at school. Sami knows that it was illegal to buy the vape and against school policy to have it at school. There are also consequences for the person who sold them the vape. They're now facing possible suspension and police involvement. What can they do moving forward to stay out of legal trouble?

Habits & Well-being

Elan started using cannabis because they enjoyed the effects when hanging out with friends. Now they find they are doing it on their own out of habit and not really enjoying it. What now?

Family Relationships

Robin has started using cannabis a lot, but their parents don't know. Lately, there's been more tension at home, and they feel distant from their family because they spend a lot of time hiding their cannabis use. What could help repair the relationship?

Friend Relationships

Sasha and their best friend have been close since elementary school. Lately, Sasha has been using cannabis more often and doesn't feel like doing the same things they used to enjoy together — like playing video games and biking. Sasha is noticing they are growing distant with their friend and doesn't want to lose the friendship. What could they do now?