



Reflect and discuss

Leif's Story



Cannabis didn't just offer me an escape—it was like part of my identity. Cannabis was always a big part of my life when I was younger. I used to deal it, I used to smoke it, I used to eat it. I used to do anything I could with it to grasp some kind of high or euphoria feeling that got me away from the present moment.

I think there is a large connection between smoking tobacco and cannabis. When I reduce smoking cannabis, it'll increase my tobacco use. When I decrease my tobacco use, I'll increase my cannabis use. I think the key to quitting cannabis is to also identify tobacco as well.

When I was in the hospital, I had a very difficult time. So I think that what could have benefitted that was having an open conversation. Also someone who understood where I was coming from and empathize with me, not just give me sympathy and pity and hand out the cigarettes.

I found that when I was trying to quit after smoking 3 or 4 grams a day, then it was hard to eat. It was definitely hard time getting to sleep, so insomnia. Very challenging.

There are 4 D's that I really learned, that really helped me stay off cannabis because I wanted to. That was to deep breathe, so my meditation. Distract. So distract the craving. Do something else. Get your mind off it. Delay. So, delay the craving, and it's not just delay the craving, it's delay the thought of the craving because it'll go away in 5 or 10 minutes if you let it. Drink water, because the more you smoke, you get really dehydrated.

The reason I quit cannabis isn't just because I wanted my lungs to be healthy. It was because I wanted my mind to be clear. I wanted to be able to do the work I could do. I wanted to be able to go to university, have a job, have friends, have family. And, generally speaking, I feel like a child when I use. I feel like I'm Little Leif. That's the example I like to use. Ya, I'm Little Leif and I can't cope. Whereas when I'm Big Leif, 25-year-old Leif that's talking and speaking right now, then I can handle what comes my way through coping mechanisms that I've learned and dealt with. When I'm Little Leif smoking cannabis, then I don't feel like I have those. I feel like I'm a victim or persecuted or a rescuer.

I feel most alive when I'm writing. The reason why that is because of freedom of expression. I'm going to choose things how I want them to be. I'm choosing how I want to write, not letting it choose me.

Activity steps

1. Play Leif's story
2. Give each participant a Leif's story handout and walk through the contents.
3. Arrange participants into pairs or small groups and invite them to talk about and write answers to the questions in one or more of the categories in the 'reflect and discuss' section.
4. Debrief as a larger group, using 4 Ds worksheet as a reference.



Leif's Story



"Cannabis didn't just offer me an escape—it was like part of my identity."

Reflect and discuss

1. Identity: Leif says using cannabis was part of his identity. It was a big part of his life growing up, and the high helped him escape from the present moment.
 - a. Consider the things in your life that make up your identity. Why are they important to you?
 - b. How would you describe your way of dealing with situations you want to escape or avoid?
2. Cannabis and tobacco: Leif says his tobacco use goes up when his cannabis use goes down, and vice versa.
 - a. What are your thoughts on Leif's explanation of the connection between cannabis and tobacco?
 - b. What are the pros and cons of quitting two things at once?
 - c. Have you ever tried to change two behaviours at once? If yes, how did it go? If not, what is your approach to making changes in your life?
3. Human connection: Leif says it would have helped to have had an open conversation with someone who empathized with him, rather than pitied him.
 - a. What do you think he means by open conversation?
 - b. What's the difference between empathy and pity?
 - c. How does having someone to talk to help a person make changes?
4. Withdrawal symptoms: Leif mentions insomnia as a symptom of cannabis withdrawal after heavy long-term use.
 - a. What other withdrawal symptoms are possible?
 - b. How does cannabis withdrawal compare with withdrawal from other substances, such as coffee or alcohol?
5. Choices: Leif says he made a choice. He chose to quit using cannabis so he could have clear lungs, a clear head and all the other things he felt he needed.
 - a. How important is choice when it comes to making changes? Why?
 - b. What are some ways to help someone making a significant lifestyle change?
6. Coping: Leif refers to his experiences as 'Big Leif' and 'Little Leif' and the difference between independence and dependence.
 - a. What are your thoughts on the 'Big Leif Little Leif' comparison?
 - b. How would you describe your own strategies for coping with daily hassles?
 - c. Who do you talk to when you have something significant to deal with? Why them?