**Cannabis / Side effects / Cannabis & Mental Health /**

**Cannabis & Anti-depressants.**

November 2017

This briefing has been requested by the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB) in response to a serious case review. The aim is to raise awareness around cannabis use and the impact cannabis can have on mental health and anti-depressant medication. This will help inform practice when working with children, adults and families.

The information provided by Bournemouth Drug and Alcohol Commissioning Team (DACT) has been sourced from the following evidence based resources where more detailed information can be found:

* Drugwise <http://www.drugwise.org.uk/>
* Royal College of Psychiatrists <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/>
* NHS <https://www.nhs.uk/>
* FRANK <http://www.talktofrank.com/>

Cannabis – the three types:

‘*Hash or cannabis resin* –Ablack or brown lump. Not seen in the UK very much anymore.

*Herbal/grass/weed/marijuana* –This is the most common way to find cannabis.  It is composed of the dried leaves and flowering parts of the female cannabis plant and resembles compressed dried herbs. Skunk is a strong form of herbal cannabis that consists just of the buds and is often grown indoors in the UK.

*Cannabis oil* – Rarely seen, cannabis oil is a sticky, thick yellowy/brown liquid.’[[1]](#footnote-1)

‘Skunk and stronger varieties of cannabis – The amount of the main active ingredient, THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), in herbal cannabis varies from 1% up to 15%. The newer strains, including skunk, can have up to 20%. On the whole, the newer varieties are probably about 2 or 3 times stronger than those available 30 years ago. They make you relaxed and cheerful more quickly, but also produce more unpleasant effects.’[[2]](#footnote-2)

Side effects of Cannabis:

*‘Pleasant* - A ‘high’ - a sense of relaxation, happiness, sleepiness, colours appear more intense, music sounds better.

*Unpleasant -* Even though THC can produce relaxation, if higher amounts are consumed, it can have the opposite effect by increasing anxiety. Some cannabis users may have unpleasant experiences, including confusion, hallucinations, anxiety and paranoia, depending on their mood and circumstances.

Some users may experience psychotic symptoms with hallucinations and delusions lasting a few hours, which can be very unpleasant. Even though these unpleasant effects do not last long, since the drug can stay in the system for some weeks, the effect can be more long-lasting than users realise. Long-term use can have a depressant effect and reduce motivation. Some researchers also suggest that long-term use can lead to irreversible, but minor cognitive deficits.’[[3]](#footnote-3)

Synthetic Cannabinoids:

Since the introduction of the Psychoactive Substance Act in May 2016, it is now illegal to produce, supply or import synthetic cannabinoids for human consumption. The chemicals used to create synthetic cannabinoids mimic the THC found in cannabis. Synthetic cannabinoids are more potent than natural cannabis due to the way they interact with the brain.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Cannabis and Mental Health:

‘There is growing evidence that people with serious mental illness, including depression and psychosis, are more likely to use cannabis or have used it for long periods of time in the past. Regular use of the drug has appeared to double the risk of developing a psychotic episode or long-term schizophrenia’.

‘There is now sufficient evidence to show that those who use cannabis particularly at a younger age, such as around the age of 15, have a higher than average risk of developing a psychotic illness, such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.’[[5]](#footnote-5)

Cannabis and Anti-depressants:

‘Cannabis or marijuana can interact with tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs), such as amitriptyline, imipramine and dothiepin. Both cannabis and TCAs can cause an abnormally fast heartbeat (tachycardia) and high blood pressure (hypertension). There's also a risk of other side effects, such as confusion, restlessness, mood swings and hallucinations.

There's a risk that using cannabis while you're on any of these medicines could lead to problems such as tachycardia, even if you don't already have a heart condition.

Little research has been done into the interaction of cannabis with other types of antidepressants, such as SSRIs.’[[6]](#footnote-6)

Advice, and Information:

*Local Drug and Alcohol Support Services:*

* Bournemouth Engagement and Assessment Team (BEAT) – 01202 558855
* Poole Substance Misuse Assessment & Referral Team (SMART) – 01202 735777
* Dorset REACH - 0800 043 4656

*National Resources:*

* Cannabis and Mental Health - Readable and up-to-date information on cannabis and mental health from The Royal College of Psychiatrists [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/cannabis.aspx](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/cannabis.aspx)
* British Association of Social Workers – Pocket guide – Mental Health &Substance Use <https://www.basw.co.uk/pocket-guides/>
* Talk to Frank Helpline: 0300 123 6600
* Marijuana Anonymous UK - [www.marijuana-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.marijuana-anonymous.org.uk)

1. Drugwise – Cannabis - <http://www.drugwise.org.uk/cannabis/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Royal College of Psychiatrists – Cannabis and Mental Health – key facts [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Royal College of Psychiatrists – Cannabis and Mental Health - <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/cannabis.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. FRANK - <http://www.talktofrank.com/drug/cannabis> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Royal College of Psychiatrists – Cannabis and Mental Health <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/cannabis.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. NHS Choices – Cannabis and anti-depressants - <https://www.nhs.uk/chq/pages/865.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)