



Reducing the Risks of Cannabis Use

GET SMART
BEFORE YOU
START

Guidelines For and By Youth



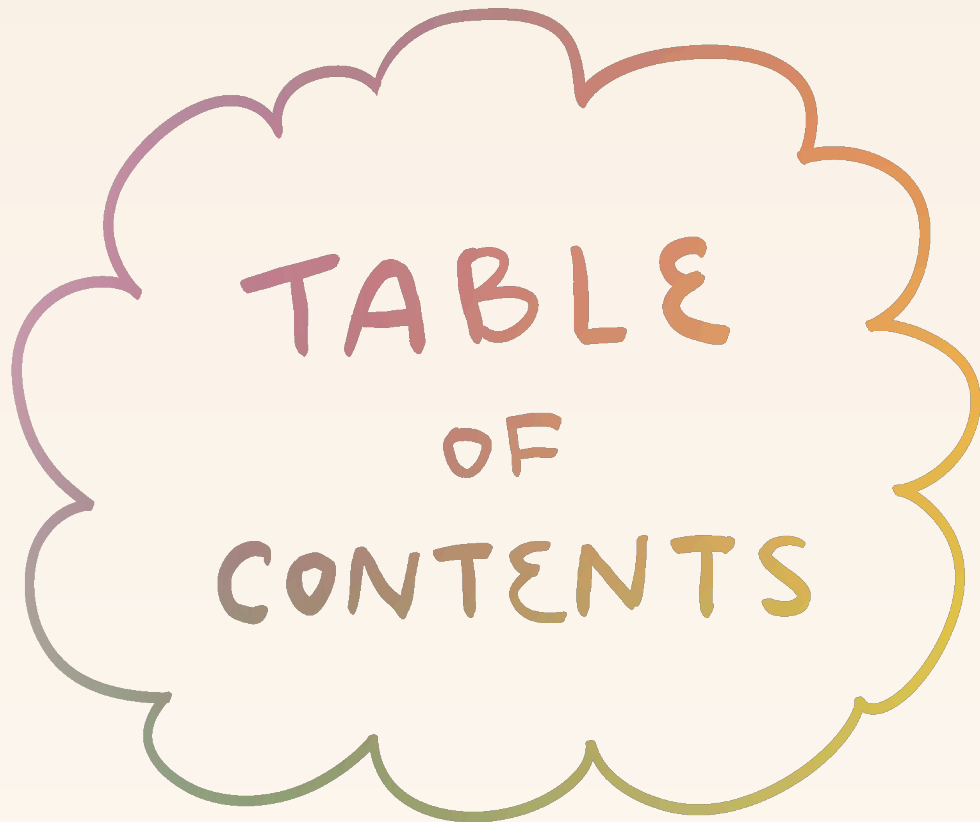
Hi!

We're a group of
young people in BC
who have put together
our experiences to
help other young people
make the most informed
decisions around using
CANNABIS

In Canada, cannabis use is legal for adults but illegal for youth under the age of 18 or 19 – depending which province they live in. However, the reality is that many young people use cannabis, and if they do, they deserve to know how to reduce the risks involved.

These Lower Risk Guidelines for Using Cannabis were co-created with young people in British Columbia to help other young people make the most informed decisions around using cannabis. They offer realistic advice and are based on scientific evidence and lived experiences from youth.

These guidelines are not meant to tell you whether to use cannabis – only you should make that decision. If you choose to use cannabis, you should have the tools to make the most of that experience and reduce potential harms.



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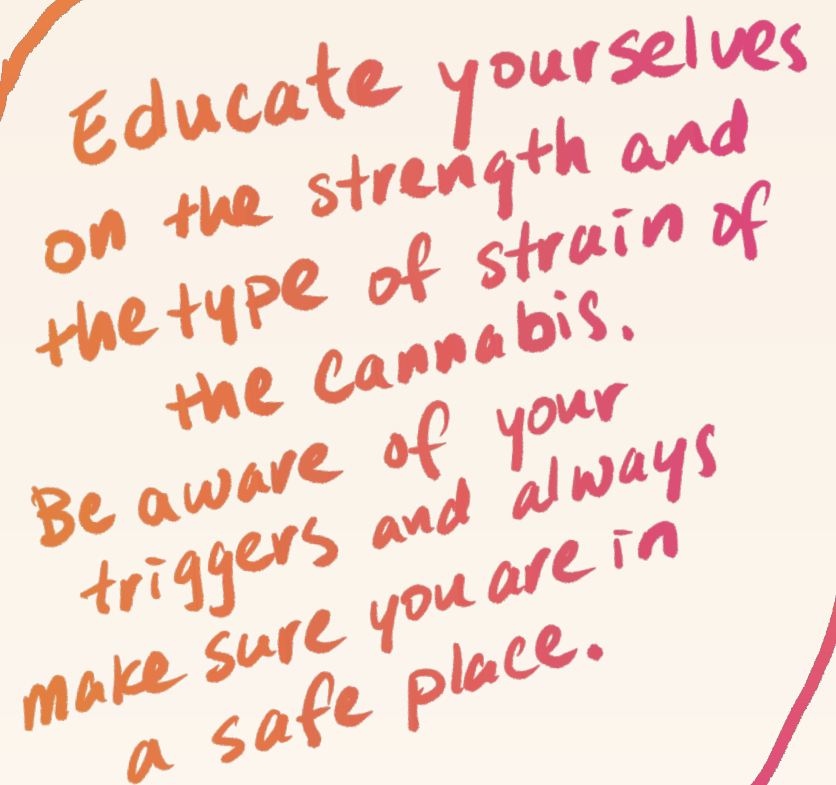
GUIDELINE

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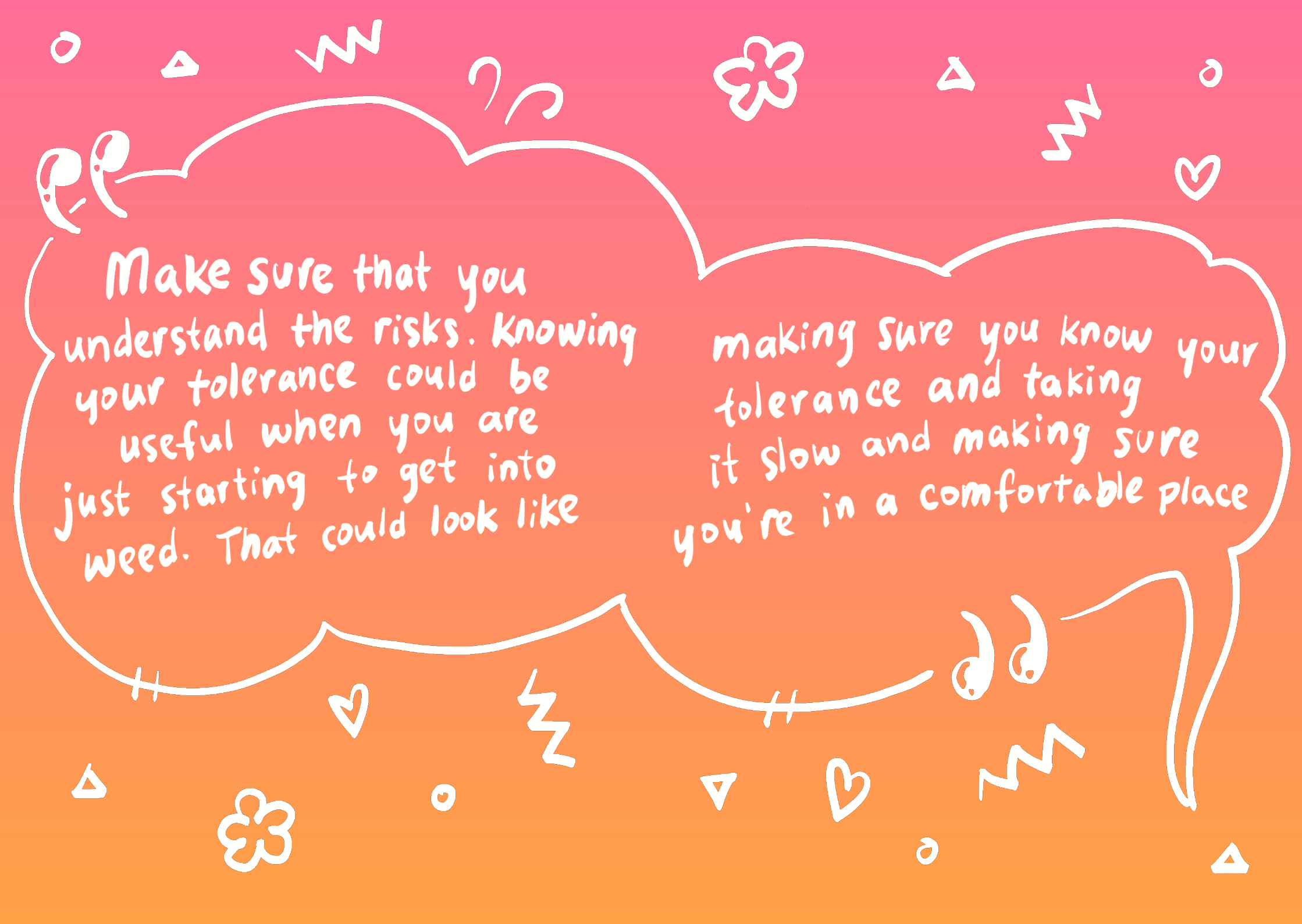
GET EDUCATED BEFORE YOU USE

Being educated about cannabis use was important for me so I knew how to reduce the harms and max out the benefits. I found it helpful to learn about the different ways to use cannabis, like inhaling or ingesting, the differences between THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol), CBD (Cannabidiol), and the short-term and long-term effects. When I started, I also found out what the legal age for cannabis use was in my province and what that meant. The more I knew, the more confident I was about making informed decisions before using cannabis.

At the end of these guidelines, there's a glossary with terms you might want to know more about and some resources to learn more.



Educate yourselves
on the strength and
the type of strain of
the cannabis.
Be aware of your
triggers and always
make sure you are in
a safe place.



Make sure that you understand the risks. Knowing your tolerance could be useful when you are just starting to get into weed. That could look like

making sure you know your tolerance and taking it slow and making sure you're in a comfortable place

REFLECT ON WHY YOU'RE USING CANNABIS & PAY ATTENTION TO HOW IT'S AFFECTING YOU

I use cannabis for different reasons like to relax, cope with stress, manage pain, or socialize.

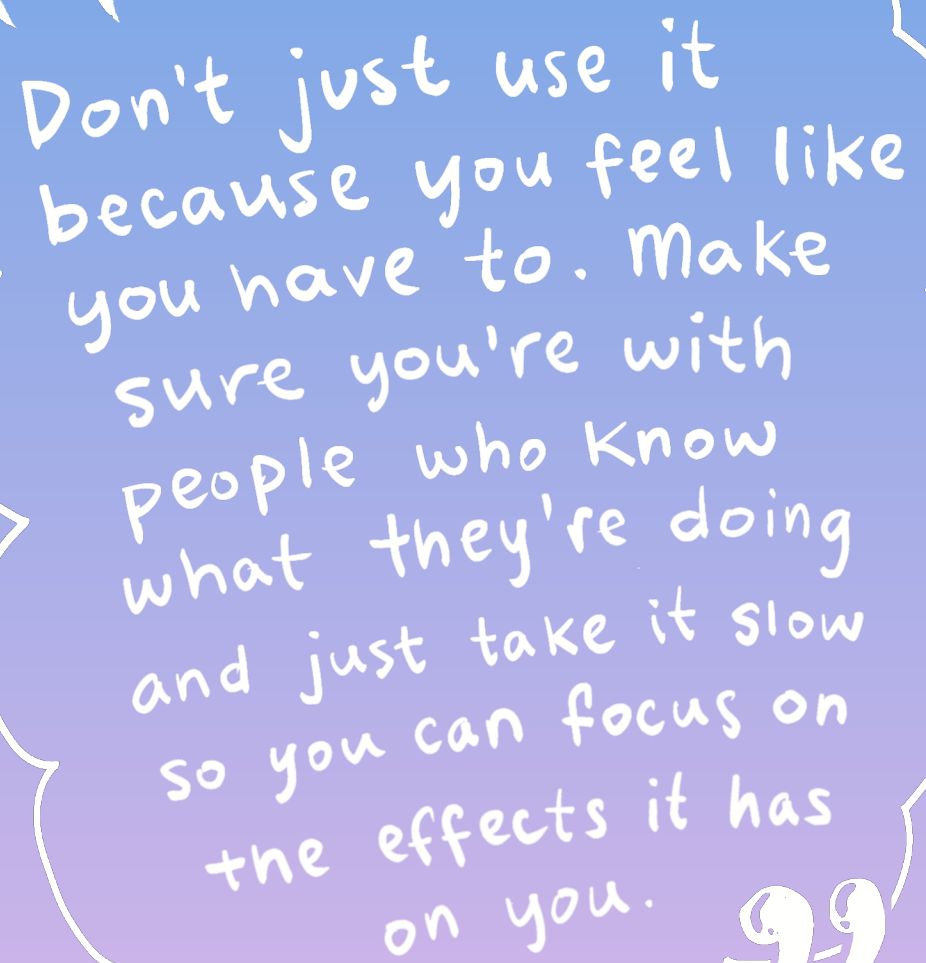
There's no right or wrong reason—it's about what makes sense for me. I always tried to be aware of why I was using and thought about whether it was helping me now and in the future. If I ever felt concerned about my reasons for using, I'd talk to someone I trust.

Even now, I am paying attention to how cannabis affects me long-term. I know that it can impact peoples' mental health, in some cases increasing anxiety, depression, or psychosis, especially if it gets used more than a couple of times a week.

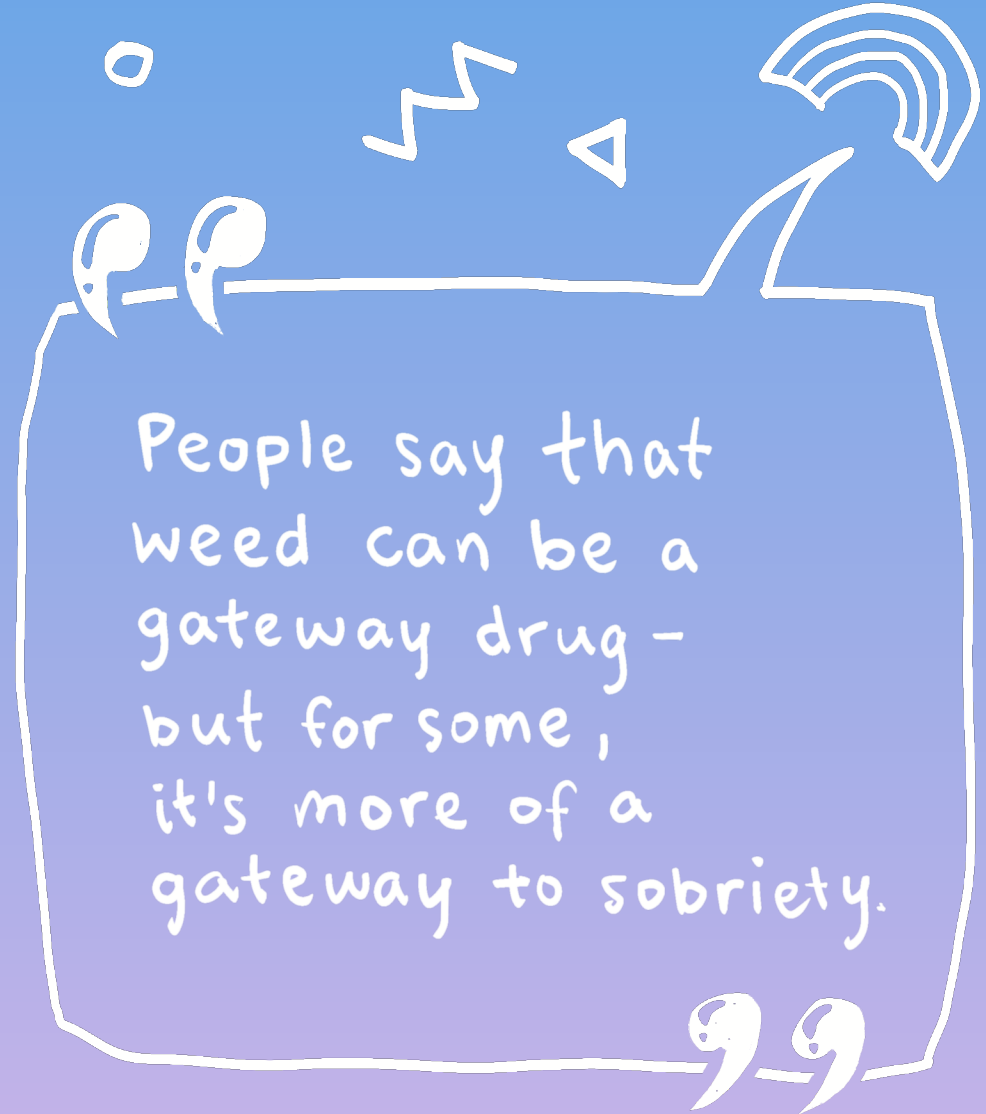
When I was young, I definitely noticed that it was harder to concentrate, react quickly, control my impulses, and make decisions. At the same time - you learn that the effects are different for everyone, so the best thing for me was to keep tabs on how my health and well-being changed over time. If I started to have negative symptoms, I'd consider cutting back.

Some people can go through withdrawal when they stop, which can make quitting tough. In that case, I'd reach out for support from someone I was close to like a friend, youth worker, or a health professional that I knew would help.





Don't just use it
because you feel like
you have to. Make
sure you're with
people who know
what they're doing
and just take it slow
so you can focus on
the effects it has
on you.



People say that
weed can be a
gateway drug -
but for some,
it's more of a
gateway to sobriety.

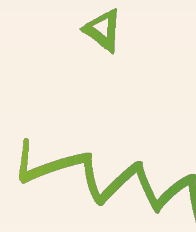
GUIDELINE

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IT'S OKAY TO WAIT
UNTIL YOU'RE OLDER
OR TO NOT USE
CANNABIS AT ALL

There was no “right” time for me to start using cannabis, and looking back, it would have been fine if I choose not to use it at all. I think about why I wanted to start and whether I could have waited until I was older or had more information about cannabis. Even now, talking to people I trust about my thoughts and feelings helps, especially if I’m unsure.



We know now that cannabis can affect your brain as it’s developing, so it can be a good idea to wait until your brain is fully developed, especially







if you think you’ll use a lot and often. This can sometimes be more important for people who struggle with their mental health or have a family history of psychosis. Same if people are pregnant.

Still, there are so many reasons that young people might want to use cannabis, and not everyone can abstain. For me, I just tried to learn about the risks so I could make the best choice for myself. No matter what you wind up deciding, know that you’re not alone.







You don't have to use it because you feel pressured or think it'll make you cool because your friends do. Try when you feel 100% ready.



You don't have to do it, just because someone doesn't want to do it alone. Some people will pressure you to use it with them - but it's not a peer pressure or bullying thing. They just want a friend. They'll say something like "I want to see if this helps you the way it helps me". It can be really hard to say no to that.



GUIDELINE

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START LOW GO SLOW

I've learned it's important to be careful with how much cannabis I use, especially since I didn't always know my limits. You can have good experiences with cannabis, but that often depends on how much you use. Once I had more experience, a strong high felt good sometimes, but I learned that it was easy to overdo it too.

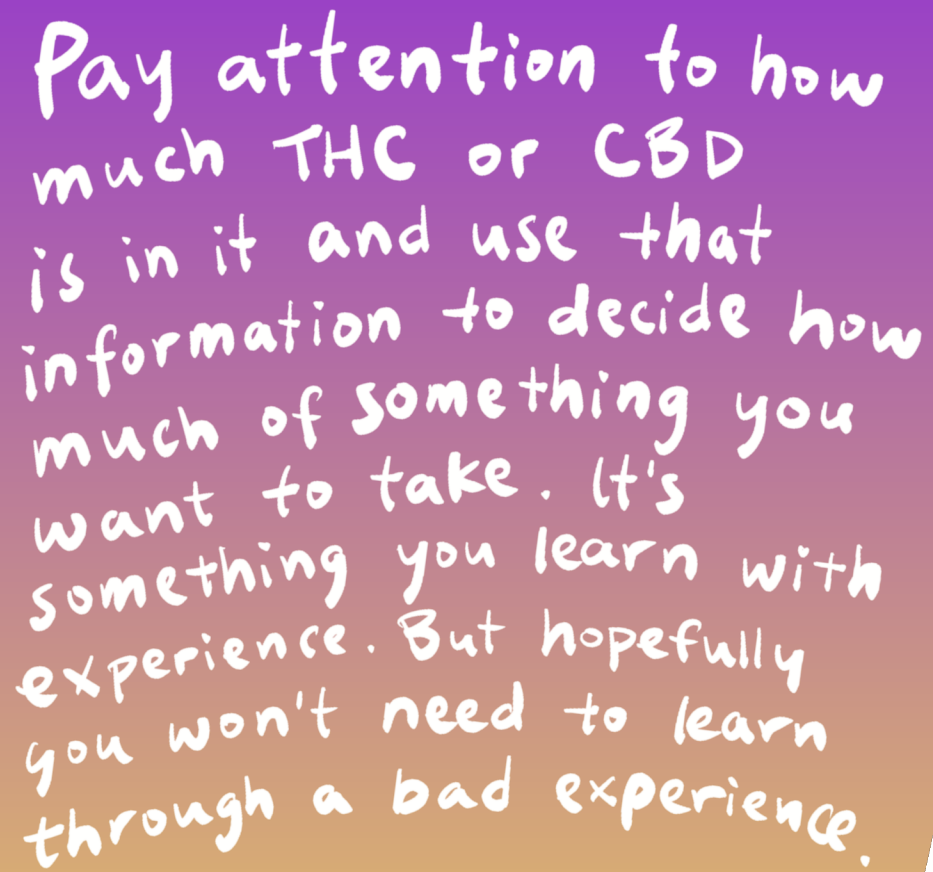
I found that getting higher than I wanted increased the chances of having a bad experience. When I've greened out - used too much - it's led to nausea, anxiety, sweating, and even throwing up. When that happened, I had to remind myself to get to a safe place and



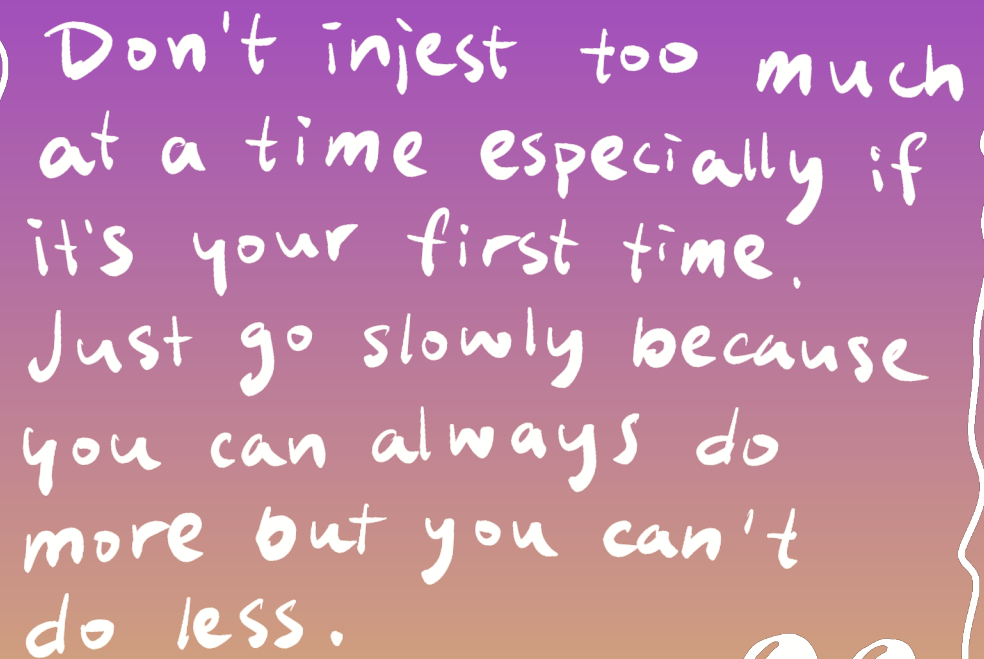
remember that the feeling would be temporary. The effects of cannabis depend on things like body weight, how much THC is in the cannabis, and how you use — like smoking or ingesting. I found that my friends and I all had different tolerance levels, and that was okay. I've learned it's better to start with less cannabis to avoid overdoing it. Starting low and going slow, using small amounts at first, and spacing out your use can help you figure out your own tolerance level and how cannabis affects you individually.

Different batches or strains can have varying amounts of THC and CBD which impacts the potency. If I was unsure, I would just use less and wait before taking more to avoid overdoing it. This was good both in the short-term and the long-term - overdoing can have lasting effects. Honestly - it's totally fine to just stick with a low dose every time.





Pay attention to how much THC or CBD is in it and use that information to decide how much of something you want to take. It's something you learn with experience. But hopefully you won't need to learn through a bad experience.



Don't inject too much at a time especially if it's your first time. Just go slowly because you can always do more but you can't do less.

GUIDELINE


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CONSIDER WHERE YOU ARE AND WHO YOU'RE WITH

Where I am and who I'm with really impacted my experience using cannabis. I always find that being with people I trust and feel comfortable around helps create a feeling of safety and makes for a better experience.


Before I use cannabis, I do a quick check-in to see if I feel safe and if I'm in a good location and situation. Also - using cannabis while driving is really dangerous—and it's illegal. It can slow your reaction time and increase the risk of crashing. I always make sure to avoid driving when I'm intoxicated with any substance, including cannabis.

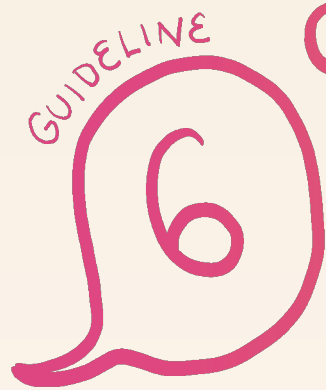




Making sure you're
with people you feel safe
around can help you
out in so many ways.
There's been so many
times when people I'm
with have helped me out
when I'm out of it.

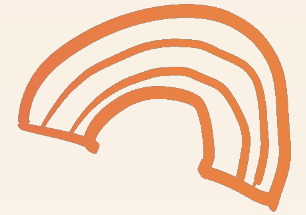
They'll order an Uber
or offer me a place
to sleep. There's all
these things that
people can help you
with, and it all comes
down to who you're
with and who you're
surrounded by.



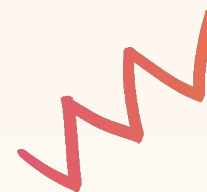


CONSIDER WHAT YOU'RE USING AND HOW YOU'RE USING IT

Not all cannabis is the same - it's good to know where your cannabis comes from and to be mindful of how you're using it. Knowing the source and type of cannabis you're consuming will help you to use it more safely. If I'm ever worried about what's in my cannabis, I know there are places that can check my supply for anything harmful. In British Columbia for instance, there is an updated list of places that offer drug checking and FAQs about drug testing for youth.



In Canada, the only places to buy regulated cannabis—cannabis with a known source and specified THC/CBD content—are from authorized stores. If your cannabis doesn't come from a regulated source, it can be hard to know what's really in it. Waiting until your legal means that you can buy cannabis directly from the authorized stores, so that'll help make informed decisions about what products you choose.



I would say, there are many things to consider. Like, if you are someone who smokes and you notice your throat is really hurting, maybe considering trying another way.

Be mindful of what works for you. If you didn't buy it from an authorized store then think critically about where things are coming from.



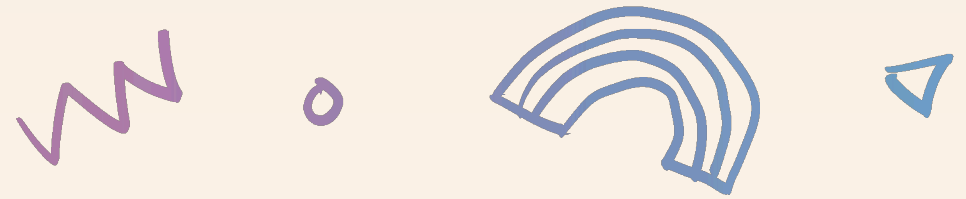
THINGS TO CONSIDER

CANNABIS CONTENT:

The amount of THC and CBD in your cannabis is important. It is recommended that you use products with a higher percentage of CBD and with less than 10% THC to minimize negative side effects. CBD does not have a psychoactive component so it does not produce a 'high' and is associated with less mental health symptoms and side-effects. Concentrates have the highest percentage of THC so take care when using these products. Also, synthetic cannabis products have been linked to abdominal distress (e.g., stomach aches, pains, cramps), paranoia, and increased aggression.

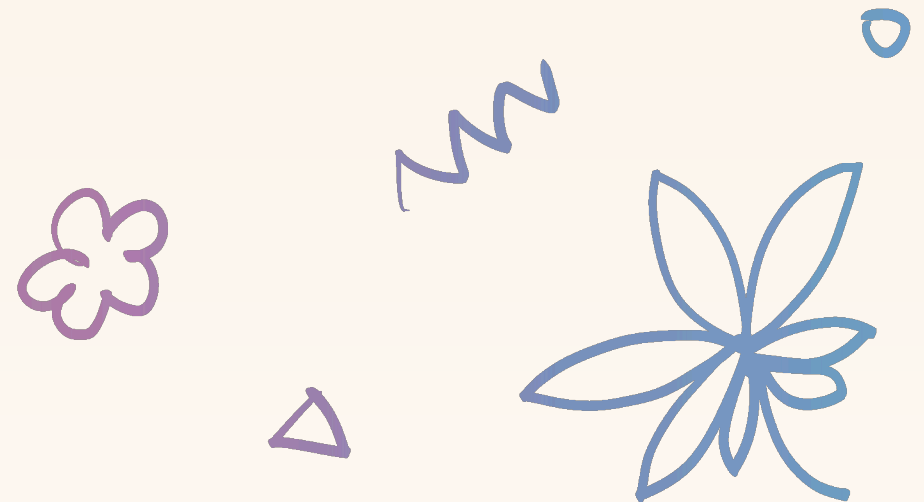
HOW YOU'RE USING IT:

The way that you consume cannabis is important. Each method affects the body differently. The two main ways that people consume cannabis are inhalation (smoking, bongs, vapes), and ingesting/eating (edibles, brownies). There are pros and cons of using each method, and each comes with its own risks and benefits. Inhaling cannabis leads to a quicker high but is more harmful to your lungs. Taking edibles can help avoid these respiratory side effects, but it takes longer to feel high which sometimes leads people to using more than intended.



USING CANNABIS & OTHER SUBSTANCES:

Using cannabis with other substances ("poly-use"), including alcohol and tobacco, can cause harm to your physical and mental health. Cannabis use can also have negative interactions with prescription medication and it's important to check that cannabis does not interact with any medication you are using. Ask a youth-friendly pharmacist if you are unsure. Remember you can bring along a friend for comfort, or if you feel judged or the pharmacist doesn't take you seriously, find another one that you can talk to.





How you're using it	Recommended dose	How long to feel effects	How long effects are felt
Smoking (Joints, blunts, pipes, bongs)	1-2 puffs with 10% or less THC	Initial effects within minutes Full effects within 10-30 minutes	Up to 6 hours (Depends on strain, body size, tolerance)
Vaping (vape pen, e-cigarette)	1-2 puffs with 10% or less THC	Initial effects within minutes Full effects within 10-30 minutes	Up to 6 hours (Depends on strain, body size, tolerance)
Edibles (gummies, brownies, tea, etc.)	Less than 2.5mg of THC content	Initial effects within 30 minutes – 2 hours Full effects within 2-4 hours	Up to 12 hours (Depends on strain, body size, tolerance)

These recommendations are adapted from guidelines intended for adults. Young people might need to start with lower doses. If you're new to using cannabis, **start with less than the listed dose**. If you don't know how much THC is in your cannabis, use less than you think you should and wait before using more.

Adapted from: [Cannabis: Lower Your Risks](#), and [Knowing Your Limits with Cannabis: A Practical Guide to Assessing Your Cannabis Use](#)

WAYS TO USE CANNABIS & THEIR POTENTIAL HARMS & BENEFITS

How you're using it	Potential harm	Potential benefits
Smoking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harm and inflammation to the lungs • Can lead to a chronic cough • Blunts: Often contain more cannabis, which can lead to using more than intended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker high • Easier to dose
Bongs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harm and inflammation to the lungs • Some bongs may produce more tar and carbon monoxide compared to smoking • There may be residuals of other unknown drugs in the bowl 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker high • Takes fewer hits to feel the effects
Vaping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually contains higher levels of THC which may make it harder to dose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker high • Potentially less harmful to lungs
Edibles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes longer to feel the effects • More difficult to dose • The delayed effects may lead to using more than you intended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoids risks to lungs

These are some of the known potential harms and benefits of the most common ways to use cannabis. Cannabis has other potential harms and benefits that are talked about in the Guidelines. You should consider these when deciding how you want to use cannabis

THINGS TO KNOW MORE ABOUT

Cannabis

Cannabis: (also known as marijuana, pot, or weed) is a plant that, when consumed, has psychoactive properties. It is often dried and comes either loose in what is called “flower” or in pre-rolled joints. In this form, cannabis is either smoked or vaped. You can get cannabis extracts too - these tend to have higher levels of THC and are usually vaped or smoked. Forms of extracts include hash, shatter, dab, oils, and vape cartridges. Cannabis also comes in edible forms, such as gummies, which can be ingested.

THC

THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol) is one of the main active components in cannabis. It is what makes people feel ‘high’ and is one of the main factors that impacts the effects of cannabis. People react to THC differently and may experience different side effects than other people they are with. It’s generally recommended to use cannabis that has low percentages of THC (less than 10%), especially to avoid negative mental health impacts. The percentage of THC is listed on regulated products – for young people who can’t legally buy from authorized retailers, it can be difficult to know how much THC is in their cannabis.

CBD

CBD (Cannabidiol) is the other main active component in cannabis. It doesn’t have psychoactive components and does

not produce a ‘high’. Some people say that CBD helps with medical conditions, such as chronic pain and sleep, but research is currently being done on the impacts of CBD. It’s generally recommended to use cannabis that has a CBD content equal to or greater than the THC content.

CBG

CBG (Cannabigerol) is a less active component of cannabis. It is non-psychoactive. Research is still being done on CBG, but there is some evidence that it may be useful for pain relief.

CBN

CBN (Cannabinol) is a less active component of cannabis. There is limited research on the effects of CBN, but it is considered to be mildly psychoactive and may be mildly useful for pain relief.

Strains

People might refer to different strains of cannabis - Sativa, Indica, Hybrid - and say that these different strains produce different effects. Sativa might make people more energized while Indica might make people feel more mellow. These effects are most likely due to their different THC and CBD contents, with Sativa having higher THC, Indica having higher CBD, and Hybrid having a combination of both THC and CBD. Focusing only on the strain of cannabis is not the most useful tool to assess its potential effects because there may be variations in the level of THC and CBD among the same strain depending on the particular plant. The most important factor is how much THC and CBD is in the product, which is why people are moving towards labelling products as high/low THC and CBD.

WAYS TO USE

The way that someone consumes cannabis helps determine when the effects of cannabis are felt and how long they last. The main ways people consume cannabis are by inhaling (e.g., smoking or vaping) and ingesting, such as through consuming edibles ('gummies') or food and drinks with cannabis in it. Bongs are another common way that people, especially youth, might smoke cannabis.

CANNABIS USE DISORDER

Some people who use cannabis can become dependent on it. Cannabis Use Disorder is a medical term describing this dependence on cannabis. It is a serious issue that many people struggle with. It usually develops during adolescence. If you're having difficulty controlling your cannabis use and feel like you might be growing dependent on it, try reaching out for support from a friend, trusted adult, or youth-friendly service provider.

CANNABIS HYPEREMESIS SYNDROME

This is a symptom of using cannabis that results in feeling nauseous, vomiting, and having abdominal pain. It usually occurs among people who use cannabis frequently or have used cannabis for a long time. It can be serious, especially if not treated. Some people report that taking hot showers or baths improves their symptoms. However, cannabis hyperemesis syndrome will not generally go away until the person stops using cannabis entirely. Research is still being conducted on this and it is not known how common it is. If you experience these symptoms after using cannabis, it may be useful to talk to a youth-friendly healthcare provider.

PSYCHOSIS

This is a serious, but temporary, mental condition where someone enters a heightened emotional state and loses contact with reality. If someone has a family history of psychosis or schizophrenia, using cannabis might increase the risk of experiencing this condition during adolescence.

LEGAL AGE

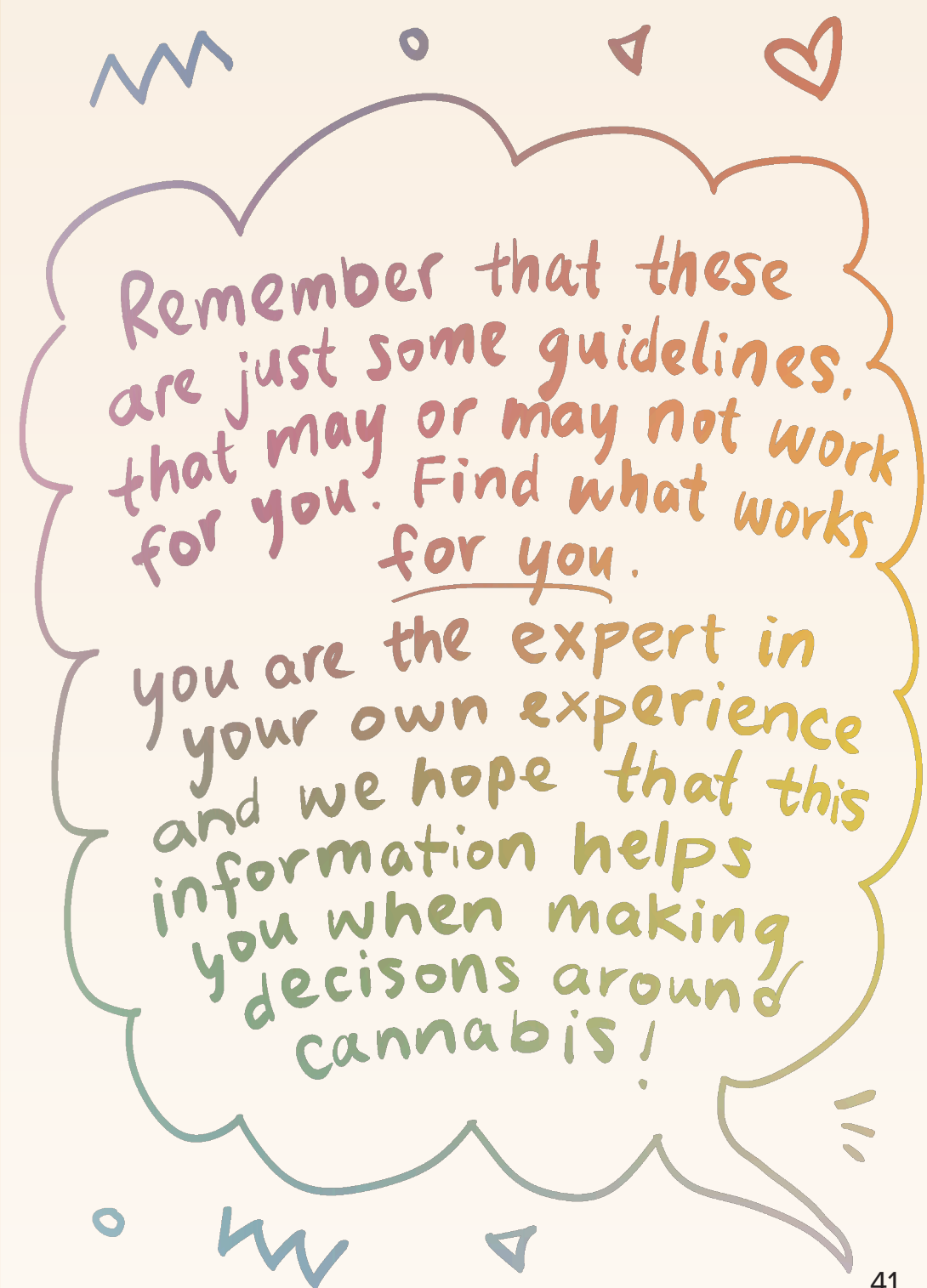
Cannabis is currently only legal to buy and use for adults in Canada. Each province has a different age where someone is considered to be legally an adult. In British Columbia, that age is 19. In other provinces, like Alberta, that age is 18. Quebec is the only province where the age is 21. Make sure you check if you're unsure what the legal age is in your province. Regardless of the legal age, it is illegal to transport cannabis – even small amounts – over international borders.

SHORT-TERM SIDE EFFECTS

You can experience many different things when using cannabis. People often report feeling relaxed, happy, tired, hungry, and giggly. They can feel creative, talkative, and energetic. However, cannabis can also make people feel anxious, sad, and paranoid. Some people feel their hearts race faster, get panic attacks, or can have hallucinations. People can also get lung discomfort, headaches, have coughing fits, or throw up. Cannabis can also make it hard to concentrate, pay attention, and make decisions, especially for younger people. If you experience negative side-effects, remind yourself that they won't last forever. Go to a place where you feel safe or find someone you trust who can help take care of you.

long-term side effects

Many people use cannabis over the long-term without any serious side effects. But, there are some potential risks. Using frequently and in high amounts can negatively impact a young person's brain development, so there are benefits to waiting until the legal age before starting to use cannabis. Using cannabis as a youth can also increase the risk of developing a cannabis use disorder. Cannabis can also lead to an increased risk of psychosis for youth who have a family history of psychosis or schizophrenia. Cannabis is also linked to worsening mental health, like anxiety and depression. People often use cannabis to cope with negative experiences in their lives. Some people might use cannabis to help with one thing, like their anxiety, but then might experience other side-effects like depression. Fortunately, many of the effects of cannabis on mental health can be reduced after cutting down on cannabis use.



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