

# Marijuana

1. Read the story below it.
2. Do the exercises at the bottom of the page.

**Marijuana** is a drug that distorts how the mind perceives the world you live in. The chemical in marijuana that creates this distortion is called "**THC**."

**THC** disrupts nerve cells in the brain and badly affects memory. Studies have linked marijuana use to brain damage.

After an initial "up" the user tends to feel sleepy or depressed. Marijuana is also known to cause sensory distortion, poor coordination of movement, lowered reaction time, lack of motivation, panic, and anxiety.

Marijuana causes study difficulties such as a reduced ability to learn and remember information.

Now read the story about the marijuana drug. (You can find a glossary at the bottom of the page, right after the exercises.)

## My Marijuana Story

I was a successful businessman and got to travel around the world. I had smoked marijuana (also called weed) for years. Some told me it was harmful. I just laughed. "Yeah, right..." I thought to myself.

I felt more enlightened than they were and thought I had a better understanding of what marijuana was all about. Why worry when I could light up a joint and break free of everything?

Life had proved to me just how right I was: I was well educated and had a prestigious job in which I was earning four times what most people my age earn. I also had a gorgeous and intelligent girlfriend. And on top of everything, I even had impressive client accounts and around-the-world trips paid for by my company.

One day I smoked marijuana at work, and my department director found out. I was afraid he would fire me. He was always a little odd, but overall, I liked the guy. I wasn't sure how he would react.

Despite my fear, he turned a blind eye. I later found out that he was doing it, too. I felt like that kind of gave me permission to keep smoking and allowed me to use marijuana even more.

My girlfriend didn't like it. I was angry with her. Didn't she want me to be happy? Why did she keep acting like she saw something I didn't see? Her attitude annoyed me. She kept saying, "Weed is an illusion. It really ISN'T your friend." I just thought she was being silly about the whole thing.

One night we were at a party at my firm, and all of my co-workers were there with their spouses or dates. One of my female colleagues was coming too close, and it was obvious she was hitting on me. My girlfriend was standing across the room, but I was high on marijuana, so it didn't really bother me. Of course my girlfriend saw the whole scene, and it turned into a big fight.

I occasionally had fights with my girlfriend. I loved her, but sometimes she was so annoying! Luckily for me (or so I thought), I was getting help from marijuana: I could just smoke and let go, not try to fight or solve it. It's crazy to think about it now, but I really did believe that marijuana was helping me!

Eventually she got tired and left me. I had two choices: run after her and try to save our relationship, or smoke another joint. I smoked another joint, thinking the whole time about how awesome I was and how she was going to come back anyway.

I smoked and smoked and smoked, for days. I called in sick to work. My girlfriend never came back.

When I eventually showed up for work, my department director instantly knew I was stoned. "Knock it off," he told me. I wasn't sure if he was kidding or being very serious. I felt a bit nervous.

"I can stop whenever I want," I assured him. "I'm not an addict."

"You're not an addict, but you also can't stop using it," he replied. "I know what it's like. You get a false sensation of calmness and after that nothing in real life matches that, and you keep craving that high." He was half smiling, but I could tell from the look on his face that he meant every word.

"Still, I'm not an addict," I insisted. "Life is just better with weed. If you can get along without it, more power to you."

But he couldn't get along without it either, and so we kept smoking and covering for each other. I began using more and more weed before and even during work.

I started feeling less focused, but above all else I started feeling less and less capable of accomplishing things. In fact, I started to care less and less about my work. It just seemed more boring than it ever did before. Most of the things I was usually interested in suddenly didn't seem important anymore. "What we could do today, let's leave for tomorrow. What we could do tomorrow, let's leave for next week. If ever at all."

I had become lazy. I had less and less energy to do things. I gave up important accounts at work simply because I couldn't imagine finding the energy to handle them. "It's okay," I told myself. "I have enough money and a good enough reputation. I don't really need this."

But I couldn't wrap my head around it: I always felt like weed was helping me get new ideas and motivating me. On the other hand, I was never doing anything with them. Since I began smoking I never seemed to have the energy or persistence I needed to achieve my goals.

A new thought started to take over: maybe I'm really not using my full potential because of my drug use. I had always thought marijuana made me a better person. Even though I knew that THC, the main active ingredient in marijuana, was a toxin affecting the nervous system. Still, it never stopped me from believing that the drug helped me and made me better at everything I did personally and professionally.

But now I started to wonder, could it be harmful to me after all? I immediately dismissed that thought. Even if it was harmful, I couldn't imagine my life without weed.

My drug tolerance started to build up more and more. I had to increase how often and how much I smoked, and soon enough I was thinking about marijuana 24/7.

My moral compass almost ceased to exist. I did things I was not proud of just to get some more weed. I lied and I misled other people. If I couldn't get weed, I would enter a panic attack that only smoking another joint would calm down.

Me, a panic attack? I had never even imagined I could get panic attacks. I was always so confident and self-assured!

One day I arrived at work, and my department director wasn't there. A few hours went by, and he still wasn't there. He didn't call anyone to explain where he was.

That night, the office manager called me. She was upset. "He's in the hospital," she said. "He crashed his car. It will take him some time to recover. They found high levels of marijuana in his blood, so he will be in legal trouble, too."

I sat completely still for a while. I didn't know what to think. He was a rare bird, but I always liked him. I had to see him.

After the visit in the hospital, I decided I was going to quit using marijuana. At that point, I already knew I was dependent on the drug, and I was finally not willing to lie to myself anymore.

I needed help. It had been a while, and I didn't know if she still cared, but I called my ex-girlfriend. She came over right away. I was so happy to see her. The days and weeks that followed were almost unbearable, but she helped me a lot and I made it through.

Today I'm fully clean, and I don't go near marijuana or any other drug. You can't fool me that this stuff is harmless.

Before my marijuana use, I had a photographic memory. Weed destroyed that entirely. I managed to slowly recover my other strong traits like my confidence and creativity, but they are not as good as they used to be. I still feel considerably slower, noticeably less intelligent, and less communicative.

Now I know that to truly work on yourself you have to be yourself, and when you are in an altered state of mind, you are not yourself.

How can we face the world if we don't actually see it, but only see a distorted version of it?

I realized that the sense of superiority over other people I felt as a drug user for all these years was just an illusion. I was escaping, escaping reality. Today I am willing to face reality and find real ways to improve my life and myself.

## Exercises

### Vocabulary Questions

1. What does "enlightened" mean?
  - a) having the ability to see and understand the truth about people and situations
  - b) needing a lot of light in your workspace
  - c) feeling sad, lonely, and nervous
  - d) being very interested in a specific idea
  
2. What does "joint" mean?
  - a) a kind of special sweet food
  - b) a relaxing tea
  - c) a marijuana cigarette
  - d) an imported kind of tobacco
  
3. What does "stoned" mean?
  - a) under the effect of a drug (such as marijuana)
  - b) extremely bored
  - c) excited about something that will happen soon
  - d) very curious
  
4. What does "communicative" mean?
  - a) quiet and shy
  - b) friendly, open and willing to talk
  - c) extremely active and energetic
  - d) intelligent and interesting
  
5. What does "potential" mean?
  - a) that someone did great things when they were younger
  - b) that someone has achieved a lot professionally
  - c) that someone thinks good things will happen

d) that someone can achieve great things if they work at it

6. What does "persistence" mean?

- a) when someone works hard and does not give up
- b) when someone cooperates with other people
- c) when someone forces another person to work hard
- d) when someone has a lot of creative ideas

### **Expressions Questions**

1. What does "to wrap your head around something" mean?

- a) stretch your body out after exercise
- b) study a topic in great detail
- c) find a way to understand or accept something
- d) invent a new way of doing something

2. What does "to hit on" mean?

- a) when a person flirts with another person
- b) when a person gets angry about something
- c) when a person asks too many questions
- d) when a person does not listen to other people

3. What does "moral compass" mean?

- a) a person's ideas about science and technology
- b) a person's sense of right and wrong
- c) a person's understanding of history
- d) a person's closest group of friends

4. What does "knock off" mean?

- a) to break something
- b) to start a new project
- c) to make a list of things that need to be finished
- d) to stop doing something

5. What does "to turn a blind eye" mean?
- a) when a person does not understand a situation
  - b) when a person pretends they do not notice bad behavior
  - c) when a person is not nice to others
  - d) when a person has a lot of friends
6. What does "rare bird" mean?
- a) an animal that you do not see often
  - b) a person who really likes birds
  - c) an unusual person
  - d) a person with a lot of power and influence
7. What does "more power to you" mean?
- a) you can be stronger
  - b) you are very successful
  - c) that's too bad
  - d) good for you, and do what you wish

### **Grammar Questions**

1. Why worry when I can break free \_\_\_\_\_ everything?
- a) in
  - b) on
  - c) of
  - d) at
2. What we \_\_\_\_\_ do today, let's do tomorrow.
- a) might
  - b) could
  - c) will
  - d) ought

3. He \_\_\_\_\_ be in legal trouble, too.

- a) has
- b) was
- c) will
- d) is

4. She came over \_\_\_\_\_ away.

- a) soon
- b) right
- c) fast
- d) very

5. \_\_\_\_\_ that point, I already knew I was dependent on the drug.

- a) At
- b) In
- c) To
- d) Of

6. I still feel considerably \_\_\_\_\_.

- a) slow
- b) slowest
- c) more slow
- d) slower

### **Comprehension Questions**

Read the story about marijuana. Then answer the following questions.

1. What are three negative side effects of using marijuana?
2. In the story, why did the character feel like he had to smoke more and more marijuana?
3. What happens to the character's relationship with his girlfriend because of his drug use? How does he react?
4. What important event makes the character decide to stop using marijuana?

## Essay Questions

1. Of all the negative effects of marijuana that are described in the story, which do you think is the most serious? Why do you think so?
2. In your opinion, how does using marijuana make the character in this story escape reality and ignore his problems rather than dealing with them?

## Glossary

**Assure:** tell someone that something is definitely true in order to remove any doubts.

**Cease:** stop.

**Client account:** ongoing work with a regular customer of a firm.

**Communicative:** friendly, open and willing to talk.

**Cover:** protect someone from getting into trouble.

**Crave:** want something very strongly.

**Dependent:** unable to stop using a drug.

**Dismiss:** put a thought or feelings out of your mind.

**Drug tolerance:** when the body becomes adjusted to the drug after repeated use and the user needs to take larger and larger doses to get the same effect.

**Enlightened:** having the ability to see and understand the truth about people and situations.

**Hit on:** flirt with another person.

**Joint:** a marijuana cigarette.

**Knock off:** stop doing something.

**Mislead:** make someone believe something that is not true.

**Moral compass:** a person's sense of right and wrong.

**More power to you:** good for you; also, do what you wish.

**Nervous system:** the system in your body that is responsible for the control of the body and communication between its parts.

**Panic:** extreme fear and confusion that you cannot control.

**Persistence:** when someone works hard and does not give up.

**Potential:** it means that someone can achieve something if they work at it.

**Prestigious:** important and respected.

**Rare bird:** an unusual person.

**Self-assured:** having confidence in yourself and your abilities.

**Stoned:** under the effect of a drug (such as marijuana).

**Turn a blind eye:** pretend not to notice some bad behavior.

**Wrap your head around something:** find a way to understand or accept something.