

## **Quitting Pot: Why You Have to Quit Hanging Out With People Who Use Marijuana**

**By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

When trying to break free from addiction and achieve abstinence from cannabis and other substances, a crucial first step is changing your social group. It's incredibly challenging to stop using cannabis if your social life revolves around people who share your past enthusiasm for cannabis.

Despite the easy access and availability of cannabis through dispensaries, people still gather to use cannabis in social settings. These social interactions help form bonds and group identities, reinforcing individuals' continuing use of cannabis. The acceptance of cannabis use in recreational and medicinal contexts further solidifies notions of marijuana as a harmless and enjoyable activity.

When you decide to quit using cannabis due to the problems it causes in your life, being around a peer group that views cannabis as harmless or even beneficial can be confusing. Your peers might seem to use cannabis without facing arguments with their partners, financial hardships, or obstacles to their dreams. Despite this, you have decided to quit because you recognize that continuing to use cannabis is not in the best interest of achieving your best life. It is normal to approach sobriety with ambivalence about quitting. Hanging out with people who are using the drugs you are trying to abstain from makes it that much more difficult.

Even though you know that being around people who are using cannabis threatens your budding sobriety, you may initially resist the suggestion to let go of your old peer group, feeling as though sobriety demands sacrificing your social life and friendships. However, changing your

environment to reduce the likelihood of relapse logically makes perfect sense.

Your cannabis and other drug use (including alcohol) are often associated with specific people, places, events, thoughts, and even smells. Some associations are direct, while others are indirect. For example, you might associate cannabis use with a core group of friends you usually get high with or with a local convenience store where you bought rolling papers, cigars, or snacks for the "munchies." You might also associate getting high with driving down certain streets, being in particular neighborhoods, the storefront of the dispensary, or starting your day with a coffee and a joint. These associations can serve as "cues" that can "trigger" powerful cravings or urges to use. Even if you use cannabis alone, there will be people, places, and things you associate with cannabis use acting as cues.

Although cravings do not cause relapse, they are particularly challenging to manage in the transition to recovery and in early recovery because you haven't yet developed a robust set of abstinence tools to combat them to prevent relapse. Cravings are one of the most significant relapse factors in the transition to recovery. Being around old "using" friends is one of the riskiest situations for relapse during this vulnerable time. Even if you've committed to quitting, whether "forever" or "one day at a time," placing yourself in environments conducive to relapse is like playing recovery roulette.

As the fear from your latest crisis subsides or your resolve to quit weakens despite your desire to be more productive, achieve a goal, or be more present in your relationships, easy access and availability increase your vulnerability to relapse. Feelings of boredom, loneliness, the desire to fit in, the pursuit of fun, or attempts to avoid shame can all contribute to succumbing to cravings and abandoning your resolve to quit.

In those vulnerable moments, you may question why you decided to quit in the first place. You might compare yourself to your friends and think (perhaps correctly) that they use as much as you do. You might start telling

yourself that sobriety isn't worth it since you're still facing negative consequences and dealing with difficult emotions. Your relationships might still be strained. When someone passes you that joint, blunt, or pipe, getting high can seem like the best choice. Believing you can rely on willpower to resist using cannabis in such situations is an illusion of control. "High-risk" situations are named so because they pose a significant risk of relapse.

You can artfully avoid most high-risk situations in the transition to early recovery. Don't hang out with friends who get high. Don't spend time with people who are drinking. Avoid bars. Instead, seek out places to meet and connect with people who aren't using. AA, NA, or Marijuana Anonymous meetings are a great starting point. Find groups of people who enjoy activities you've always liked, such as bowling, attending sporting events, building things, or taking classes. You probably have sober family members who share some of your interests—spend time with them. Many people in early recovery spend time with family members who urged them to get help. Soon, as you learn new sobriety skills and change your lifestyle, you'll build a network of sober friends who actively encourage your sobriety.

Paying attention to your health can be part of this transformation. Engage in daily exercise, maintain a regular sleep schedule, and address problems in your life proactively rather than worrying without action. Change your support system to one that embodies the changes you are trying to make. These simple lifestyle changes can keep your early recovery efforts from derailing and significantly enhance your overall well-being and long-term SUCCESS. **Note:** This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2012 with the title, "Quitting Smoking Pot: Why You Have to Quit Hanging Out with Pot Smokers," on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.

Understanding the complexities of addiction and the risk of cross addiction is crucial in your recovery journey. Cross addiction occurs when individuals in recovery from one addiction develop a new addiction to a different substance or behavior. To learn more about preventing cross addiction and safeguarding your recovery, check out our eBook, "Understanding Cross Addiction to Prevent Relapse." This comprehensive guide delves into the nature of addiction, identifies risk factors, and offers strategies to maintain sobriety and prevent relapse. Equip yourself with the knowledge and tools to navigate recovery successfully and achieve lasting well-being.

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