

1 Refusal skills psychoeducation

- **What?** Practical skills for not using when a person does not want to.
- **Why?** Support people to be able to make their own choices.
- Social pressure to use when a person does not want to can be:
 - **Direct** – when someone offers a drink or drug directly.
 - Example: A friend hands a person a drink at a party and encourages the person to drink.
 - **Indirect** – when a person feels an urge to use due to the environment or situation, even if no one is offering it.
 - Being at a party where everyone is drinking, contributing to the person feeling they should join in.
- **No one-size-fits all refusal response** – *Key considerations that impact this influence and contribute to varying degrees of social pressure include:*
 - Trust and familiarity: the greater degree of emotional investment in a relationship the more likely it is to influence the decision-making process.
 - Expectation and obligation: different degrees of feeling the pressure to maintain harmony, avoid conflict or conform to expectations can make refusal either easier or more challenging.
 - Emotional leverage: close relationships may sometimes use emotional leverage, such as guilt or manipulation, to encourage substance use. For instance, a friend might say, "Do it for me," making it harder to refuse. Conversely, positive relationships can provide strong support for refusal, where loved ones understand and respect the decisions around AOD.
 - History: previous experiences and established patterns within relationships can play a role where breaking a pattern may require additional efforts.

2 Having the conversation to create a tailored and graduated list

One or more of these sample questions based on the key considerations can be used to guide the discussion to build a tailored and graduated list:

- Looking at your life now, can you tell me about who would you find it easier or harder to say no to, if they offered you _____ and you did not want to use? For example, a casual acquaintance, a close friend, a family member?
- How do you usually communicate refusal in your close relationships? Do you find it easier or harder to say no with certain people?
- Are there certain people you feel expected to join in with when they use? How would you feel about saying no if you did not want to use in these situations?
- Can you tell me if there was a time where you felt obligated to use substances when you did not want to because you wanted to maintain harmony in a situation, to fit in or avoid conflict?
- Has anyone ever used guilt or manipulation to encourage you to use when it was not something you wanted to do?
- Do you feel social expectations to use substances in certain settings, like family gatherings or social events?
- Do you ever feel the pull to use substances when you don't want to because of the place you are in or the people you are with?
- Have you ever felt pressured to use substances when you did not want to just by being around people you trust and are familiar with, even if they didn't offer anything to you directly?
- Are there any situations that are coming up where you do want to use where you might find it hard to say no?

3 Two-voices role play

Two-voice role plays are an effective way to develop these skills as they:

- Simulate real-life situations where role plays provide a realistic practice environment, helping participants apply refusal skills and hear how they 'sound' in scenarios they are likely to encounter.
- Allow for practicing refusal techniques in a safe setting to boost participants' confidence to use these skills in real life – people get to 'hear' themselves saying their responses.
- Support active participation and repetition in role plays to reinforce learning and improve skill retention.
- Provide immediate feedback, allowing for quick adjustments and improvement.

Setting up two-person role plays to practice refusal skills

- Introducing role plays and safety:
 - Explain the purpose of the role plays and what they will entail.
 - [Sample script: *I'd like to use role play exercises to practice refusal skills for each of these situations. I think this would help as it lets us simulate real-life situations in a safe environment. Hands-on practice and saying things out loud here in this room can help you be prepared to say no when you're faced with these situations in real life. Does that sound ok to you?*]
 - Advise person they can stop and take a break at any time.
 - Workers: be prepared to 'press pause' if indications arise the person is experiencing distress.
- Select situations:
 - Start with least challenging scenario.
 - Take a few minutes to discuss with the person the context and specifics of the scenario:
E.g.: *Who is involved? Where are we? What might the other person say/do?*
- Discuss responses:
 - Discuss what might be helpful for the situation.
 - Use the 'Refusal skills ideas' handout to identify anything the person might think would be helpful.
- Roleplay guidelines:
 - Encourage participants to stay in character during the roleplay.
 - The "refuser" can practice the different refusal techniques as discussed.
 - The "pressure-giver" can apply realistic but respectful pressure to make the scenario challenging yet supportive.
- Feedback and reflection:
 - After each role play, provide a few minutes to discuss how it went.
 - Encourage the "refuser" to share what felt challenging and what worked well.
 - The "pressure-giver" should provide constructive feedback on the "refuser's" techniques.
- Continue
 - When ready, move to the next situation.

Two-person role play variations

- Make it fun.
- Switch roles – workers can play the client.

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Let's Practise: Two-voices role play

Instructions:

- Read your Scenario.
- Take turns being the person under pressure and the person applying pressure. Start with the "Least challenging" scenario.
- Worker Role:
 - Practice giving a rationale for using two-person role play (see Tip Sheet).
 - Build the scenario - ask:
 - Where does it happen?
 - Who applies the pressure and how?
 - What has worked or not worked in the past?
 - What do you think would be an effective response? (Use the Refusal Skills Ideas Handout as needed)
- Do a 5-minute role play to practice responses. After each role play, give feedback and discuss what worked well.
- Switch roles after each round so both of you get a chance to practice.

Scenario 1: Alex

Background:

- Alex is a 28-year-old who recently decided to cut down on alcohol consumption due to health reasons. They are generally social and enjoy attending gatherings with friends. Alex has a history of heavy drinking, especially during social events.

Graduated list developed with the worker:

- Least challenging: At a large party where my good friend Jordan offers them a drink.
- Moderately challenging: I'm at a networking event for work where free alcoholic drinks are being served, and mingling with potential clients always involves accepting drinks from them.
- Challenging: I'm at a weekend BBQ with friends, and someone suggests playing a drinking game.
- Most challenging: I'm having dinner at my older brother's house and it's a weeknight and I do not want to drink, and he repeatedly pressures me to drink, saying, "Just one drink won't hurt. Do it for me!"

Scenario 2: Taylor

Background:

- Taylor is a 24-year-old who has decided to stop using cannabis to focus on their career and mental health. Taylor has been a regular cannabis user in social settings but wants to make a change.

Graduated list developed with the worker:

- Least challenging: I'm at a coworker's housewarming party next week, and I know a group of colleagues will be passing around a joint.
- Moderately challenging: I'm at a music festival with friends, and cannabis use is prevalent among this social group.
- Challenging: I play a club sport where some members use cannabis after practice sessions each Tuesday night.
- Most challenging: I'm at a small, intimate gathering with close friends like Clint, Peta and Sam, and we have always used cannabis together in the past. The group is pressuring me to join in and I'm thinking I don't want to snub them.