

# “Pros & Cons” Decisional Balancing Reflection

**Recommended Age: 14+**

## Goals

- To provide an assessment tool for youth to reflect on the benefits and harms of using substances, as well as the benefits and harms of quitting or reducing use.
- To introduce the concept of stages of readiness, as well as emphasizing goal-oriented strategies to reduce harm.

## Have Ready

- Reflection Activity handout (see below).
- Flipchart paper and markers, or chalk/whiteboard.

## Activity Introduction

- There is a need for youth who are actively engaging in substance use to reflect on their own level of use, their reasons for using, as well as explore their motivations for quitting or cutting down on substance use.
- When we think about making changes, most of us don't really consider all 'sides' in a complete way. Instead, we often do what we think we're 'supposed' to do, avoid doing things we don't feel like doing, or maybe just feel overwhelmed and give up thinking about it at all. Thinking through the pros and cons of both changing and not making a change is one way to help us figure out if we're ready to make a change. This can also help us to 'hang on' to our plan in times of stress or crisis.

## Instructions

- Ask youth, **“Think about your substance use and what the positives and negatives are.”** They can write all the reasons they can think of in each of the boxes on the handout.

- Let youth know they will not be asked to share their page with anyone.
- It's helpful to be honest about what the positive benefits of using substances are, as well as the negative consequences of using. For example, a person can put that a positive of smoking pot is that it is fun and a negative is that it costs too much money.
- It's also important to be honest about what someone would gain as well as lose by quitting. A positive about quitting pot could be helping with physical issues, such as an ongoing cough or memory problems. A negative is that it may have been helping with sleep.
- Pass out the worksheet and give youth time to fill it out.

### Sample Sheet for Cannabis

<p>Best about Using</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun</li> <li>• More friends</li> <li>• Helps get through your day</li> <li>• Coping/helps deal with trauma</li> <li>• Helps with sleep</li> </ul>	<p>Worst about Using</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$\$\$</li> <li>• It has to 'work'</li> <li>• Triggers suicidal feelings</li> <li>• Kicked out of school</li> <li>• Unsafe situations</li> <li>• Physical health issues</li> </ul>
<p>Best about Quitting/Cutting Down</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get off street</li> <li>• Decreased suicidal feelings</li> <li>• Return to school</li> <li>• Sleeping/eating improve</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• More money</li> </ul>	<p>Worst about Quitting/Cutting Down</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boredom</li> <li>• Loss of friends</li> <li>• Flashbacks</li> <li>• Sleep</li> <li>• Miss being high</li> <li>• Loss of social status</li> </ul>

### Debrief

- Ask youth, **“When looking at your completed sheet, what do you notice?”** Youth may say some sections are harder or easier to fill in. Acknowledge that deciding to continue using or choosing not to use can be really complicated.
- **When trying to decide if you are ready for change, it is not the number of points made in each section, but how much weight or importance that you put on those points.**

- However, even if you may not be ready to cut down or quit, you can still make small changes and set goals to get ready for bigger changes. For example, if you are worried about not sleeping well without pot, you can try to look for other strategies that can help with sleeping, even while still using.

## **Additional Activities**

Ideally, this activity can be followed by:

- Identifying Strengths Reflection
- Drug Trivia Game

## Decisional Balancing Sheet

<p><b>Best things about using</b></p>	<p><b>Worst things about using</b></p>
<p><b>Best things about quitting/cutting down</b></p>	<p><b>Worst things about quitting/cutting down</b></p>