



How to handle high-risk situations

Learning how to identify high-risk situations – the times, places, occasions, people, thoughts and feelings which might trigger your substance use or your urge to use can help you.

Identifying your high-risk times is step one. Step two is learning how to handle them.

Rather than wait until you are under pressure, work out beforehand some ways of coping with these situations. You will feel more in control if you have prepared for a difficult situation. It's a bit like a fire drill – a fire drill identifies specifically what we need to do and it works best when we are familiar with it, and when we practice it – you can plan for high-risk situations in the same way.

You could 'Escape' – sometimes just leaving the situation is best. Or you could try the strategies – Delay, Distract, Decide, Self-talk and Urge Surfing.

A method that many people find works well in preparing for high-risk situations is the Problem Solving Approach. This is really good for solving other sorts of problems as well.

The Problem Solving Approach

1. Take a moment to really think. Can you identify the problem?
2. Brainstorm ideas for handling the problem. The trick here is not to be too fussy; in this step anything goes. Don't try and work out what is good or not – that comes next.
3. Now – weigh up the costs and benefits of each idea. Can you predict what is likely to happen if you try each solution?
4. Select the ideas that you think will work best for you.
5. Try one out. Sometimes if you are planning you can try it out in your mind – think through the steps you will take – imagine going through the steps and implementing your choice. If your first choice doesn't work, try the next one. Keep on trying until you find one that works

If what you tried doesn't work, look at what happened and where it went wrong. What could you do differently? Can you come up with some new ideas?

If nothing seems to have worked, seek advice from someone you trust (e.g., your supporter, friend, partner, and the person who gave you this booklet or a professional counsellor).

Example

John identified two high-risk situations and used the problem-solving approach to decide what to do in those situations

High-risk situation A

I use cannabis in the evening to relax when I get home from work.

Brainstormed solutions:

- I'll sit down and put my feet up when I get home
- I'll drink some beer
- I'll do next door's gardening
- I'll listen to some music
- I'll go for a walk or go to the gym
- I'll talk to my girlfriend about how the day went
- I'll go to a friend's place on the way home

Costs and Benefits

Best solutions:

Listen to some music or talk to my girlfriend

What happened?

I listened to some music and I talked to my girlfriend while we had dinner and felt better

High-risk situation B

I'm pressured to use more cannabis when I'm at a party with my friends at the weekend.

Brainstormed solutions

- I won't go to any more parties
- I'll tell my friends I don't want to see them
- I'll go to the library instead
- I'll take my favourite music so I have more fun at the party
- I'll go to parties with friends who don't use cannabis
- I'll refuse cannabis because I have to go to work in the morning.
- I'll take all the cannabis I'm offered

Costs and Benefits

Best solutions

Take my favourite music and refuse cannabis because I have to work.

What happened?

I took my favourite music and danced and enjoyed myself. Some people still offered me cannabis but they accepted my refusal because I had to work.

Finally, remember there are other strategies that can help you too. These include being assertive, challenging unhelpful thoughts and practicing mindfulness.

Now that you know how to handle high-risk situations, here are some related sheets that you might also find useful:

[How to cope with cravings](#)

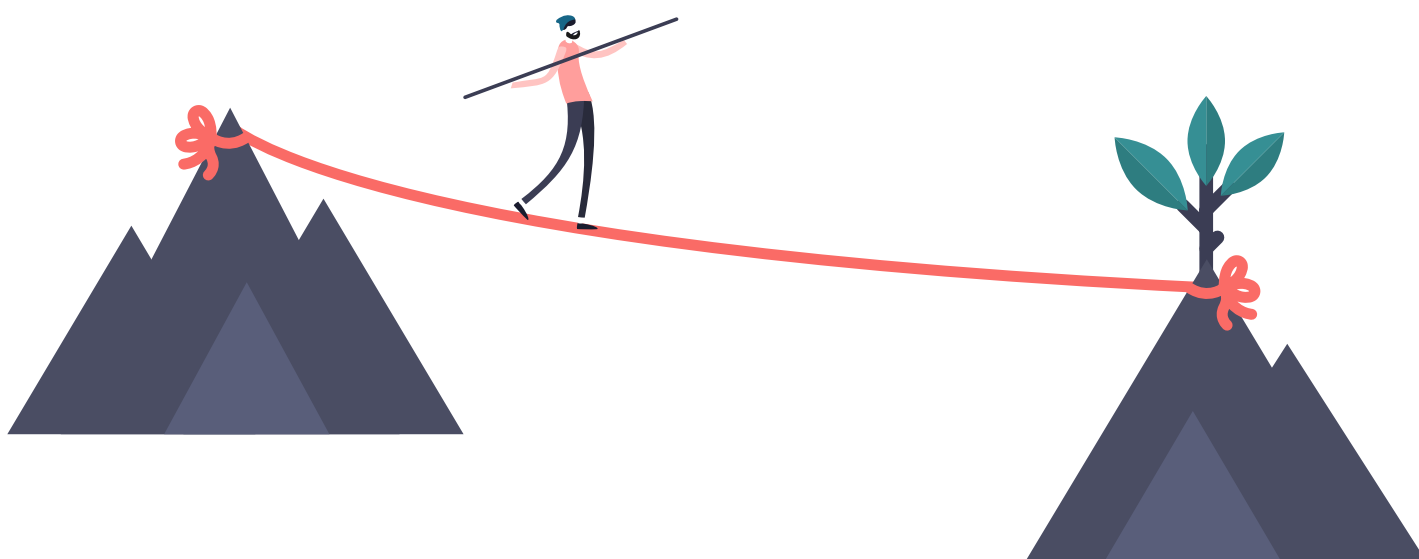
[How to challenge unhelpful thoughts](#)

[How to be assertive](#)

[How to prepare for and respond to a slip](#)

[How to manage a slip](#)

[How to practice mindfulness](#)



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