

Behavioural strategies

To support the young person to achieve their goal | June 2024

Strategy 1: Alternative dopamine reward

This strategy is based on the dopamine release as the reward. Dopamine is a 'feel good' chemical released in the brain. Research has shown that nicotine increases the level of dopamine in the brain.

Suggest: Instead of using an e-cigarette for a dopamine release, the young person should carry a snack with them (for example, flavoured sugar free gum) or do some exercise (for example, walking or dancing).

Strategy 2: Think of yourself as someone who does not use e-cigarettes

This strategy is based on motivational interviewing so the young person can imagine themselves as someone who does not use e-cigarettes.

To exercise this strategy, the young person can say to themselves:

"I am not a vaper." "I don't need to vape/smoke."

This can include asking the young person to imagine an example of being offered an e-cigarette and role-playing the response.

Example scenario 1: Imagine your friend or a group of friends have asked you to go for a vape/take a hit of a vape. What is your response?

"I don't like it anymore; it gives me a headache." "I don't want to waste my money."

Example scenario 2: Role-play a scenario offering an e-cigarette to a young person.

Think of other relevant scenarios with the young person so they can continue practising this strategy.

Strategy 3: Urge surfing

Urge surfing is a form of mindful noticing of cravings. It is not designed to make the craving disappear, but merely to notice that the feelings and thoughts come, peak and then pass. Merely noticing a craving is powerful when cravings have previously dictated actions multiple times a day.

Urge surfing can be practised in other ways, such as holding a peppermint in the mouth without immediately swallowing the saliva that develops.

Strategy 4: Distraction

Suggest the young person distract themselves by doing something else for example go for a walk, listen to music, use fidgets, a toy or pen to distract their hands.

Advanced technique: distraction with imagery. While experiencing a craving the young person learns to visualise something completely different like being on a beach, or cows grazing in a paddock. If stuck, it may help for them to focus on an aversive image for example vomiting.

Practise: Mindfully rehearse a simple distracting visualisation when there is no craving.

Strategy 5: Rewards or incentives

Suggest the young person set measurable goals like not using e-cigarettes for one week to reduce or cease their e-cigarette use, including positive reinforcement (rewards or incentives) for periods of abstinence.

Example scenario 1: Involve a parent/caregiver who agrees to provide a reward to the young person for one week of abstinence (or other agreed time).

Example scenario 2: Support the young person to identify a reward they can give themselves for an agreed period of abstinence.

Strategy 6: Make a promise (either committing to one or more of the above behavioural strategies, or to not use e-cigarettes)

Studies have shown that when people make a promise to do something they are more likely to comply.

Example 1: Ask the young person to make a promise to commit to doing one or more of the behavioural strategies in this guide or make a commitment to a trusted friend or family member.

This can also be used in a situation where the health professional/worker asks the young person to make a promise to not use e-cigarettes at specific times or number of days.

Example 2: Do you promise me that you won't use vapes during school hours?

References:

New South Wales Government. Guide to Support Young People to Quit E-cigarettes. In: NSW Ministry of Health, editor. 2023
RACGP. Check RACGP CPD Solution. Unit 604, Smoking Cessation. June-July 2023

Department of Health
GPO Box 125
Hobart TAS 7001

1300 135 513
www.health.tas.gov.au