

LO-4 Example Constellation of Use Assessment

Sample conversation between a BHSS and patient evaluating the patient's constellation of use.

Here is an in-session example of how to assess these different aspects of use or their constellation of use:

BHSS: “People have all different kinds of relationships with substances. What does your current substance use look like?” *[Open-ended question to elicit an initial narrative.]*

Patient: “I feel like I have been drinking more than usual, like up to a six pack of White Claws some nights. I want to cut down there. That’s more my big habit. I also like to vape at night to chill. Mostly, I try to wait till after 5pm so I can get things done during the day.”

[Note: We now have the first substance, alcohol, and the route of administration: “Drinking” is an oral route of administration. We also have the second substance’s route of administration, but we need clarification on quantity/frequency of the first substance AND the type of substance that is vaped, as well as quant/frequency.]

BHSS: “Thanks for sharing where you’re at. *[Affirmation for providing the information. Note: BHSS is not affirming use per se, just the provision of information.]* In terms of drinking, how many days a week is that usually? *[Follow up on frequency.]*

Patient: Oh, every day for sure.

BHSS: Got it. And what would you say you drink on a typical day?” *[Follow-up question to be sure we got the type of beverage.]*

Patient: Yeah, White Claws. That’s my go-to.

BHSS: About how many White Claws do you have on a typical day? *[Follow-up on typical quantity.]*

Patient: Hm—yeah—I’d say 4 to 6 usually.

BHSS: Would you say that’s closer to 4 or closer to 6? *[Follow-up on typical quantity: Be sure to get ONE number vs a range to best assess potential harm.]*

Patient: Honestly? Closer to 6.

BHSS: OK, what size can?

Patient: 12 oz.

BHSS: And what flavor are you usually drinking?

Patient: Oh, it’s a variety pack, but it’s got like Blackberry and Lime and stuff...

BHSS: (Scanning internet) Oh, so the White Claw Surge?

Patient: Yeah—that’s it. Surge. *[BHSS notes this is not the typical 5% White Claw, but 8%. This makes a big difference when calculating standard drinks.]*

BHSS: And how many days in the last week did you drink? *[Frequency.]*

Patient: Oh, every day pretty much.

BHSS: Pretty much?

Patient: Every day.

BHSS: Got it. Thanks for walking me through that. And you also mentioned you vape at night?

Patient: Mm-hmm.

BHSS: What are you usually vaping?

Patient: Oh, uh—cannabis.

BHSS: Anything else?

Patient: Nah, just cannabis.

BHSS: Tell me a little about your cannabis use.

Patient: Well, I vape cannabis to chill after a long day. It really relaxes me, but sometimes it freaks me out a little.

BHSS: It freaks you out. *[Simple reflection to follow up on potential harm.]*

Patient: Yeah, I get a little jumpy, like paranoid, if I vape too much.

BHSS: I see. And about how often do you vape?

Patient: Every night.

BHSS: Ok—and what THC concentration is your vape?

Patient: Let me look. (Pause.) 83%.

BHSS: Got it. How do you usually track your use with vaping? *[Trying to get a read on what metric is relevant is harder with vapes.]*

Patient: Oh, I usually do about 5 puffs. Then, I wait. Usually, I am watching a show or playing video games.

BHSS: OK. And what else do you use? *[Probing for any further substances.]*

Patient: That's it.

BHSS: Thanks for sharing where you're at. This will help us focus our efforts on your personalized plan to help you reduce your substance-related harm in ways that are helpful to you.

This material appears in the UW BHSS Educator's Guide chapter on Intervention, unit: Harm Reduction.