

Skunk & Spice Agenda

Cannabis & Synthetic Cannabinoids — Learning Objectives, Agenda & Capability Framework Alignment

A 3 hour online course providing a deeper level of knowledge about common forms of cannabis and synthetic cannabinoids — history, pharmacology, health and psychiatric implications, harm minimisation and current treatment

Trainer: Tony D'Agostino

Company: TD Consultancy

Delivery: Online — 3 hours

Edition: 2026

Aims & Objectives of the Course

- Achieve a deeper level of knowledge about common forms of cannabis — herbal (skunk), resin and concentrates — and their varying potency and risk profiles
- Understand the different types of synthetic cannabinoids, how they are manufactured, marketed and used, and why they present unique and unpredictable risks
- Understand how cannabis and synthetic cannabinoids work — THC, the endocannabinoid system, and the pharmacological differences between natural and synthetic compounds
- Understand the health and psychiatric implications of cannabis and synthetic cannabinoid use, including psychosis, dependency and acute toxicity
- Be able to describe and apply harm minimisation strategies and techniques relevant to this client group
- Understand current treatment approaches and referral pathways for cannabis and synthetic cannabinoid use disorder

Session Agenda

Skunk & Spice: Cannabis, Synthetic Cannabinoids, Health & Harm Minimisation

10:00am Start — Welcome & Course Overview

10:10am Current UK situation — prevalence, trends and policy context

10:30am Different types — skunk, resin, concentrates, oils and synthetic cannabinoid products (Spice)

11:05am How they work — THC, the endocannabinoid system and the pharmacology of synthetic cannabinoids

11:15am Break (15 minutes)

11:30am Health & psychiatric implications — psychosis, acute toxicity, dependency and co-occurring needs

11:55am Harm minimisation — strategies and techniques for cannabis and synthetic cannabinoid users

12:20pm Current treatment approaches — evidence base, interventions and care planning

12:40pm Working with this client group — confidence, referral pathways and service responses

1:00pm Close & Q&A

Capability Framework Alignment

This course aligns with the Capability Framework for the Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Recovery Workforce (NHS England/ OHID, 2024), which underpins the 10-Year Strategic Plan for the Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Recovery Workforce 2024–2034.

Capability Domain (NHS England / OHID, 2024)	Framework Section
Knowledge of the nature, prevalence and patterns of cannabis and synthetic cannabinoid use in the UK, including current policy, legal status and the specific risks associated with high-potency skunk	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Application of Knowledge</i>
Knowledge of the different types of cannabis and synthetic cannabinoid products — herbal, resin, concentrates, and branded synthetic cannabinoid products — and their varying potency and risk profiles	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Application of Knowledge</i>
Knowledge of how cannabis and synthetic cannabinoids work — including THC, CBD, the endocannabinoid system, and the pharmacological differences that make synthetic cannabinoids unpredictable and more dangerous	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Application of Knowledge</i>
Knowledge of the health and psychiatric risks associated with cannabis and synthetic cannabinoid use, including psychosis, acute toxicity, dependency, and co-occurring mental health needs	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Application of Knowledge</i>
Ability to provide evidence-based harm minimisation advice for cannabis and synthetic cannabinoid users, including guidance on potency, routes of administration and reducing acute risk	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Harm Reduction, Treatment and Recovery</i>
Recovery-oriented approach — working with individuals to build motivation, recovery capital and resilience in relation to cannabis and synthetic cannabinoid use	<i>Underpinning Principle: All Roles</i>
Challenging stigma — recognising how the normalisation of cannabis and the marginalisation of synthetic cannabinoid users (particularly in homeless and prison settings) can influence professional practice	<i>Underpinning Principle: All Roles</i>

Underpinning Principles Embedded in This Course

Trauma-informed care • Recovery-oriented approach • Evidence-based practice • Person-centred working • Forming a working alliance • Therapeutic optimism • Challenging stigma • Co-occurring needs and multidisciplinary working

Note: National Occupational Standards (DANOS/NOS) are retained within the National Occupational Standards library but are no longer the primary workforce development reference for the drug and alcohol treatment and recovery sector. This course uses the NHS England / OHID Capability Framework (2024) as its primary alignment standard.