

# Joint Decisions: Who Takes the Rap for Marijuana Possession and Consumption at a High School Party?

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*Secure Communities Group*

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In this engaging case study about marijuana possession and consumption, middle school, high school, and college educators have an opportunity to teach students about the different perspectives involved in conflict resolution. While marijuana has been legalized for recreational use, the negotiation tactics gained from this case study are vital to resolving issues at a local, national, and global scale. A comprehensive glossary aids students in understanding key historical figures, locations, and terminology relevant to the possession and consumption of marijuana. In the third segment of the case study, “Confidential Instructions” for six roles are provided, allowing educators to divide their classes into six groups who participate in a live, conflict resolution role play exercise. Each group collaboratively works towards negotiating a resolution and fair punishment.

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**Description of Six Characters**

1. John Erickson, MLK High School Senior and Valedictorian
2. Samantha (“Sam”) Jacobson, MLK HS Senior, and co-hostess of the party
3. Emily Griffith-Jacobson, Sam’s mother, and co-hostess of the party
4. Officer Tom Edwards, Police Officer on scene
5. Dr. Jennifer Williams, MLK High School Principal
6. Mike Edwards, MLK HS Senior, and member of the Disciplinary Committee

**Three Critical Issues to be Negotiated**

1. Person(s) at Fault
2. Penalty
3. Who Decides #1 and #2



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In the 6-character role-play exercise, each person or small group will receive *only* the confidential instructions regarding the character whose role they will assume. Educators, as negotiation facilitators, encourage students to play the roles of their characters even if they might not personally agree with the character’s beliefs, teaching participants to ‘walk in the shoes’ of others.

This live, case-study-based negotiation and conflict resolution pedagogy is what we call an ‘intellectual outward bound, role-play-based, conflict resolution simulation exercise.’ Each case study includes 6 characters and 3 issues to be discussed by those characters during negotiations. This is based on our theory of ‘triangulation’ in conflict resolution.

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## Rules of Engagement

### SETUP

- Set up three tables in the room to serve as ‘negotiation pods’ to be used during the negotiation rounds. Place the ‘Confidential Instructions’ for Character 1 and Character 2 on Table A; for Characters 3 and 4 on Table B; and for Characters 5 and 6 on Table C.
- To form the teams, assign each participant to one of the Characters and lead them to their appropriate Table to review their ‘Confidential Instructions,’ with other members of their team.

### GAMEPLAY

#### *Summary Statements*

- Each team has 15 minutes to understand their Character and formulate a concise Summary Statement, focusing on their Character’s stances on the issues.
  - To extend the 15-minute discussion time, the majority of participants must agree for time.
- Each team selects a representative to deliver a 2-minute introduction of their Character and their stances on the three issues. Presentations occur sequentially in the predetermined order listed above. All are encouraged to take notes during the presentation of Summary Statements.

#### *Negotiation Rounds*

##### Rounds 1-5

- In the first series of negotiations, each team debates all three issues simultaneously with each of the five other teams for 15 minutes apiece, in the following pairings:
  - *Round 1:* Pairings are Character 1 with Character 2; 3 with 4; and 5 with 6.
  - *Round 2:* Shifting to the right, pairings become 1 with 3; 2 with 5; and 4 with 6.
  - *Round 3:* Continuing to shift, pairings are now 1 with 4; 2 with 6; and 3 with 5.
  - *Round 4:* With another shift, pairings change to 1 with 5; 2 with 4; and 3 with 6.
  - *Round 5:* Finally, in the last round, pairings are 1 with 6; 2 with 3; and 4 with 5.
- If agreement on an issue seems unreachable, switch to another to make the most of your time.
  - During negotiation rounds, more time can be negotiated as before.

##### Round 6

- For Round 6, the three Tables will be divided between Issues 1 (at Table A); 2 (at Table B); and 3 (at Table C). Each team should send one-third of its members to each Table.
- Each Table should engage in issue-focused debates. For example, Table A should negotiate a settlement only to Issue 1, and so on with Tables B and C.

#### *Recommendation Statements*

- Each Table must have a secretary to take notes, who will write a 150-word Recommendation Statement on the Table issue, stating the action that should be taken.

### CONCLUSION

- The three Recommendation Statements will be consolidated into one document: the final negotiated compromise. The simulation ends when a solution is successfully agreed upon.
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**Confidential Instructions for [1]  
John Erickson, MLK High School Senior and Valedictorian**

**“I was only joking when I told Sam I’d join her when she came back. I just wanted to help as I knew she only used the marijuana when she felt anxious or when she knew an attack was coming on.” - John Erickson**

*You are MLK High School's valedictorian and have received a football scholarship to attend an Ivy League college. You are a member of the community service program at MLK, serve on the Disciplinary Committee (DC), and you are actively involved in the drug and alcohol prevention program. Though you have attended off-campus parties where you have occasionally drunk beer and rarely smoked marijuana, getting caught holding Sam's medical marijuana is your first offense. You are aware the law enforcement officer who arrested you, Officer Edwards, stashed and smoked marijuana instead of turning it in as evidence, and his son, Mike, was smoking the same stash at the party.*

### **Stances on the Critical Issues**

#### *1. Person(s) at Fault*

- You feel that you are definitely at fault.
- You believe that you should not “throw Sam under the bus”, but she is also at fault.
- The DC should know that Sam had the marijuana and “distributed” it to you at the party.

#### *2. Penalty*

- You feel that there should be a fair, but not overly severe punishment for you and Sam.
- You believe that you should still be able to walk in graduation and receive your diploma there, as well as deliver your valedictorian address.
- You strongly believe that the MLK High School Disciplinary Committee (DC), your principal and your college counselor should not notify your college of this offense.

#### *3. Who decides #1 and #2*

- Your school's DC, not the principal or the court of law should decide your punishment.
- You do not feel that you should have any say in, or be able to vote on, the final decision.
- You and Sam should only face questioning by other members of the DC, including Mike.

### **Non-Negotiable Principles**

- You do not want this one case to put your college acceptance, and future, in jeopardy.
- Sam is partially at fault for providing you with the marijuana.

### **Potential Areas for Compromise**

- Specifics of the punishment should be within the authority of the school.
- The punishment should be 2 days of suspension and 10 hours of community service.
- You feel that as a compromise, performing community service instead of participating in Senior Week would be fair.

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**Confidential Instructions for [2]  
Samantha (“Sam”) Jacobson, MLK HS Senior, and co-hostess of the party**

**“Few people understand just how horrible it is to have a seizure disorder. And it’s not just a physical thing. It can destroy your self-confidence, your self-esteem and your self-worth, as well.” - Sam Jacobson**

*You are a senior at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. High School (MLK HS), and John Erickson has been your friend since nursery school. You have excelled not only in track and field at your school, but especially in music, and you are excited that you will be attending an out-of-state school next fall that has a very good music program. You have loved MLK HS, and achieved success there, despite having a disability that has burdened you for years: a complex partial seizure disorder, or epilepsy, that you have had since age 13. You never wanted this disability to become a burden on others like John, whom you feel has a lot of promise, and because he’s never stood before the Disciplinary Committee before.*

### **Stances on the Critical Issues**

#### **1. Person(s) at Fault**

- John should be the only one disciplined.
- John was rolling the joint and had it in his mouth as he was caught by Officer Edwards, not you.
- You do feel guilty that you asked John to hold the marijuana and rolling papers while you went in search of matches.

#### **2. Penalty**

- It should serve as a lesson about the seriousness of partaking in marijuana consumption activities.
- John should be able to participate in graduation, receive his diploma, and deliver his class speech.
- The guidance counselors should not notify John’s college about the off-campus incident.

#### **3. Who decides #1 and #2**

- The principal, not a local judge or the school’s Disciplinary Committee (DC), should decide John’s penalty.
- The principal will be more lenient on John, whereas the DC has previously made unfair decisions.

### **Non-Negotiable Principles**

- You did not intentionally distribute the marijuana and are not responsible for the incident.
- This small offense should not affect John’s ability to graduate from high school, or to attend the Ivy League college where he has a full football scholarship next fall.

### **Potential Areas for Compromise**

- John’s punishment should be 2 days of suspension and 10 hours of community service. You are open to sharing a portion of the penalty
  - The DC can advise the principal, or only have a limited say in the punishment.
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**Confidential Instructions for [3]  
Emily Griffith-Jacobson, Sam's mother, and co-hostess of the party**

**“Sammy and John both know better than to handle her medicinal marijuana in that manner, but this small incident shouldn't cost my daughter, or John, either of their futures. Mistakes happen.” - Mrs. Emily Jacobson**

*You are a licensed social worker with a private practice in the town where MLK High School is located. You are also a respected member of the community, and the single mother of Samantha (“Sam”) Jacobson, a senior at the school. John has always supported Sam as a friend throughout her battle with epilepsy, but you have set clear boundaries with her in terms of not sharing the marijuana she has been prescribed with anyone else. You are concerned about being held liable for hosting the party, during which time Officer Edwards caught John smoking marijuana. Secretly, you have also been having an affair with Officer Edwards, and are aware that his son Mike was smoking at the party, as well, but was not apprehended like John was.*

### **Stances on the Critical Issues**

#### *1. Person(s) at Fault*

- John is at fault, as he requested the marijuana from Sam.
- Sam can legally consume the marijuana, whereas John cannot.
- You cannot keep a watchful eye on every person who visits or socializes in your home.

#### *2. Penalty*

- It should serve as a lesson that possession & consumption of marijuana is illegal without a prescription.
- John should still be able to partake in graduation, receive his diploma, and give his class speech.
- The case should not be reported to the Ivy League school where John was accepted.

#### *3. Who decides #1 and #2*

- The principal should decide on John's punishment, as she is a great leader and educator.
- The party was a school event that falls under MLK HS's “disciplinary umbrella”, even though it was held off campus.
- John's parents should not sue you as the party's host.

### **Non-Negotiable Principles**

- The incident should be handled within the authority of the school.
- John's parents should not take legal action against you for the incident.

### **Potential Areas for Compromise**

- John should be suspended for 4 days and serve 20 hours of community service.
  - The DC can have a partial say in the penalty.
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**Confidential Instructions for [4]  
Officer Tom Edwards, Police Officer**

**“As a respected police officer, it is my responsibility to protect members of the community from more violent crimes and to uphold local, state and federal laws, both on and off of campus grounds.” - Officer Edwards**

*You are a respected, 23-year veteran police officer serving in the town where you grew up, and you also serve as one of the School Resource Officers at MLK HS which your son, Mike Edwards, currently attends with John Erickson. You think very highly of John, and did not feel great about having to arrest him last Friday. The arrest conflicts with two different secretive aspects of your personal life: You are having an affair with Sam's mother and the host of the party, Emily, and you yourself smoked marijuana confiscated “evidence” - the marijuana from the party - that you should have turned in at the police headquarters. You hope the investigation does not become larger than it needs to be.*

**Stances on the Critical Issues**

**1. Person(s) at Fault**

- John and Emily are both at fault.
- John was in possession and had the joint in his mouth, clearly intending to smoke it with Sam.
- Emily is guilty of allowing a student other than her daughter to be in possession of marijuana on her property.

**2. Penalty**

- John should receive a 5-day suspension during Senior Week and 30-hours of community service.
- John should be able to receive his diploma, but not participate in or speak at the graduation ceremony.
- The principal and guidance counselors should not inform John's college of acceptance about the incident.

**3. Who decides #1 and #2**

- The event was off-campus and as a result it does not fall under the school's “disciplinary umbrella”.
- A judge, as a neutral third party and expert in local and state laws, should decide John's penalty.
- If John and Emily fess up, hopefully the judge will give them both a slap on the wrist, instead of stiff fines.

**Non-Negotiable Principles**

- John is at fault, not Sam.
- Mike does not need to get tied into the investigation.

**Potential Areas for Compromise**

- The penalty given to Sam's mother and your friend, Emily.

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**Confidential Instructions for [5]  
Dr. Jennifer Williams, MLK High School Principal**

**“This incident will serve not only as a lesson on illegal marijuana usage but also as a case that will require certain negotiation tactics for a common consensus to be reached between the different parties involved.” - Dr. Williams**

*You have been the principal of MLK HS for almost two years. Prior to that, you rose through the teaching and administrative ranks in a neighboring town’s well-known International Baccalaureate (IB) high school. Your doctoral thesis focused on what you call the “Intellectual Outward Bound Case-Study Approach to Conflict Resolution” and one saying that has stuck with you throughout your experiences is “Listen spelled another way is Silent.” While you know marijuana usage is completely unacceptable, you can recall experiencing substance use yourself as a curious senior in High School, so you understand where John is coming from.*

### **Stances on the Critical Issues**

#### *1. Person(s) at Fault*

- John is at fault. He must responsibly represent the school community both on and off-campus.
- Sam is also partially at fault. She should not have let John handle her prescribed medication while she was in the house looking for matches.
- Though Emily co-hosted the party, John was in possession of the marijuana at the time when the officer appeared.

#### *2. Penalty*

- Honesty is the best policy; The college at which John was accepted should be informed of his arrest.
- John should have 5-days of suspension during Senior Week and 25 community service hours.
- John should receive his diploma, but not take any part in the graduation ceremony.

#### *3. Who decides #1 and #2*

- As principal, you should decide the responses to these first two questions.
- You will listen to the recommendations of the DC, but in the end, you should have the final say.
- Any penalties recommended against Emily should be handled outside of the school system.

### **Non-Negotiable Principles**

- You should have a say in the penalty.
- John will be suspended and have (how many?) community service hours.

### **Potential Areas for Compromise**

- You are willing to allow your school’s Disciplinary Committee (DC) to hear from those involved.
  - Sam’s penalty intensity does not need to be as harsh as John’s.
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**Confidential Instructions for [6]  
Mike Edwards, MLK High School Senior, and voting member of the Disciplinary Committee (DC)**

**“While the incident is a great lesson to others considering illegal marijuana usage, Sam and John have always been kids in my class and they wouldn’t have reckless or ill intentions with marijuana.” - Mike Edwards**

*As a hard working senior student-athlete at MLK HS, you look forward to graduating and attending an in-state university next fall with a football scholarship. You are respected by your MLK HS community, and your fellow students elected you to sit on the school’s Disciplinary Committee along with your best friend, John Erickson. Your reputation as a non-biased, well-respected student leader of your school, and a responsible, respected young man in your town is important to you. At the same party where John was arrested by your father, Officer Edwards, for marijuana possession, you were further back in the yard, smoking marijuana.*

### **Stances on the Critical Issues**

#### *1. Person(s) at Fault*

- John is at fault, but Sam should not have given him the marijuana. Both should be penalized.
- Though Emily was unaware of John and Sam’s activities, the incident occurred on her property, so she should also be penalized in some way.
- Emily could have taken more action, like warning others to refrain from illegal substance use during the party..

#### *2. Penalty*

- John should be given 3-days of suspension during Senior Week, and 10 community service hours.
- Sam should receive 2-days of suspension and 7-hours of community service.
- Both should participate in the graduation, except John should not be allowed to deliver the valedictorian speech.

#### *3. Who decides #1 and #2*

- The Disciplinary Committee should decide John’s and Sam’s punishments.
- A local court judge should decide the penalty against Sam’s mother, Emily, who co-hosted the party with Sam.
- You should sit on the DC to “enlist” the ideas of the committee for your friend.

### **Non-Negotiable Principles**

- John should still graduate, and the incident should not be shared with his college.

### **Potential Areas for Compromise**

- You are willing to serve 10-hours of community service because of your indirect involvement in the issue.
- If the DC cannot decide on John’s fate, you will not be directly responsible for John’s punishment.

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