

SMART Recovery

Adapted from *AA Alternatives: The Behavioral Science of SMART Recovery* by Gabrielle Ferrara

SMART Recovery is a peer support group for those interested in abstinence from an addictive process, including substances and behaviors. **SMART stands for Self-Management and Recovery Training.**

SMART Recovery Basics

SMART Recovery is a nonprofit considered by many to be an alternative to 12-step recovery due to its differences from groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous.

SMART Recovery advocates autonomy and self-reliance rather than utilizing the idea of powerlessness, which is emphasized by AA and other recovery groups such as Celebrate Recovery. Both SMART Recovery and AA are abstinence-based, however SMART Recovery *encourages* abstinence rather than making it a requirement.

The SMART Recovery Method

SMART Recovery harnesses components of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and motivational interviewing. CBT helps identify the connection between thoughts and behaviors which in turn assists with developing ways to resolve undesired behaviors by changing associated thoughts.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

In a cost-benefit analysis (CBA), the costs and benefits of engaging in an addictive behavior are identified versus the costs and benefits of not engaging. The exercise recognizes that while the addictive behavior may cause harm, there is benefit or “payoff” to engaging in the behavior. Likewise, there are drawbacks to opting out of a behavior.

For example, when misusing alcohol, there may be temporary relief from anxiety. However, there may also be painful impacts such as missing important events with loved ones.

CBA encourages forward progress by facilitating the assessment of benefits and costs of a behavior as well as identifying alternate methods of meeting the same needs.

Identifying the needs an addictive behavior meets begins the process of exploring other ways to fulfill needs, which could include therapy, exercise, or connecting to supportive peers.

ABC Method

The ABC Method is a rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) exercise that helps reprocess an “activating event.” In the ABC Method, the following are examined:

- A—Activating events
- B—Beliefs about these events (what you “must” do because of this event)
- C—Consequences of your beliefs (feelings and behaviors)

SMART Recovery

Adapted from *AA Alternatives: The Behavioral Science of SMART Recovery* by Gabrielle Ferrara

Optionally, an additional step includes (D) disputing the irrational belief and implementing (E) effective change in the thoughts about the initial activating event.

Example: Let's say you received a bad performance review from your boss at work, and your boss tells you that you struggle with time management. This activating event:

- A: This activating event triggered feelings of being a "failure."
- B: Led to you to feel that you *must* have a drink to reduce the pain you felt.
- C: If you took a drink after work, it would be reverting to an old maladaptive coping pattern with negative consequences you already know about.
- D: Instead, you examine what you are actually feeling and dispute the negative belief that "you are a failure."
- E: Instead of having a drink, you choose a different action. (This can be one chosen in advance with a therapist or one chosen based on feelings identified in the moment.)

4-Point Program

SMART Recovery principles revolve around a 4-Point Program that differs from 12-step programs where each step is intended to be completed in order. SMART Recovery steps do not have to be completed in a specific order.

1. Building and maintaining the motivation to change and stay changed.
2. Coping with urges to use and cravings to return to unwanted behaviors.
3. Managing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in an effective way without addictive behaviors.
4. Living a balanced, positive, and healthy life that takes long- and short-term goals into account.

Points 1 and 2 are the "recovery training" elements of SMART and points 3 and 4 are considered to be the "self-management" principles.

Stages of Change

SMART Recovery uses the Stages of Change to conceptualize recovery.

1. Precontemplation: You do not see a problem with your behaviors and actions, so therefore you do not see a need to make any change. Or, you may see a problem with your behaviors and actions, but are strongly against making any changes at this point.
2. Contemplation: You are beginning to see the problem with your behaviors but are still ambivalent to change. You are beginning to consider making changes.
3. Preparation: You are now committed to change and develop a plan to make these changes.
4. Action: The plan is put into action, and behavior changes are adopted.
5. Maintenance: New behaviors have been established, and behavior changes have been in effect for six months.

SMART Recovery

Adapted from *AA Alternatives: The Behavioral Science of SMART Recovery* by Gabrielle Ferrara

6. Termination/Graduation: You can consistently respond appropriately to any temptations or urges to engage in the problematic behavior.

Motivational interviewing can be an effective intervention at any stage of change. Motivational interviewing is incorporated in some of the SMART Recovery worksheets. It is important to note that relapse is considered a potential deviation throughout the stages and can occur at any time. SMART Recovery believes that relapses provide individuals with the opportunity to learn and grow.

SMART Recovery and AA: Key Differences

In SMART Recovery, the individual is perceived to be in control, encouraging self-motivation and reliance on one's self in recovery. In AA, control is perceived as external, demonstrated by concepts such as powerlessness.

SMART Recovery does not follow the disease model of addiction, which describes addiction as a mental health condition. SMART Recovery looks at addiction as a problematic pattern of behavior that can be changed with motivation and the use of cognitive-behavioral skills. SMART Recovery emphasizes active learning of skills and tools, including the use of worksheets.

SMART Recovery meetings are more interactive than AA meetings. Conversations and feedback are encouraged, whereas AA meetings are more structured. SMART Recovery can be helpful for those living with co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders, as individuals are invited to discuss any relevant topic at meetings, not just the topic of addiction.

Facilitators of SMART Recovery meetings receive training on running meetings. While the facilitators are volunteers, not licensed mental health professionals, SMART Recovery meeting facilitators do not have to identify as being in recovery themselves, unlike AA facilitators.