

SMART RECOVERY

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ABSTRACT

SMART Recovery (Self Management and Recovery Training) is a non-profit organization offering support groups for individuals who desire to abstain from any type of addictive behavior. As of Fall 1999, it sponsors about 250 meetings per week, almost all of which are in the United States. SMART also hosts an Internet listserv discussion group and sells publications. SMART was incorporated in 1992, and has been operating as SMART Recovery since 1994. This article will describe SMART's program, meeting format, organizational structure, and publications.

PROGRAM

The SMART approach to recovery from any substance or activity addiction is presented in its Purposes and Methods statement (Table 1; reprinted here without the "Commentary" section). The SMART Four-Point Program is contained within Point 2 of the Purposes and Methods statement, and describes aspects of recovery applicable to most individuals.

The first point of the Four-Point Program regards motivation. Meeting participants are encouraged to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of their addiction, focusing not only on the cost of the addiction, but also on the actual or perceived benefits of the addiction (for instance, drinking in order to relax). The advantage of identifying benefits of the addiction is in identifying new skills or activities that will need to be developed (for instance, learning new ways to relax). Any behavior has its own cost-benefit analysis. SMART suggests that all individuals experience or have experienced some degree of addictive behavior. However, some individuals may have such an unbalanced cost-benefit ratio for a particular behavior that they

Table 1. SMART Recovery^a

Purposes and Methods
1. We help individuals gain independence from addictive behavior.
2. We teach how to
• enhance and maintain motivation to abstain
• cope with urges
• manage thoughts, feelings, and behavior
• balance momentary and enduring satisfactions
3. Our efforts are based on scientific knowledge, and evolve as scientific knowledge evolves.
4. Individuals who have gained independence from addictive behavior are invited to stay involved with us, to enhance their gains and help others.

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voluntarily elect to stop that behavior. It is for these individuals that the SMART program is intended. SMART does not object to individuals attempting to moderate an addiction. SMART remains available for them in the event that they are unable to moderate and elect to abstain.

Having made a decision to abstain, almost all individuals are likely to experience urges (or cravings) to continue to engage in the addictive behavior. Unless these cravings are coped with effectively, a return to addiction is likely. SMART teaches a variety of coping techniques, including personifying the urge as an undesirable individual (e.g., an untrustworthy salesman), countering the benefits perceived with the known costs of the addiction, recalling a particularly painful and costly episode of addictive involvement, and other techniques.

If an individual abstains from the addiction, problems that used to be coped with by using the addiction will now need to be coped with in some other manner (e.g., needing new ways to relax). Individuals are taught to recognize the thoughts underlying their distressed emotions and self-destructive behaviors, and how to develop more rational ways of thinking, resulting in more functional emotions and behaviors.

Albert Ellis's ABCDE method of resolving emotional and behavioral problems is often used as the vehicle for this instruction. An *Activating* event is a situation or mental occurrence which gives rise to an emotional or behavioral *Consequence* which is distressing or self-destructive. Individuals are taught to recognize that there is an intermediate *Belief*, which is an interpretation of the situation or occurrence. The *Consequence* does not arise directly from the *Activating* event, but arises from the *Belief*, which may or may not be rational. If the *Belief* is irrational, it is necessary to *Dispute* this *Belief*, and arrive at a more rational perspective, which in turn will lead to a new emotional or behavioral *Effect*.

For instance, if a relationship is ended by my partner and I perceive this to mean that I am unworthy as a person, the emotional Consequence is likely to be highly distressing. However, if upon examination I recognize that in fact there was a significant mismatch in the relationship, which I was also beginning to realize (even if more slowly than my partner), then I might attribute the breakup to the mismatch rather than my deficiencies. The emotional Effect of this change might be to experience some degree of sadness, but not grief or extreme distress.

For many individuals addiction is a way to balance out aspects of life that are otherwise unbalanced. For instance, an individual who spends much of the day doing “shoulds” may use evening addictive activity as the primary “want.” Achieving a balance between duties and pleasures, work and fun, social time and alone time, secular activities and spiritual ones, and so forth, reduces the desirability of addiction in the future, and therefore is a way to prevent relapse.

As noted in point number 3 of the Purposes and Methods statement, the SMART program is based upon empirically supported treatments for addictive behavior. As of 1999, these treatments are mostly cognitive-behavioral in nature. A comprehensive overview of these treatments is provided by Hester and Miller (1995). The SMART program therefore differs from an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA or 12-Step) approach in a number of significant ways. SMART focuses on changing a maladaptive behavior, rather than overcoming a disease. The SMART approach is entirely secular, rather than spiritual (although SMART does not discourage religious or spiritual beliefs in its members). The approach is self-empowering, rather than encouraging powerlessness and acceptance of a higher power.

SMART is not opposed to any other program of recovery, nor does it suggest that attendance in a support group (or treatment) is essential for recovery. SMART believes that there are as many routes to recovery as there are individuals, and that each individual needs to persist in finding a combination of ideas, techniques, and services necessary for that individual’s progress. SMART does oppose individuals being forced into any particular approach to recovery, and therefore supports judicial, legislative, and regulatory decisions which allow freedom of choice for recovery services and support group attendance.

MEETING FORMAT

SMART meeting leaders are called Coordinators. There is a recommended meeting outline (Table 2), but Coordinators have some discretion about how to conduct the meeting. The major portion of most meetings is devoted to helping participants identify and analyze, according to a rational perspective, the problems they are experiencing. These problems could be those of motivation, coping with urges, solving other problems, or achieving lifestyle balance, in accordance with the SMART Four-Point Program. Most SMART meetings are open to the public, but some are restricted to those who desire to participate in discussion about personally abstaining from some type of addictive behavior.

Table 2. SMART Recovery Meeting Outline (3/97) (90 Minutes)^a

Pre-Meeting: Some groups may choose to run a half-hour pre-meeting to introduce the program to newcomers, answer questions, etc.

1. Welcome and Opening Statement (5 minutes)
(The opening may be read by the Coordinator or another group member.)
(An additional reading may be included.)
2. Personal Update (5-20 minutes)
What has happened in your life since the last meeting?
(Coordinator goes first.)
Newcomers: Why did you attend?
3. Agenda Setting (5 minutes)
Based on the Personal Update, establish a meeting agenda.
4. Coping with Activating Events (30-45 minutes)

Focus on SMART's Four-Point Program:

1. Building and maintaining motivation to abstain
2. Coping with urges
3. Managing thoughts, feelings, and behavior
Activating event, Beliefs, Consequences
4. Balancing momentary and enduring satisfactions
Lifestyle balance
(Reason and scientific knowledge are the highest authorities in SMART.)
5. Pass the Hat (5 minutes)
6. Meeting Review and Homework (15 minutes)
 - (a) What was most meaningful to you about this meeting, and
 - (b) What homework could you do this week? (Homework can also be suggested by someone else in the group.)(Coordinator goes last, and may also summarize the whole meeting.)
7. Socializing (10 minutes)
Announcements, exchange of phone numbers, purchase publications, questions and answers, court cards, general socializing.

Note: For a sixty-minute meeting, each section of the meeting is proportionally shorter.

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Table 3. Contact Information for SMART Recovery

SMART Recovery® (SMART)
7537 Mentor Avenue, Suite 306
Mentor, Ohio 44060

440-951-5357
Fax: 440-951-5358
SRMail1@aol.com
www.smartrecovery.org

To subscribe to SMARTREC (an Internet discussion group): Send message on next line to listserv@maelstrom.stjohns.edu

Subscribe SMARTREC yourfirstname yourlastname

The Coordinator is normally a non-professional volunteer. Unlike 12-Step groups, in SMART there are no sponsors (individuals who meet one-on-one with members to guide them through recovery). Individuals who need intensive support are encouraged to attend more meetings, attend individual psychotherapy, or participate in 12-Step groups and obtain a sponsor there.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

SMART has a volunteer Board of Directors which meets twice yearly. Most Board members are addictive behavior professionals. A central administrative office is in Ohio, staffed by two part-time employees (see Table 3). The organization is self-supporting from individual contributions, donations collected at meetings, and profits from the sale of publications. In Spring 1998, an International Advisory Council of addictive behavior scientists and other prominent individuals was established.

At the local level, one or more Coordinators may consult with a Professional Advisor, a behavioral health professional who volunteers to support Coordinators and their meetings. Professional Advisors may at times lead or sit in on meetings. SMART continuously seeks inquiries from behavioral health professionals and meeting participants who may be interested in serving as Professional Advisors or Coordinators.

Publications

SMART's primary publications are its Member's Manual and the SMART Recovery Primer. A recommended reading list is also distributed (Table 4).

Table 4. SMART Recovery Recommended Reading List^a**Core Reading List**

**SMART Recovery Member's Manual — A compilation of practical information designed to assist the reader in attaining the ultimate goal of recovery (1996)

**SMART Recovery: A Sensible Primer — William Knaus, Ph.D. (William Knaus, Longmeadow, MA — 3rd Revision, 1998)

*Alcohol: How to Give It Up and Be Glad You Did, A Sensible Approach — Philip Tate, Ph.D. (Rational Self-Help Press, Altamonte Spring, FL — 2nd edition, 1997)

*Addiction, Change & Choice: The New View of Alcoholism — Vincent Fox, M.Ed., CRREd. (See Sharp Press, Tucson, AZ — 1993)

When AA Doesn't Work for You: Rational Steps to Quitting Alcohol — Albert Ellis, Ph.D. & Emmett Velten, Ph.D. (Barricade Books, Inc., Fort Lee, NJ — 1992)

Changing for Good — James Prochaska, Ph.D., John Norcross, Ph.D. & Carlo DiClemente, Ph.D. (William Morrow, New York, NY — 1994)

The Truth About Addiction and Recovery — Stanton Peele, Ph.D. & Archie Brodsky with Mary Arnold (Simon & Schuster — 1989)

The Small Book — Jack Trimpey, LCSW (Delacorte Press, New York, NY — 1992)

*Three Minute Therapy: Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life — Michael Edelstein, Ph.D. & David Steele, Ph.D. (Glenridge Publishing, Lakewood, CO — 1997)

*Sex, Drugs, Gambling & Chocolate: A Workbook for Overcoming Addictions — A. Thomas Horvath, Ph.D. (Impact Publishers, San Luis Obispo, CA — 1999)

Additional Useful Reading

How to Stubbornly Refuse to Make Yourself Miserable About Anything, Yes Anything! — Albert Ellis, Ph.D. (Lyle Stuart, Inc., Secaucus, NJ — 1988)

A New Guide to Rational Living — Albert Ellis, Ph.D. & Robert Harper, Ph.D. (Wilshire Book Company, N. Hollywood, CA — 1975)

Diseasing of America: Addiction Treatment Out of Control — Stanton Peele, Ph.D. (Lexington Books — 1989)

Heavy Drinking: The Myth About Alcoholism as a Disease — Herbert Fingarette, Ph.D. (University of California Press — 1988)

Feeling Good — David Burns (William Morrow & Company, New York, NY — 1980)

The Authoritative Guide to Self Help Books — Santrock, Minnett, and Campbell (Guilford Press — 1994)

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*Also available from SMART

**Available only from SMART

REFERENCE

Hester, R. K., & Miller, W. R. (Eds.) (1995). *Handbook of alcoholism treatment approaches: Effective alternatives* (2nd ed). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

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