

SMART RECOVERY – What is it? How does it work?

Evidence-Based SMART Recovery: SMART (Self-Management and Recovery Training) helps people recover from all types of addictive behaviors, including alcoholism, drug abuse, substance abuse, drug addiction, alcohol abuse, gambling addiction, cocaine addiction, and addiction to other substances and activities. SMART is an alternative to Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

Purpose: To support individuals who have chosen to abstain or are considering abstinence from addictive behaviors (substances or activities) by teaching how to change self-defeating emotions and actions, and to work towards long-term satisfactions and quality of life.

Approach:

- Teaches self-empowerment and self-reliance.
- Works on addictions/compulsions as complex maladaptive behaviors with possible physiological factors.
- Teaches tools and techniques for self-directed change.
- Encourages individuals to recover and live satisfying lives.
- Meetings are educational and include open discussions.
- Advocates the appropriate use of prescribed medications and psychological treatments.
- Evolves as scientific knowledge evolves.
- Differs from Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and traditional 12-step programs.

SMART Recovery 4-Point Program:

SMART Recovery (Self Management and Recovery Training) helps individuals gain independence from addictive behaviors (substances or activities). Our efforts are based on scientific knowledge and evolve as scientific knowledge evolves. The program offers specific tools and techniques for each of the program points:

- Point 1: Enhancing and Maintaining Motivation to Abstain
- Point 2: Coping with Urges
- Point 3: Problem Solving (Managing thoughts, feelings and behaviors)
- Point 4: Lifestyle Balance (Balancing momentary and enduring satisfactions)

From the SMART Recovery Purposes and Methods Statement:

1. "We assume that addictive behavior can arise from both substance use (e.g., psychoactive substances of all kinds, including alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, food, illicit drugs, and prescribed medications), and involvement in activities (e.g., gambling, sexual behavior, eating, spending, relationships, exercise, etc.). We assume that there are degrees of addictive behavior, and that all individuals to some degree experience it.
2. Individuals who have been successful in gaining independence from addictive behavior appear to have made changes in all four areas we teach about. These four areas could also be described as maintaining motivation, coping with craving, thinking rationally, and leading a balanced lifestyle. Although we teach important information in each of these areas, ultimately it is the individual's determination and persistence to keep moving forward that will determine how much success is achieved.

Much of the information imparted by us is drawn from the field of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and particularly from Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy, as developed by Albert Ellis, Ph.D. In general, CBT views addictive behavior more as a complex maladaptive behavior than as a disease. Use of the CBT perspective allows us to use a rich and easily accessible body of ideas, techniques, and publications. Some of these publications we are able to make available directly to our participants, and others are available through bookstores and other sources.

SMART vs. 12-Step Programs:

At SMART we believe that each individual finds his own path to recovery. For some that may include traditional 12-step programs like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA). While the SMART approach differs from AA and NA, it does not exclude them. Some SMART participants choose to attend AA or NA meetings when they cannot attend a SMART meeting. Some find that what they hear at AA or NA meetings helps them on their path to permanent recovery."

Program Overview:

SMART Recovery (focusing on Alcoholism) is a program designed to help Alcoholics:

1. develop a better understanding of their drinking behavior, including any risks (health) it could pose;
2. help alcoholics consider whether they might want to change their drinking behavior and;
3. understand the ways they could change if they decided to.

These involve 3 parts:

1. looking at your drinking;
2. getting feedback;
3. deciding whether or not to change.

SMART Recovery is based in large part on the pioneering work of psychologist and researcher, Albert Ellis, Ph.D. Dr. Ellis developed his seminal theory in Behavior Therapy in 1955, called REBT (Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy). REBT is an action-oriented approach to psychotherapy that stimulates emotional growth by teaching people to replace their defeating thoughts, feelings, and actions with more effective ones. REBT teaches individuals to take responsibility for their own emotions and gives them the power to change and overcome their unhealthy behaviors which interfere with their ability to function and enjoy life.

Rigorous empirical research into REBT efficacy dates back from the end of the 1980's (after the earlier groundbreaking work of Dr. Ellis and others from the 50's). REBT has generally come out favorably in quantitative reviews of psychotherapy.

1. REBT is equally efficient for clinical as well as non-clinical populations (parent education, assertiveness training, etc.), for a large age range (9-70) and for males and females.
2. In general, there is no difference between individual and group REBT.
3. In general, the higher the level of training of the therapist, the greater the results of REBT intervention.
4. Increased numbers of REBT sessions correlates with better outcomes.

If readers wish to review more of the literature on REBT, look into: Haaga, D.A.F. and Davidson, G.C. (1993), "An Appraisal of Rational-Emotive Therapy", Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 61, 215-220.