

About SMART Recovery[®]

By: Philip Tate, Ph.D. and Vincent Fox, M.S.

SMART Recovery[®] is an abstinence-based, not-for-profit organization with a sensible self-help program for people having problems with drinking and using. It includes many ideas and techniques to help you change your life from one that is self-destructive and unhappy to one that is constructive and satisfying. SMART Recovery[®] is not a spin-off from Alcoholics Anonymous. No one will label you an "alcoholic" or an addict. You are neither diseased nor powerless, and if you do not believe in a religion or spirituality, that's fine, too. We teach common sense self-help procedures designed to empower you to abstain and to develop a more positive lifestyle. When you succeed at following our approach, you may graduate from the program, or you may stay around to help others.

Based on Sensible Theory

Drinking and using can serve a purpose -- to cope with life's problems and emotional upsets. There's a drawback, however. Many problems arise from heavy drinking and continual using. So that kind of coping is not only impractical, it's counterproductive.

To help you reverse your self-destructive behavior, we use a cognitive-behavioral (thinking/doing) psychotherapy called REBT which stands for Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy. Psychologist Albert Ellis devised this system in the '50s. It's effective and widely accepted.

According to REBT, thinking creates your feelings and leads you to act. By managing the beliefs and emotions that lead you to drink or use, you can empower yourself to quit. Then you can work at problems you have with abstaining.

In SMART Recovery[®], we are not much concerned with the past, except to learn from it. We focus on present-day events and the causes of self-destructive behaviors. We concentrate on what to do about them in order to achieve a positive lifestyle change, especially in the areas of our lives that are related to drinking or using.

Key Areas of Awareness and Change

In SMART Recovery[®] we emphasize: (1) enhancing motivation, (2) refusing to act on urges to use- (3) managing life's problems in a sensible and effective way without substances; and (4) developing a positive, balanced, and healthy lifestyle.

- **Motives and Goals**

Motivation is a key element in nearly all you do. Consider this. we all have two primary goals-survival and the avoidance of pain along with seeking happiness. You can increase your awareness of your motives for drinking and of your reasons for quitting. Then you will feel better about changing your behavior. We will show you how.

- **Beliefs**

What you believe about addiction is important, and there are many beliefs about heavy drinking and recovery. You may believe, for example, that you have an incurable disease, that you have a genetic defect, that you're powerless, or that after the first drink you have to lose all control. These beliefs may actually be damaging to you.

Some people have additional beliefs. For example, "I've tried and failed, so I can't do it. I need alcohol to cope", or "Because I've tried to quit and failed, I'm no good". Those beliefs, and many like them, can't be justified because evidence just doesn't support them.

- **Emotions**
Emotions are important too. People often drink or use to cope with their emotional problems including anger, guilt, anxiety, and low self-esteem. SMART[®] teaches you how to diminish your emotional disturbances and increase self-acceptance. Then you can have greater motivation and ability to remain abstinent and to live more happily.
- **Behaviors**
Changes in thinking and emotions are not enough. Commitment and follow-through are essential. We encourage members to work at problems and to become involved in enjoyable activities in place of their substance use activities.

How Help is Provided

Our meeting format is straightforward and organized. Our coordinators (some are professionals) are trained for the job. Some of them have had experience with drinking and using, and some haven't. That doesn't seem to make any difference. Remember, SMART Recovery[®] is a mental health and educational program. We're not trying to cure an imaginary disease. We're concerned with changing human behavior.

SMART Recovery[®] meetings are serious but often fun. We're certainly not into drunkalogues (war stories), sponsors, and meetings-for-life. We don't dredge up the past about which you can do nothing. We can do something about the present and the future.

We present either our problems with drinking or using or our difficulties in recovery. The primary tool used in SMART Recovery[®] is the A-B-C method of problem-solving. The A-B-Cs help us gain awareness of our mistaken beliefs that lead to problem emotions and behaviors.

Near the end of the meeting, the "hat" is passed for donations, which are encouraged but not required.

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.

Commentary:

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.

For some individuals the negative consequences of addictive behavior (which can involve several substances or activities) become so great that change becomes highly desirable. To individuals who are, or think they may be, at this point, we offer our services. Our groups are free of charge (although a donation is requested). Our Internet listserve discussion group is free to those who can access it. There is a nominal charge for our publications.

2. Gaining independence from addictive behavior can involve changes that affect an individual's entire life, not just changes directly related to the addictive behavior itself. Consequently there appear to be as many roads to gaining independence from addictive behavior as there are individuals. For many the road will lead somewhere other than using our services. We recommend they follow the direction they have chosen, and we wish them well. They are always welcome to return.

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.

Our services are provided for those who desire, or think they may desire, to achieve abstinence. Individuals unsure about whether to pursue abstinence may observe in our group discussions how abstinence can be achieved, and how it can help. Even those whose ultimate goal is moderated involvement with their substances or activities may benefit from participation in abstinence-oriented discussions. Benefit could occur if the individual aims to engage in selected periods of abstinence, or frames the goal as abstaining from over- involvement (as opposed to all involvement).

Much of the information imparted by us is drawn from the field of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and particularly from Rational Emotive Behavior 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.

3. What we offer is consistent with the most effective methods yet discovered for resolving emotional and behavioral problems. As scientific knowledge advances, our teachings will be modified accordingly. Individuals with religious beliefs are likely to find our program as compatible with their beliefs as other scientifically derived knowledge and applications.

4. The length of time an individual will derive help from our services is variable. For many sincere participants there will come a time when attending our groups, or participating in our other services, is more in conflict with the pursuit of their life goals than enhancing them. Although these participants will always be welcome back if they want to come, this conflict signals that the time for graduation has arrived.

One of the most enduring satisfactions in life is helping others. The individuals who have nurtured SMART Recovery[®] thus far have reported intense satisfaction at witnessing the positive changes our participants have experienced, and at witnessing the influence we are having on professional addictive behavior treatment. We offer to others, whether graduates of our efforts or not, the opportunity to join us in experiencing that satisfaction.

Structure and Operations (revised 05-26-02)

SMART Recovery[®] exists at four levels:

1. The individuals who attend our groups, read our publications, or participate in our internet services.
2. Coordinators, who are the volunteer non-professionals who lead our groups,
3. Professional Advisors, who are the volunteer behavioral health professionals who support the Coordinators, and
4. The volunteer Board of Directors, which formulates our program and policies. An International Advisory Council, consisting of prominent scientists from the field of addictive behavior, and other prominent individuals, advises SMART Recovery[®] regarding its program and operations.

Our Central Office is operated by Shari Allwood, our part-time Executive Director, and Jodi Dayton, her part-time assistant. They are the only employees of SMART Recovery[®].

SMART Recovery[®] is funded primarily by the contributions of interested individuals. Contributions made at meetings are used primarily to cover local expenses, with leftover funds contributed to the Central Office.

Individuals who desire information about SMART Recovery[®] can begin their inquiry by viewing the website, contacting the Central Office (by mail, phone, fax, or e-mail), or by contacting a local group. There are now SMART Recovery[®] phone book listings in many localities. If an inquirer lives in an area where SMART Recovery[®] does not have a meeting, information about how to start one (including advice on finding a location, arranging publicity, recruiting a Professional Advisor, learning the program, etc.) is on the website.

The volunteer efforts of Coordinators are the backbone of the SMART Recovery[®] organization. Coordinators are individuals who believe in the principles upon which the SMART Recovery[®] program is based, and who desire to serve their communities by volunteering their time to organize, publicize and lead meetings. Both recovering and non-recovering individuals are welcome to consider becoming a Coordinator.

Professional Advisors support Coordinators by providing training and consultation on leading SMART Recovery[®] meetings. This support is accomplished by brief contact as needed, and typically as well by periodic meetings between the Advisor and one or more Coordinators in a given locality. The Professional Advisor is available in the event of a participant's behavioral health crisis, and helps guide access to appropriate care. Professional Advisors may also provide substantial administrative support for their local groups (eg.,

providing a phone message machine and keeping it updated with meeting information, updating and distributing meeting lists, stocking publications and flyers, arranging publicity, responding to inquiries, etc.). Behavioral health professionals with training in the treatment of addictive behavior, and an interest in serving as a Professional Advisor, are encouraged to contact us.

Although the descriptions given here are typical, there are variations in the activities and qualifications of Coordinators and Professional Advisors, depending on local traditions and circumstances. Members of the Board, many of whom are also Professional Advisors, are



available to all levels of the organization for consultation. Through interpersonal interaction links, SMART Recovery® participants, Coordinators, Professional Advisors, and the Board and International Advisory Council form an international community of support activities we call the SMART Recovery® Network.