SMART Recovery is the world’s largest community of mutual support group meetings that uses science and self-empowerment to help people overcome addiction problems with drugs, alcohol and harmful behavior such as gambling, over-eating and excessive shopping and internet use.

Meetings Proliferate to Help Individuals and Families Recover from Addiction Epidemic

The number of meetings is on pace to quintuple this decade as the global addiction crisis increases the need for treatment and recovery support. Each year in the U.S. alone, this crisis:

- Takes the lives of more than 160,000 people, including more than 72,000 fatal drug overdoses in 2017 and the 88,000 annual deaths attributed to excessive alcohol use, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The U.S. accounts for one in four drug-related deaths worldwide, most caused by opioid overdoses, according to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (World Drug Report, 2017).
- Costs the economy as much as $1 trillion or more based on various estimates that account for crime (police, court and incarceration expenditures), lost work productivity and healthcare. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) estimates addiction to tobacco products, drugs and alcohol costs the economy more than $740 billion. The White House Council of Economic Advisors estimates the opioid crisis alone is costing more than $500 billion (The Underestimated Cost of the Opioid Crisis, 2017).

These figures cannot measure the incalculable impact on the families of loved ones suffering from addiction and the quality of life in communities everywhere, especially those hit hardest by the opioid epidemic.

SMART, which stands for Self-Management and Recovery Training, has helped address all these needs over the past quarter century. It holds free weekly support group meetings for people suffering from harmful addictions, including those undergoing medication-assisted therapy; their family members and friends; and inmates in correctional facilities through its InsideOut program, which was developed with $1 million in grants from NIDA. SMART also has meetings for teenagers, students in schools, military veterans and people needing support in recovery community organizations, treatment centers and hospitals.

The Global Reach of SMART Recovery

Tens of thousands of people gather weekly at more than 2,800 SMART meetings in 23 countries, including 1,640 in the U.S., 535 in the UK, 275 in Australia and 260 in Canada. People anywhere in the world can attend another 30 weekly meetings online with a headset and weblink, and receive support through 24/7 chatrooms and message boards. The SMART Recovery Handbook has been published in 14 languages: Arabic, Danish, English,
Farsi, French, German, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Vietnamese and the dialect of Australian Aborigines.

SMART uses principles, practices and tools from disciplines with proven effectiveness in treating problematic addictive behavior, such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and Motivational Interviewing.

**SMART 4-Point Program® Based on Self-Empowerment to Achieve Life Balance**

SMART is designed to help people find the power to change within themselves. The discussion at meetings is centered around the SMART 4-Point Program:

1. **Build and Maintain Motivation.**
2. **Cope with Urges.**
3. **Manage Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviors.**
4. **Lead a Balanced Life.**

**Trained Facilitators, Hosts Lead Interactive, Forward-Looking Meetings**

SMART meetings are led by facilitators who complete a rigorous 30-hour training course or by hosts who undergo less rigorous training and lead simpler meetings. Meetings are highly interactive, conversational and educational, enabling all participants to share their successes and challenges and receive guidance from others. Meetings are action-oriented, positive and focused on the present and future.

These self-empowering discussions include science-based tools that enable participants to become increasingly self-reliant in their efforts to change, and to lead lives that are more meaningful, productive and connected.

Participants learn from each other about specific tools and how to apply them in various situations. SMART’s tools evolve as scientific findings evolve. SMART meetings themselves are the ongoing subject of scientific inquiry. Research suggests that SMART meetings are as effective as any other mutual help meetings for resolving problematic addictive behavior.² ³

Other research has revealed the importance of choice in the types of meetings available for individuals with different orientations, such as spiritual vs. scientific.³ This finding follows the emphasis in modern treatment on offering people multiple pathways for recovery.⁴

**SMART Works to Destigmatize Addiction**

SMART discourages the use of labels such as “addict” and “alcoholic,” because such labels can undermine motivation for many people. SMART views addiction as a behavioral problem that can be corrected, not a condition that defines a person’s identity.

The SMART organization is operated almost entirely by volunteers. Meeting participants are encouraged to become volunteers in order to enhance their own gains and experience the satisfaction of helping others. SMART is supported by ongoing relationships worldwide with mental health professionals and psychological scientists, who help SMART stay current with relevant treatment and scientific innovations. SMART’s International Advisory Council includes some of the world’s leading addictive behavior scientists. The SMART Recovery Australia Research Advisory Committee features scientists performing cutting-edge research in that country and globally.

**SMART Endorsed by Leading Government and Medical Institutions Worldwide**

SMART is a widely recognized pathway for recovery support and behavioral change. It is recommended by leading government and medical institutions worldwide, including:

**Australia** – the Government National Health and Medical Research Council and Government Department of Health and Ageing.


**United States** – National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Founded in 1994 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, SMART works as a partnership between professionals and peers (people who’ve had addictions or family members with addictions).

For more information, visit www.smartrecovery.org

July 2018
References: Research on SMART’s Use and Effectiveness


A 2017 study by Zemore et al., “Comparison of 12-Step Groups to Mutual-Help Alternatives for AUD in a Large, National Study: Differences in Membership Characteristics and Group Participation, Cohesion, and Satisfaction,” *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 73 (2017) 16-26, found that “high levels of participation, satisfaction, and cohesion among members of the mutual help alternatives suggest promise for these groups in addressing addiction problems.” 16.

3 Zemore’s studies follow research published in 2007 by Randolph G. Atkins, Ph.D., and James E. Hawdon, Ph.D., “Religiosity and Participation in Mutual-Aid Support Groups for Addiction,” *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 33 (2007) 321-331. This research concludes: “Because religiosity influences group participation and outcomes, client religiosity must be considered in treatment planning…. For [individuals] with low levels of religiosity, and especially who have a secular or ‘scientific’ worldview, it may be very difficult to fit in with spiritually based recovery programs. Individuals with this type of personal philosophy are more likely to feel that sense of belonging in secular support groups that do not use a spiritual approach, such as SOS or SMART, and are more likely to continue participating in these secular groups, thus improving their prognosis for long-term abstinence.

“This study provides more evidence that, in recovery, ‘one size does not fit all’ and that matching clients to appropriate support groups according to their individual beliefs can have a positive impact on their program involvement and, ultimately on their treatment outcomes. As White and Kurtz (2005, p. 39) point out, ‘It is time that the multiple pathways and styles of recovery fully permeated the philosophies and clinical protocols of all organizations providing addiction treatment and support services.’ We could not agree more.” 329, 330.

Examples of SMART Tools and Strategies

**Cost Benefit Analysis** – This exercise motivates people to stop an addictive behavior by weighing the short-term benefits of, for example, abusing pain pills (feeling good, relaxed and happy for a short time) against the long-term harmful costs (ruined relationships, lost jobs, wasted money, ill health). The purpose is to help people decide for themselves to change, which is the most effective way for them to do so. Most people do not respond well to coercion.

**Cost-Benefit Analysis Worksheet | Four Questions About My Addiction: A Cost/Benefit Exercise**

**A Cost-Benefit Analysis for Alcohol Addiction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages (benefits and rewards)</th>
<th>Addictive Drinking</th>
<th>Disadvantages (costs and risks)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relieve anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lose job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier to socialize</td>
<td></td>
<td>Costs a lot of $$$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcome boredom</td>
<td></td>
<td>Health problems—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate success</td>
<td></td>
<td>cirrhosis, cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun with friends</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lose respect of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>friends, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DUI/Lose Driver’s License</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hangovers/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>blackouts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages (benefits and rewards)</th>
<th>Quitting/Abstaining</th>
<th>Disadvantages (costs and risks)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear thinking, high self esteem</td>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>Have to make new friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save a lot of $$$</td>
<td></td>
<td>Trouble sleeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High self esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job success/family life</td>
<td>No hangovers, feel good in a.m.</td>
<td>Harder to socialize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good marriage &amp; family life</td>
<td></td>
<td>Harder to cope with stress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next step is to label each item either “short-term (ST)” or “long-term (LT),” and people discover that all the advantages of drinking are short term and the disadvantages long term. In addition, the benefits of not drinking are long-term and the disadvantages can be overcome with some effort but will not last that long.

**Urge Log** – In the early stages of resolving a harmful addiction, people benefit by identifying all the events, sights, smells and settings that trigger urges and cravings to use. Keeping a daily log of these triggers helps people avoid using and learn that urges are temporary and grow less intense the longer they abstain.

**Urge Log**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Rate 1-10</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>What triggered my urge?</th>
<th>Where/who was I with</th>
<th>How I coped, feelings about coping</th>
<th>Alternative Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**ABC** – The basis for this exercise is learning how our beliefs govern our experiences, including what we feel and how we act. We may think our actions and feelings are caused by outside forces or events we cannot control. These outside factors – call them Activating or Adverse events, the A – play a role, but it is what we Believe – the B – that decides what we experience. When our beliefs are irrational, extreme or exaggerated, the resulting actions and feelings – the Consequences or C – can be harmful. The ABC exercise reveals rational and realistic beliefs that help us relieve anxiety and refrain from harmful and unhealthy behavior. **ABCs – A Crash Course | Finding the ABCs**