

An Introduction to SMART Thinking

Facilitator Notes

This exercise is designed to be used either in a face-to-face meeting or in a solitary setting. It is targeted to newcomers who are sometimes intimidated by a traditional ABC. It offers a more user-friendly approach to the ABC process.

This exercise differs from the traditional ABC in that it first deals with the participant's goal in coming to SMART Recovery®. When I was in individual therapy at the Albert Ellis Institute, my clinician and I established my personal therapy goals in our first session. Those goals set the direction for my subsequent therapy. Here, the goal clarification is meant to narrow the focus of the exercise and become a standard by which thoughts can be evaluated as helpful or unhelpful later in this process.

A sample statement is provided at each fill-in-the-blank location. Again, this is intended to help a newcomer, especially if he or she is doing this exercise alone. The addictive behavior of shoplifting was selected because very few participants seem to have this issue. Examples of drug or alcohol abuse might promote copying rather than personal introspection.

At the Institute I was taught to start an ABC by describing the Activating Event and the Negative Consequences. Those terms along with Irrational Beliefs, Disputes, Effective New Philosophies and Effective Thoughts and Behaviors can, in my experience, be daunting in early recovery. This exercise takes a participant through the ABC process, but without Dr. Ellis's terminology. In NYC trials, using everyday language has proven to be very effective in demystifying the process of changing thinking in order to change behavior.

In our opening statement we promise our attendees that SMART Recovery will help them manage their thoughts, feelings and behavior. In about 40 minutes (in a face-to-face meeting) this exercise delivers on that promise. It's been shown to be a powerful incentive for newcomers to embrace SMART as their chosen program of recovery.

I hope you find this exercise helpful and easy to use.

Lee Stout

