



THE TOOL:

DISARM

(Destructive Self-talk Awareness and Refusal Method)

EFFECTIVELY USED FOR WHICH OF THE SMART RECOVERY® FOUR POINTS?

Building Motivation Coping with Urges Problem Solving Lifestyle Balance

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED: None

WHAT IT IS: DISARM is a tool which exposes the self-talk and images which tell us to use as lies, excuses, and rationalizations. It challenges those urge-producing thoughts at every opportunity, shooting them down like a gunslinger or reducing them to the point of absurdity. **All** humans, not just humans with substance abuse problems, have thoughts, urges, or other impulses, which, if followed, would harm their **long-term** interests. Realizing the power of what we think/believe about our strong urges to use and changing distorted thinking is crucial to success. Indeed, the trouble with a philosophy of “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die” is that tomorrow comes and we aren’t dead!

So, we are wise to first make ourselves aware of our destructive self-talk (thinking that is contrary to our **long-term** interests) and then refuse to go along with it. While we cannot *will* ourselves not to have certain thoughts or feelings, including strong urges, we can learn how to recognize that there are actually thoughts driving our urges and how to refuse to go along with them. We can learn to DISARM them. Then we can walk away from the situation or get ourselves involved with something other than focusing on our urge to use.

WHEN IT IS USED: (Common question or statement that may prompt using this tool)

When a member of your group indicates that he/she has been having strong urges -- whether or not he/she given in to them.

EXAMPLE OF ITS USE IN A SMART RECOVERY® MEETING:

Ask the group member to ask and answer the following questions. (Note: these questions are valid for **all** group members if/as they experience a strong urge).

- Question:** Do I have to give in to the urge because it is intense and hard to resist?
Answer: *No, I don't have to give in. Because the urge is strong, it would be easy to give in, but I don't HAVE TO. I have had urges that I did not give in to, therefore it must be possible to resist.*
- Question:** Will it be awful to deny myself by not giving into the urge?
Answer: *No, it won't be awful. It may be quite unpleasant, but unpleasant is not awful, it's just unpleasant. If I don't give in to the urge, it will get weaker and come less frequently. If I do give in, the urge will stay strong, be harder to resist next time and show up more frequently.*

3. **Question:** Is it really unbearable not to give into this urge?

Answer: *I don't like the way it feels to deny my urge, but since it doesn't kill me not to give in, I can keep on resisting. (Remember, individuals drinking large amounts of alcohol may need to go to a detox center when they first stop because the sudden end of alcohol really could be injurious.)*

4. **Question:** Am I somehow entitled to be able to give up using without strong urges to go back to using?

Answer: *No! I don't have a note from God, my mother, SMART Recovery® group members or anyone else which entitles me not to have strong urges to use. It may be unpleasant to resist some of my urges, but no one gave me a "get out of unpleasantness free" card.*

The DISARM method allows the individual experiencing the craving to carefully and rationally answer a few key questions. The results will help the individual to understand that the urge truly can be overcome, and that as success is experienced, the urges will be less strong and will occur less frequently.

DISARMING the "ENEMY"

Some people find it helpful to use a technique to dissociate yourself from the voice inside each of us which says, "It's a good idea to do something self-destructive." It is a game you can play with yourself which might help you to: a) identify the specific thoughts which, if followed, would lead to using when you have already decided that, in the long term, this choice is not for you, and b) steadfastly refuse to go along with this thinking no matter how attractive it might seem. Instead of talking yourself into lapsing you can develop powerful countering and coping statements. To do this, it may help to invent and personify an "enemy" who lives in your mind, and whose only purpose is to get you to use. The Enemy (your alter ego) knows you well, and can change form to take advantage of your weakest moments. Name your enemy (i.e., salesman, gangster, diplomat, bad cop). When urges come, ask yourself, "What is s/he telling me now? How is s/he trying to trick me?" When thoughts are identified:

1. Without debate, ATTACK the enemy with powerful counter statements: "Nice try, jerk. You can't fool me!" You can be as aggressive or profane as your nature allows with the Enemy - after all, s/he is trying to screw up your life.

2. Then quickly FOCUS on some other thoughts, images, or activities which are consistent with what you want in the long run and inconsistent with what the Enemy is saying. The Enemy then loses his power and fades away.

Later on, you can submit the Enemy's tricks to an ABC analysis in order to dispute them. You usually discover irrational themes and patterns to the thoughts and arguments the Enemy throws at you. While coping statements alone will often work, it is important not to omit disputing. If your coping statements aren't working, it is because you don't believe them as strongly as you believe the Enemy. Through disputing we can develop powerful coping statements you fully believe for use in the future. Through actually resisting the Enemy's suggestions, you become increasingly better at doing so.

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