

Ground Rules for SMART Recovery® Meetings

By: Robert F. Sarmiento, Ph.D.

1. **Use of alcohol or drugs is seen as a personal matter**, so you are welcome to attend regardless of whether you are currently using or not. If your behavior is disruptive for any reason, it will be pointed out and you may be asked to leave if it continues. However, no one will shame you or try to pressure you into quitting. In coming to the group, participants agree to be responsible only for their own behavior and to allow others to make their own decisions.
2. **All participants agree to confidentiality** for all that is said and done at meetings. It is not permissible to tell anyone outside the group about who attended or what was said in any way that would identify the individual. Violation of confidentiality is grounds for being removed or barred from attendance.
3. **Participants are encouraged to take primary responsibility for their own recovery**. Thus, there is no sponsorship or buddy system. It is helpful to actively participate in meetings, but not required. What you do during the week in your daily life is much more important than what happens in the meeting. Practicing what you have learned on a daily basis is usually the best way to overcome your substance dependence. "Homework" assignments like reading, writing out "ABCs", visualizing and behavioral confrontation methods will help you develop competence at self-management and recovery.
4. **Socializing between members** is seen as a private matter between individuals. However, the group will not provide a list of names or phone numbers to members.
5. **Relapse is seen as a chance for practicing your new skills, not something to be ashamed about**. Instead of downing yourself or using your relapse as an excuse to give up, use it to observe how you got yourself to relapse, what the triggers were and what thoughts led you to use against your better judgment. Write down an ABC analysis and bring it to the next meeting for discussion.
6. **If you think someone in the group is having a serious problem** like severe depression, suicidal thoughts, incoherent behavior, etc., recommend that they immediately seek professional or medical assistance, or dial 911 for assistance if it's a medical or mental health crisis.
7. **Although attendance is free, payment for the help you receive can take many forms:**
 - Donate money to help defray direct costs like materials, etc.
 - Volunteer to help with opening and closing the room, managing materials, etc.
 - Consider becoming the facilitator or co-facilitator for the group.
 - Help to promote SMART Recovery. Spread the health!
 - Tell your friends, counselor, minister, doctor, neighbors, etc. about SMART Recovery.
 - Put up posters, give speeches, speak with the media.
 - Help explain and demonstrate the methods to new members.
 - Replace yourself before you leave the group.

Many of the ideas you hear may not make much sense at first. **Plan to attend at least five meetings before you make up your mind about whether this approach will help you.** Dependency on the group is discouraged and self-reliance encouraged. However, self-management and recovery skills usually require practice and effort over a period of weeks to months, so plan to attend regularly for several months, then irregularly for up to a year or more. Discuss your progress and any plans to leave the group at meetings. It can also be helpful to have periodic "booster" sessions from time to time after you have recovered to keep up your self-management and recovery skills.