

Addiction Discussion Questions

1 Oftentimes, a person's relationship with drugs and alcohol will change over time. For example, you might've initially used drugs only a few times a month as a fun way to relax, but eventually they become an everyday necessity. How has *your* relationship with drugs changed from the time that you first used to now? Do you still use for the same reasons, or have those reasons changed?

2 Some people are able to function adequately, and complete their responsibilities such as work or school, despite having an addiction. However, for most of these people, functioning would be even better without drugs. How did your functioning change at work or school after you started using? Even if you're able to keep up with your responsibilities while you use, how do you think sobriety would change things?

3 The rituals and activities that surround drug use can be difficult to give up. For example, a smoker might enjoy the ritual of having a cigarette—not just the nicotine. Similarly, a drinker might have more trouble saying goodbye to their drinking buddies than to alcohol itself. What are some rituals or activities that *you* associate with drug use, and how do you feel about giving them up? Do you think you could achieve sobriety without changing your lifestyle?

4 Many people use drugs as a crutch to help them handle difficult emotions such as anger, depression, and anxiety. These emotions are challenging for everyone, and it can be hard to resist the temptation of an easy escape. What choices does a person have, other than drug use, when they are confronted with these painful emotions? What emotions might lead you to using drugs or alcohol?

5 Some people say that addiction is a disease, and others believe it's a choice. What do *you* think, and why? How do you believe counseling, support groups, or other treatments could help a person who struggles with addiction?

6 Drugs and alcohol affect your judgment, thoughts, feelings, and more. Such changes might lead you to make decisions that you *wouldn't* make while sober. Have you done things under the influence of drugs that you wouldn't have done while sober? Have you noticed any behavior patterns that occur only when you're intoxicated?

Substance Use Assessment

Instructions: Fill out the section for each of the drugs you have used, even if that substance was never a problem for you. If you don't remember specifics, give your best estimate.

	Age of first use. (ex. "16")	When did you last use? (ex. "1 month ago")	Frequency of most recent use. (ex. "3x per week")	Was this substance ever a problem? (yes / no)
Alcohol				
Benzodiazepines (Xanax, Valium, etc.)				
Cocaine				
Crack				
Hallucinogens (LSD, mescaline, etc.)				
Heroin				
Inhalants ("Huffing")				
Marijuana				
Methamphetamine				
Methodone				
MDMA ("Ecstasy")				
PCP ("Angel Dust")				
Prescription Medicine (Vicodin, "Oxys", etc.)				
Other (list)				

Substance Use Assessment

Instructions: Answer each of the following questions by circling **YES** or **NO**. Try not to overthink your responses (if you're unsure about a question, go with your first instinct).

- YES** **NO** Have your relationships with friends, family, or a significant other ever been strained or damaged by your drug / alcohol use?
- YES** **NO** Have you ever had difficulty reducing or ending your drug / alcohol use?
- YES** **NO** Have you ever missed work, or had reduced productivity / judgment at work due to drug / alcohol use?
- YES** **NO** Have you ever used drugs / alcohol to self-medicate anger, depression, anxiety, or other negative emotions?
- YES** **NO** Have you ever spent a great deal of time thinking about using, or thinking about how to obtain drugs / alcohol?
- YES** **NO** Have you ever experienced strong cravings for drugs / alcohol?
- YES** **NO** Have you ever developed a tolerance to a drug / alcohol that required you to use more of the substance to reach a desirable level of intoxication?
- YES** **NO** Have you ever operated a vehicle, or engaged in a dangerous activity while under the influence of drugs / alcohol?
- YES** **NO** Have you ever given up other enjoyable or healthy activities, such as hobbies, socializing, or exercising due to drug / alcohol use?
- YES** **NO** Have you ever engaged in risky sexual behaviors (e.g. unprotected sex or infidelity) while under the influence of drugs / alcohol?
- YES** **NO** Have you ever experienced withdrawal symptoms, such as a hangover, physical discomfort, or irritability due to abstinence from a drug.

Change-Plan Worksheet

Changes I want to make:	
How important is it to me to make these changes? (1-10 scale)	
How confident am I that I can make these changes? (1-10 scale)	
The most important reasons I want to make these changes are:	
The steps I plan to take in changing are:	
How other people can help me:	
Person	Kind of help
I will know my plan is working when:	
Some things that could interfere with my plan are:	

Coping Skills

Addictions

Social Support

Few things are as powerful as having a supportive person in your corner. Just knowing that friends, family, or even a fellow group member or sponsor are pulling for you can make all the difference.

Daily Social Support

There's more to social support than having someone to call during moments of crisis. People who have strong relationships are more resilient when facing life's obstacles, and more likely to beat addiction. Make a point to strengthen your relationships, attend support groups, and build new friendships.

Crisis Social Support

When in crisis, it's helpful to have a person you can count on for support—someone who you can call, who will help to talk you through the situation. Make a list of people who you can contact during these situations, and how you can reach them.

Diversions

Cravings are brutal. They grow and grow, gnawing at your willpower, demanding that you relapse. In the middle of a craving, it might feel as if there's no escape but to use. But then, if you resist, the craving starts to fade. Eventually, it disappears. Most cravings end within one hour of starting.

The goal of **diversions** is to buy yourself time during a craving. If you can distract yourself for just *one hour*, you will have a much better chance of avoiding relapse. Come up with a list of activities you genuinely enjoy that will keep you at a distance from your temptation.

Diversion Ideas

go for a walk	read a book	play a sport	listen to music
watch a movie	practice a hobby	go for a run	clean or organize
do yard work	draw or paint	do a craft	cook or bake
play a game	go for a bicycle ride	write or journal	take a long bath
play an instrument	call a friend	lift weights	go swimming
go hiking in nature	take photographs	play with a pet	rearrange a room

Coping Skills

Addictions

Building New Habits

Most addictions require a *lot* of time. Thinking about, acquiring, and indulging an addiction can fill most of a day. When you quit, one of your greatest new resources is time. However, if your newfound time isn't filled with healthy activities, it will pose a risk for falling back into old habits.

Building new habits is different than diversion because of the focus on long-term or permanent life changes. This isn't about riding out a craving—this is about building a better life for yourself.

Foster New Relationships

- Join a casual sports league.
- Attend a local meetup for one of your interests or hobbies.
- Get involved in your community by volunteering or supporting a cause you care about.

Develop New Professional Skills

- Return to school to pursue a subject you are interested in.
- Find a full-time job, or seek a new career that you enjoy.
- Build new skills on your own using free online resources, or practice your existing skills.

Refocus on Existing Relationships

- Build a routine around socializing with friends and family. For example, have Sunday dinners with family, and evening walks with a friend.
- Be proactive—don't wait for others to reach out to you.
- Say “yes” to every social invitation that will not put you at risk of relapse.

Prevention

Avoid Triggers / Risky Situations

Don't wait until you're in a bad situation to figure out how to escape it. Instead, avoid those situations altogether. Create a list of the people, places, and things that will likely lead to relapse, and come up with a plan to avoid them in the future. Sometimes this is as simple as taking a different route home from work, and other times it might mean a significant lifestyle change.

Healthy Lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle will make you more resilient when faced with obstacles. Many unhealthy habits, such as insufficient sleep and exercise, have been closely linked to many forms of mental illness. Focus on creating a routine that accounts for the following aspects of a healthy lifestyle:

- Sleep
- Exercise
- Medical Compliance (e.g. taking medications as prescribed and attending appointments)
- Healthy Diet

Coping Skills

Addictions

Managing Emotions / Relaxation

Most addictions serve as an escape from uncomfortable emotions such as stress, anxiety, and anger. When the crutch of addiction is taken away, you may need to re-learn how to manage your emotions. If you don't learn how to relax, tension will build and build, until it leads to relapse. These techniques, when practiced regularly, will help you manage your emotions in a healthy way.

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple technique that's excellent for managing emotions. Sit comfortably and place one hand on your abdomen. Breathe in deeply enough that your hand begins to rise and fall. Imagine you are trying to completely fill your lungs with air. Time the inhalation (4s), pause (4s), and exhalation (6s) during every breath. Practice for 3 to 5 minutes at a time.



Journaling

Writing about personal experiences gives your brain the opportunity to process information and organize it into manageable chunks. Some of the many benefits of journaling include improved mental wellbeing, and the reduction of uncomfortable emotions. As you journal, be sure to describe your feelings alongside the facts of your experiences.

Feel free to journal however you like. However, if you feel stuck, try these prompts:

- **Daily Log:** Jot a few notes about each day. Whatever comes to mind is fine.
- **Letter:** Write a letter to someone with whom you would like to tell something. Remember to describe your feelings. *Do not send the letter!*
- **Gratitude:** Describe three good things from your day, no matter how minor they seem.

Imagery

Your brain has the power to turn thoughts into real emotions, and physical responses. Think about it: Your mouth waters at the thought of your favorite food, and a happy memory can make you laugh. With the imagery technique, you will use this power to your advantage.

Take a moment to think of a relaxing location or situation. This could be a memory, or something entirely made up. Maybe you're on a warm beach, alone at the top of a mountain, or at dinner with close friends. Next, imagine this scene through each of your senses. Don't just think about each detail for a second and move on—really imagine them. What do you see? What sounds do you hear? What do you feel? What smells are around you?

Use imagery for at least 5 minutes whenever you need a quick escape.





The tool:

SMART Recovery[®] Online (SROL)

(An “unofficial” SMART Recovery[®] tool)



Effectively used for which of the 4 points?

	<p>Building & Maintaining Motivation</p>		<p>Coping with Urges</p>		<p>Managing Thoughts, Feelings & Behaviors</p>		<p>Living a Balanced Life</p>
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Found online at <http://smartrecoveryforum.org>* you can use this “tool” as a resource for help and support **WHENEVER** you need it, 24/7/365 days a year. SMART Recovery[®] Online (SROL) is a warm and caring online community designed to help one another overcome addictive behaviors. Available for your use are:

1. The **MESSAGE BOARD** is an extensive resource available to our online members. At the top of each page, you will find the **SMART Tool Box**, containing the SMART tools and many other helpful articles and essays. When first starting out, we invite you to make a post introducing yourself in the **Welcome Area**. The main parts of the Message Board are **Discussions** and **Tools and Resources**. The **Classic Posts** section is an archive of some favorite posts from the past. Many people join one (*or more*) of the daily check-in groups that are available. There are also forums for specific substances and behaviors (*i.e. Opiates, Quit Smoking, Eating Disorders, Self-Harm, etc.*) as well as for specific situations (*i.e. Family & Friends, Dealing with Grief while Recovering from Addictions, Recovering to Parenthood, etc.*).
2. The **CHAT ROOM** is open 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. Because there are online members from all over the world, there is usually always someone in the chat room. Upon entering, you may find a casual or joking environment, but if you have an issue or want information about something, just let the room know. Recovery comes first and the focus of the discussion will turn to try to help you with your issue(s).
3. The **MEETING ROOMS** provide a number of online meetings per day. The Meeting Schedule can be found at the top of each webpage on the site. While you are more than welcome at any of the online meetings available, please note that there is also one tailored especially for new members. Our online meetings, which are 90 minutes long, are more structured than general chat, having a Facilitator that runs the meeting. Some of the online meetings take place in our Voice Meeting Room. Refer to the Meeting Schedule for specific dates and times.
4. The **ONLINE LIBRARY** is an excellent place to look for SMART Recovery[®] concepts and tools, which are the foundation of SMART Recovery[®]. Within this area, the **Tools and Homework** is a useful place to start. Many who first come to SMART Recovery[®] start out by printing out and completing the Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) Worksheet. You will also find links to the various podcasts and YouTube videos that are available for viewing and listening, and also to the SMART Recovery[®] blog, which is continually being updated with new articles and posts on topics you may find helpful.

The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise

Research has shown us that people who exercise regularly tend to be more resistant to many mental illnesses. Exercise can help treat current symptoms, and prevent future episodes.

What problems can exercise help with?

Mental Illness

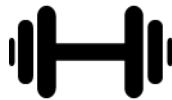
Depression
Anxiety
Substance Abuse
Bulimia
Alzheimer's Disease

Other

Sleep Difficulties
Stress
Physical Health
Low Energy
Self-Esteem

Beginning an exercise plan doesn't have to be difficult. Walking for as little as 30 minutes, 3 times a week, has been found to be beneficial. Don't worry too much about what exercise you choose. Aerobic and anaerobic exercises are both effective at improving mental health.

Anaerobic Exercises



Weightlifting
Sprinting (running, biking, etc.)
Interval training
Climbing

Aerobic Exercises



Walking, jogging, or biking
Elliptical or ski machines
Swimming
Dancing

If you're crunched for time, you might still be able to squeeze some exercise into your day. Two 15 minute walks work just as well as one 30 minute walk! Here are some tips to help:



Need to make a phone call? Walk and talk.

Get an exercise partner to hold you accountable.

Park at the back of the parking lot and walk.

Do an activity you enjoy, and it won't be a chore.

Skip the elevator and take the stairs.

Head outside for 10 minutes during lunch.

Distress Tolerance Skills

Distraction (A.C.C.E.P.T.S.)

Negative feelings will usually pass, or at least lessen in intensity over time. It can be valuable to distract yourself until the emotions subside. The acronym "A.C.C.E.P.T.S." serves as a reminder of this idea.

A ctivities	Engage in activities that require thought and concentration. This could be a hobby, a project, work, or school.
C ontributing	Focus on someone or something other than yourself. You can volunteer, do a good deed, or do anything else that will contribute to a cause or person.
C omparisons	Look at your situation in comparison to something worse. Remember a time you were in more pain, or when someone else was going through something more difficult.
E motions	Do something that will create a competing emotion. Feeling sad? Watch a funny movie. Feeling nervous? Listen to soothing music.
P ushing Away	Do away with negative thoughts by pushing them out of your mind. Imagine writing your problem on a piece of paper, crumpling it up, and throwing it away. Refuse to think about the situation until a better time.
T houghts	When your emotions take over, try to focus on your thoughts. Count to 10, recite a poem in your head, or read a book.
S ensations	Find safe physical sensations to distract you from intense negative emotions. Wear a rubber band and snap it on your wrist, hold an ice cube in your hand, or eat something sour like a lime.

When I am Tempted to Use

Check off the situations in which you would be most tempted to use drugs or alcohol. Write in your own situations if you don't see them listed.

- When I am having withdrawals
- When I want to have just one drink
- When I want to see if I can handle using in moderation
- When I have a headache
- When I am worrying about something
- When I have a dream about drugs
- When I am tired
- When I'm in pain
- When I'm depressed
- When I'm angry
- When I want to relax
- When I'm at a party
- When I see drugs and alcohol on TV
- When I'm happy
- When my friends are using
- When I am on vacation
- When I am bored

Triggers



In this section, you will develop a plan for dealing with your three biggest triggers. Review your plan regularly, and practice each of the strategies.

Describe your three biggest triggers, in detail.

Trigger	#1	
	#2	
	#3	

Describe your strategy for *avoiding* or *reducing exposure* to each trigger.

Trigger	#1	
	#2	
	#3	

Describe your strategy for dealing with each trigger head on, when they cannot be avoided.

Trigger	#1	
	#2	
	#3	

Tips for Avoiding Relapse

The most important moment before relapse isn't the final decision to use a drug. It's when you decide to expose yourself to triggers. For example, a trigger could be going to a party or walking through the liquor section at the store. Before encountering your triggers, *you* still have most of the control. Not your craving.

If you're feeling the urge to use, try to wait it out. If you distract yourself for even 30 minutes, it's likely your craving will lessen in intensity. It might not totally disappear, but it will become easier to resist.

Focus on replacing your past drug use with new positive activities. If you used to go home after work and drink, you'll need to make a new plan to occupy yourself. Going home and staring at a wall will eventually lead to staring at a wall with a drink in your hand.

Don't try to do this alone. Sharing your goals for sobriety with a friend makes all the difference. They can hold you accountable when you're making questionable decisions ("I'm just going to the bar to hang out, I won't drink!") and they can offer a kind ear when you're struggling.

Remind yourself that cravings will pass. Have you ever had that experience when you're sick where you can't remember what it feels like to *not* be sick? The same thing happens with cravings. Give it time, and believe it or not, the feeling will go away.

You'll have to make sacrifices beyond giving up the drug. If you previously used during specific activities (for example: watching a game on TV, going to concerts, or spending time with friends), you may need to make changes. This might mean *not* watching the game, or making new friends who are sober. This can be really hard, but that's what makes it a sacrifice.

Have a plan for when things get bad, because at some point, they will. People get fired, hearts get broken, and sometimes people leave us forever. Develop a plan to get through these major life challenges--without the use of drugs--before they happen.

Don't become complacent with your sobriety. If you someday consider having "just a glass of wine with dinner", don't make the decision lightly. If you've struggled with addiction in the past, you are much more likely to develop an addiction again.

If you do relapse, don't give up. A lot of people find it helpful to keep track of how long they've been sober, but don't confuse this count with the true goal of leading a good life. If you're at day 100 of sobriety, that's great. However, if you make a mistake and end up back at day 0, know that you are not starting over (you gained knowledge, experience, and confidence). In other words: Slipping up is not a license to go on a binge.

Come up with new rituals. How do you celebrate holidays, promotions, or any other happy occasion? If your answer includes any sort of drug, you'll want to get creative and figure out something new. Go wild with a hobby for the day, treat yourself to a nice dinner, or take a weekend trip. Make sure it's something you can get excited about.

Relapse Prevention Plan

Coping Skills: List activities or skills you enjoy that can get your mind off of using.

1	
2	
3	

Social Support: Who are three people you can talk to if you are thinking about using?

1	
2	
3	

Consequences: How will your life change if you relapse? How about if you stay sober?

Outcomes of Relapse	Outcomes of Sobriety

Tips to avoid relapse:

- Cravings will eventually pass. Do your best to distract yourself and ride it out.
- Don't become complacent. Relapse can happen years after you've quit using. It probably won't ever be safe to "just have one".
- Avoid situations that you know will put you at risk of relapse, such as spending time with friends who use drugs or going places that remind you of your past use.
- The decision to relapse is made when you put yourself in risky situations, long before you actually use.
- Don't view relapse as a failure. Falling back into old patterns because of a slip will only make the situation worse.