Session 13: Be Smart, Not Strong

Goals of Session

■ Help clients understand that recovery is not mainly a test of will, but of commitment and smart planning.
■ Help clients understand the importance of avoiding triggers and relapse situations.
■ Help clients assess the efficacy of their approach to recovery.

Handout

■ RP 13—Be Smart, Not Strong

Presentation of Topic (15 minutes)

1. Understanding That Substance Dependence Is Stronger Than the Individual

When people become dependent on a substance, chemical processes are at work on a biological level that cause cravings. Clients cannot conquer these cravings merely by an assertion of will anymore than they can concentrate and make feelings of hunger disappear. With longer abstinence, cravings will fade. The physical processes that clients set in motion when they became dependent on stimulants are stronger than their willpower. Most people who come into treatment have tried very hard on their own not to use. But quitting is not just a matter of deciding not to use and then gritting one’s teeth. It requires clients to be smart and make plans to remain abstinent.

2. Understanding the Importance of Avoiding Triggers to Abuse and Likely Abuse Situations

No matter how strong clients’ desire to remain abstinent, wanting to be abstinent is not enough by itself. People who are able to stop using and stay abstinent do so by being smart. Clients need to use the relapse prevention skills they learn in these sessions and in Early Recovery Skills sessions to ensure that they are avoiding triggers and relapse situations. Clients should take a hard, honest look at the people, emotions, and situations that are linked to their substance abuse, make a list of these triggers, and then make a commitment to avoid them. Likewise, clients should analyze situations for their risk potential. If a group of friends always winds up at a bar, clients need to avoid that group of friends. If substances are prevalent at a certain club, clients need to avoid that club.

3. Assessing How Well Prepared Clients Are To Avoid Relapse

Clients need to have an accurate idea of how smart their approach to recovery is. Avoiding triggers and relapse situations is not all there is to recovery. But doing these things helps support the complete lifestyle change necessary for a solid recovery. The more skills clients have at their disposal to help them avoid triggers and prevent relapse, the stronger their recovery will be. The techniques clients learn in Early Recovery Skills sessions should be thought of as tools to use to stay abstinent. For recovery to be successful, clients need to have as many tools in their toolboxes as possible.
Handout and Focused Discussion (45 minutes)

Clients should be given time to complete the handout before the discussion begins. Clients should not be forced to comply if they find it difficult or uncomfortable to complete the handout in the group. The handout is primarily a tool for discussion. The counselor steers clients away from reading their responses and encourages them to converse about the issues the handout raises. The counselor ensures that all clients have an opportunity to participate.

- Go over handout RP 13—Be Smart, Not Strong.
- Ask clients whether the statements at the top of the handout sound familiar.
- Ask clients to discuss the difference between being strong and being smart, in the context of recovery.
- Ask the recovering co-leader to discuss his or her experience with trying to be strong and being smart.
- Have clients calculate their Recovery IQ.
- Review the various techniques listed on the chart. Do clients understand the importance of all these techniques?
- Ask clients what they can do to work on the techniques they currently are not practicing.

Open Discussion (30 minutes)

The counselor should carry over from the previous discussion any important issues that have not been addressed fully. Although it is important for clients to be able to speak about what is on their minds, the counselor should make sure that the session’s topic has been explored completely.

Five minutes before the end of open discussion, the counselor should ask clients to share briefly their experience of doing the homework from the previous session. The counselor can decide how detailed the followup on homework should be. The goal of asking is not to discover which clients have not done the homework but to encourage clients to work on their recovery between sessions and to share that work with the group.

Homework

Have clients choose 1 of the 11 relapse prevention techniques for which they rated themselves fair or poor and describe how they will work to improve that rating. Clients can write in their journals or on pages 10 and 11 of their Client’s Treatment Companion.
“I can be around drugs or alcohol. I’m sure I don’t want to use, and once I make up my mind, I’m very strong.”

“I have been doing well, and I think it’s time to test myself to see whether I can be around friends who are using. It’s just a matter of willpower.”

“I can have a drink and not use. I never had a problem with alcohol anyway.”

Staying abstinent has little to do with how strong you are. People who maintain abstinence do it by being smart. They know that the key to not drinking and not using is to keep far away from situations in which they might use. If you are in an environment where drugs might appear (for example, at a club or party) or with friends who are drinking and using, your chances of using are much greater than if you weren’t in that situation. Smart people stay abstinent by avoiding triggers and relapse situations.

DON’T COUNT ON BEING STRONG. BE SMART.

How smart are you being? Rate how well you are doing in avoiding relapse. (Circle the appropriate number.)

1. Practicing thought stopping
   - Poor: 1
   - Fair: 2
   - Good: 3
   - Excellent: 4

2. Scheduling
   - Poor: 1
   - Fair: 2
   - Good: 3
   - Excellent: 4

3. Keeping appointments
   - Poor: 1
   - Fair: 2
   - Good: 3
   - Excellent: 4
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<tr>
<td>4. Avoiding triggers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>5. Not using alcohol</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Not using drugs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Avoiding people who use drugs and alcohol</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Avoiding places where you might encounter drugs or alcohol</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>9. Exercising</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>10. Being truthful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>11. Going to 12-Step or mutual-help meetings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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Add up the circled numbers. The higher your total, the better your Recovery IQ. The best possible Recovery IQ is 44.

I scored ___________.

This is your Recovery IQ. What can you do to improve your Recovery IQ?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________