

SMART Recovery® Toolbox Quick Start Guide

Welcome to SMART Recovery. This guide provides a brief overview of how to use SMART Recovery tools, along with suggestions that many participants have found helpful.

This is NOT a SMART Recovery document. This is me (Mike) putting together my own document for recommending how to get started with SMART tools.

The SMART Recovery Toolbox is available at:

<https://smartrecovery.org/toolbox>

Quick Start Summary

1. **Start with a few core tools** – Many people begin with HOV (Hierarchy of Values), CBA (Cost-Benefit Analysis), Change Plan, DUBS, and DENTS because they work well together.
2. **Use the toolbox like an à la carte menu** – There is no required order and no requirement to complete every tool.
3. **There is no "right" way to do a tool** – The purpose is to increase awareness and support change, not to produce perfect answers.
4. **Keep your completed tools** – Use a folder, binder, notebook, or digital file to save your work for future reference.
5. **Date every tool you complete** – Your answers and perspectives will change over time, and the dates help you see your progress.
6. **Review old tools occasionally** – Looking back can reveal growth, recurring patterns, and new insights about yourself.
7. **Expect your answers to change** – Repeating a tool often produces different results because your circumstances, thoughts, and goals evolve.
8. **Use meetings to support your tool work** – Bring tools to meetings, ask questions, share insights, and learn from the experiences of others.
9. **Attend several meetings before forming an opinion** – Different facilitators, meeting formats, and participant groups create different experiences. Try at least 4–6 meetings.
10. **Focus on progress, not perfection** – Recovery is a process of learning, practicing, and building skills one step at a time.

Remember: *The best SMART Recovery tool is often the one you are willing to use today.*

Understanding the SMART Recovery Toolbox

SMART Recovery provides a collection of practical tools designed to help people build and maintain motivation, manage urges, examine beliefs, cope with challenges, and create a more balanced life.

Many people find it helpful to begin with a few core tools that naturally build on each other:

HOV (Hierarchy of Values) – What matters most to me?

CBA (Cost-Benefit Analysis) – What are the costs and benefits of continuing versus changing?

Change Plan – What specific changes do I want to make?

DUBS (Disputing Unhelpful Beliefs) – What thoughts may be getting in my way?

DENTS (Disputing Irrational Beliefs / Examining Urges) – How can I better understand and manage urges?

These tools often work together. HOV helps identify what is important to you, CBA helps clarify why change matters, the Change Plan turns motivation into action, and DUBS and DENTS help address the thoughts and urges that can interfere with progress.

There Is No "Right Way"

One of the strengths of SMART Recovery is that the tools are not a rigid program.

Think of the toolbox as an à la carte menu.

You can:

- Use the tools in any order.
- Repeat the same tool as often as you like.
- Focus on the tools that seem most useful to you right now.
- Set aside tools that are not helpful and return to them later.

Different people find different tools useful at different times.

Keep Your Work

Consider obtaining a folder, binder, notebook, or digital folder to store your completed tools.

For each tool:

- Put the date on it.
- Save it, even if it feels incomplete.

- Add notes if something important was happening in your life at the time.

Over time, these tools can become a valuable record of your growth, challenges, successes, and changing perspectives.

Review Tools Occasionally

Sometimes it is helpful to revisit previous tools.

You may discover:

- Progress you had not noticed.
- Challenges that no longer seem as difficult.
- Patterns that continue to appear in your life.
- New insights into old situations.

At the same time, do not feel obligated to revisit every tool. Some tools may be useful repeatedly. Others may serve their purpose and not need to be revisited for months or years.

Expect Your Answers to Change

It is common to complete the same tool multiple times and get different results.

That is not a mistake—it is often a sign of growth.

Your answers may change because:

- Your thoughts and feelings have changed.
- Your goals have evolved.
- You are facing different circumstances.
- Your understanding of yourself has deepened.

The goal is not to produce the "correct" answer. The goal is to gain greater awareness, understanding, and choice.

Use Meetings as Part of the Process

Meetings are often where the tools come to life.

Consider:

- Bringing completed tools to meetings.
- Asking questions about a tool you are working on.

- Listening to how others use SMART Recovery tools.
- Sharing your own experiences when you feel comfortable.

Many newcomers worry about "doing a tool correctly." In practice, there is rarely a single correct answer. The discussion and learning process are often more valuable than the worksheet itself.

If possible, attend a variety of meetings, including discussion meetings and tool-focused meetings.

Different facilitators and different groups often provide different perspectives and experiences.

A good guideline is to attend at least **4–6 meetings** before deciding whether SMART Recovery is a good fit for you.

Start Small

You do not need to complete every tool in the toolbox.

Choose one challenge, one situation, or one goal and begin there.

Small steps taken consistently often produce greater change than attempting to do everything at once.

Progress, Not Perfection

Recovery is a skill-building process.

The SMART Recovery tools are not tests or assignments to complete perfectly.

Use them when you need clarity.

Use them when you feel stuck.

Use them when you want to understand yourself better.

Most importantly, use them in whatever way helps you continue moving forward.

A Helpful Mindset

If there is one attitude that can make SMART Recovery more useful, it is this:

Be curious rather than judgmental.

Approach your thoughts, feelings, urges, successes, setbacks, and experiences with curiosity.

The more you learn about how you think, feel, and behave, the more options you gain for making choices that align with your values and goals.

First Week Challenge

- Attend two SMART Recovery meetings.
- Complete a CBA.
- Complete a HOV.
- Save both tools in your folder.
- Share one insight from either tool at a meeting.

You do not have to do everything at once. Just begin.

Recovery is built one step, one insight, and one decision at a time.

Why Doing Tools Matters

The value of a SMART Recovery tool is not limited to the worksheet itself.

Tools Help You Prepare

Completing a tool is a form of planning.

Many people experience anxiety, stress, or uncertainty when facing future situations. By working through a tool, you are thinking ahead, considering options, identifying obstacles, and developing strategies before challenges arise.

When situations occur and challenges arise (which they inevitably do), you are less likely to feel caught off guard because you have already spent time preparing for it.

In this way, tools can help reduce anxiety and increase confidence by replacing uncertainty with preparation.

Tools Exercise the "Change Muscle"

The tools also provide benefits beyond the specific problem they address.

Every time you complete a tool, you are practicing the process of change itself.

You are:

- Reflecting on your thoughts and behaviors.
- Considering alternatives.
- Making decisions.
- Taking action.
- Building self-awareness.

Like any skill, change becomes easier with practice.

The simple act of sitting down and completing a tool is evidence that you are actively participating in your own growth and recovery.

Over time, this can strengthen confidence, motivation, and belief in your ability to make meaningful changes in your life.

Remember: every completed tool is more than a worksheet—it is practice for change.

A Few Simple Practices

As you become familiar with SMART Recovery tools, you may also find it helpful to develop a few daily habits that support recovery and personal growth.

The Hula Hoop®

One of the most recognizable SMART Recovery concepts is the **Hula Hoop® Tool**.

Imagine a hula hoop drawn on the ground around your feet.

Inside the hoop are the things you can directly control:

- Your actions
- Your decisions
- Your attitudes
- Your effort
- Your responses

Outside the hoop are things you cannot directly control:

- Other people's thoughts
- Other people's choices
- The past
- The future
- Circumstances beyond your influence

When we spend too much time focused on what is outside our hoop, we often experience frustration, anxiety, resentment, or helplessness.

When we focus on what is inside our hoop, we are more likely to take constructive action.

The Stoic Dichotomy of Control

This idea is also found in Stoic philosophy.

The Stoics taught that some things are within our control and some things are not.

Much of human suffering comes from trying to control things that cannot be controlled.

A useful question to ask is:

"What part of this situation is within my control right now?"

Even in difficult circumstances, there is usually something we can think, say, do, learn, accept, or change.

Focusing on those things often leads to greater peace of mind and more effective action.

The Serenity Prayer

Many people find value in reflecting on the Serenity Prayer, regardless of their religious or spiritual beliefs:

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

This simple idea aligns closely with both the Hula Hoop Tool and the Stoic Dichotomy of Control.

Practice Gratitude

Another simple exercise is keeping a gratitude list.

Each day, take a moment to identify a few things for which you are grateful.

These do not need to be large or extraordinary.

Examples might include:

- A supportive friend
- A good conversation
- A safe place to sleep
- A pet
- A meal
- A moment of peace
- Progress toward a goal

Practicing gratitude helps shift attention from what is missing to what is already present and valuable in our lives.

Recovery Is Built Through Practice

The SMART Recovery tools, the Hula Hoop Tool, the Serenity Prayer, and gratitude exercises all point toward the same idea:

Focus your energy where it can make a difference.

You do not need to be perfect.

You do not need to have all the answers.

You only need to take the next helpful step.

Recovery is built one choice, one action, and one day at a time.

Recommended Reading

Many SMART Recovery participants find it helpful to continue learning about behavior change and habit formation outside of meetings.

One highly recommended book is:

Atomic Habits by James Clear

The central message of the book is that meaningful change is often the result of small, consistent improvements repeated over time.

Some key ideas include:

- Focus on systems rather than goals.
- Make good habits easy and obvious.
- Make unwanted habits difficult and less attractive.
- Small improvements, repeated consistently, can produce significant results.
- Lasting change often comes from changing what you do every day rather than relying on motivation alone.

These ideas align closely with many SMART Recovery principles, particularly the emphasis on practical action, self-management, planning, and building new patterns of behavior one step at a time.

As James Clear writes:

"Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become."

Recovery, growth, and change rarely happen all at once. They are built through many small choices made consistently over time.