

Self-management in Covid-19 Lockdown

Strange Times



There is no doubt about it – these are ‘strange’ times – for many of us right now. But, despite these “unprecedented” issues and events, which are undoubtedly problematic; our SMART tools and self-management techniques can (and will) help us get past these difficulties.

Lockdown Impacts

The social-distancing rules and guidelines, which underpin the “Stay at Home” message of covid-19 lockdown, have created many new issues that we need to deal with. This period is also having an impact on some of our existing problems. Yes, some of those issues might be even more difficult to deal with now but, we were dealing with them before lockdown... weren’t we? Like each new day, we just have some new problems to face like;

- ⚙ **Increased Isolation:** missing family and friends, unable to access our support networks (SMART meetings, peer-support groups, treatment services and mental-health support etc.)
- ⚙ **New Problematic Thinking:** higher levels of anxiety, increased rumination, boredom due to inactivity and/or worrying about our health and wellbeing (job security, wages or benefit payments, redundancy, bankruptcy etc.)
- ⚙ **Recurring Problematic Behaviours:** all the above can be triggers for our past addictive behaviours, leading to a temporary lapse, relapse or perhaps a return to our past behaviours or substance use.
- ⚙ **New Problematic Behaviours:** for some people, the lockdown might have led to new behaviours. Boredom, frustration, anxiety etc. can all lead to new or increased use of alcohol and/or drugs. Increased levels of gambling, new or increased levels of domestic abuse and violence and mental-health problems, are all reported examples of the issues being faced by many.

SMART Self-management

The first thing to consider within our *4-Point programme* is our **motivation**; trying to maintain recovery in lockdown is undoubtedly testing. Attempting or continuing a new pathway, on the journey to recovery, during this difficult period, could be even more problematic. But, we can still make that choice to change, or continue along the new road we have chosen.



Continued...

The self-management skills within SMART can help us to deal with many of these issues, in a productive manner. Let's look at (or remind ourselves about) some of the SMART methods that we can use to approach some of the circumstances we're currently facing.

The SMART Mindset

If we chose to begin or maintain an addictive behaviour, we can also choose to change or end that behaviour, by thinking differently... even now!

"People are not disturbed by things, but by the view they take of them"
(Epictetus)



SMART #1 – Building OR Maintaining Motivation

Hierarchy of Values



Our personal 'values' provide us with our 'motivation' to do things, or not as maybe. Although the values we have can and do change throughout our life, without knowing what those values are, sometimes it's difficult to grow from the 'seeds' of our motivational tree.

Make a list of as many things that you feel are important in your life (under normal circumstances), then select the five that are the most important on that list. These are the 'seeds' of our personal motivational tree.

Why would we want to plant different seeds, just because of covid-19? We still want our tree to grow. As with any season, weather can impact on growth, perhaps conditions aren't as good as they could be but... the weather will change. Why hold off planting and watering what we are trying to grow?

Once we have our 'core values' we can begin to analyse the circumstances we find ourselves in (now or at any time). We look at the impacts upon those things we value - because of how we think and subsequently react.

Three Questions

1. What do I want for my future?
2. What am I currently doing to achieve this?
3. How do I feel about what I'm currently doing?



Once you have answered the above, add the following;

4. What could I do differently, to achieve the future I want?
5. How would changing what I do, or getting what I want, make me feel?

Additional SMART Tools: Cost Benefit Analysis Tool (CBA), Change-Plan Worksheet.

SMART #2 – Coping with Urges



Techniques within our *SMART Toolbox* are designed to help with our urges, that lead to our addictive behaviours. Clearly, lockdown has created additional triggers for those urges.

Our behaviours are often part of our personal coping strategies, helping us to deal with our thoughts; disguising a problem, escaping from a situation or, we believe it will help us to deal with that ‘problem’ that we are facing – but will it?

STOP

When our thoughts are racing it can impact our emotional state, leading to an increase in our anxiety levels. Particularly with all the uncertainty at present. In recovery it is important that we become aware of our thought patterns.



- ✦ **S** – Stop what you are doing
- ✦ **T** – Take a few breaths
- ✦ **O** – Observe what is happening
- ✦ **P** – Put it in Proper Perspective
- ✦ **P** – Put into practice (new, learned responses)

The issues we are currently facing, as a result of covid-19, might be around for a while however; overthinking the situation is probably counterproductive and mostly unhelpful.

When we face problems and difficulties, trying to deal with the situation is often more productive (rational) than avoiding or ignoring the situation. It is unrealistic (irrational) to expect that covid-19 and lockdown will miraculously disappear. It won't... at least not for now.

SMART Tools: ABC, DEADS, DIBs, HALT the BADS.

SMART #3 - Managing, Thoughts, Feelings & Behaviours

The covid-19 lockdown has given us all stuff to think about. Some of it worrying, some of it has left us feeling anxious and some might have left us feeling angry however; even though it might feel like it now, the rational thought process is - this isn't a permanent situation that will last for ever, things will change.



Disputing Irrational Beliefs (DIBs) Example

- ✦ **An Irrational Belief:** *I'm going to get coronavirus and die!*
- ✦ **Dispute/Question that belief:** *Will I get coronavirus? It's possible but not inevitable. How can I reduce that risk? I will stay at home and if I need to go out, I'll keep a safe distance from other people.*
- ✦ **The SMART Response:** Coronavirus is worrying but, transmission is worsened by people not taking sensible precautions. If I follow social-distancing guidelines and wash my hands properly and more often, I probably won't catch it. Even if I did, not everyone dies from it.

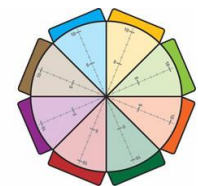
It is difficult to escape all the covid-19 talk at the moment and for some of us this can make us feel even more uncomfortable - the ABC tool can be beneficial for looking at the situation, and challenging and changing our thinking.



- ⚙️ **Activating Event** – *Everyone is talking about the virus; it's driving me mad!*
- ⚙️ **Belief** – *People shouldn't talk about the virus. They must stop! I am going to go mad!*
- ⚙️ **Consequence(s)** – *anxious, angry, scared, frustrated*
- ⚙️ **Dispute (Irrational beliefs)** – *Where does it say people can't talk about it? Am I really going to go mad?*
- ⚙️ **Effective (rational) beliefs** – *I would prefer not to hear about the virus all the time, but I can't control what other people talk about. As it's a challenging time for all it is only natural people want to talk about it. Having said that it doesn't mean I have to get involved. I can limit how much I hear by limiting my engagement on social media, limit the news I watch. I can do things to distract myself that have nothing to do with the virus. This may also be beneficial regarding thoughts I am going mad, which of course I know I am not!*

SMART #4 – Living a Balanced Life

Lifestyle balance can be tricky at the best of times but now, it seems more difficult than ever. The SMART *lifestyle balance pie* is a great tool to gain insight into where most of our focus is going. It can help us ask ourselves - is this helping me, if not what do I need to change?



It's important to note that achieving a balanced lifestyle is just like all the other aspects of the **SMART Recovery 4-Point Program**—there is no 'magic' involved here, it takes some **self-management** work to accomplish our goals.

Additional SMART Tools: Change Plan Worksheet, Five Considerations.

