

Risk-Reward Analysis for Substances

To drink or not to drink. To use or not to use. What will break the log-jam of conflicting thoughts?
*Let's start by getting the risks and rewards of quitting down on paper.**

“I couldn't cope without my dope” vs “What in the hell have I done now?”

Risk & Reward Analysis

Risks: All the things that terrorize us about stopping are risks of quitting, while the risks of using are those problems that have either already happened or are possible to happen. These two categories involve the more immediate aspects of the situation.

Rewards: There must have been rewards for using or we wouldn't have kept it up so long. To complete the picture, there are sure to be rewards for quitting. These latter two categories involve the longer-term perspective.

In **SMART Recovery** we want you to act reasonably and responsibly about your future involvement with intoxicants or any bad habit. First there are a few ground rules to consider.

- ✱ You are a normal human being.
- ✱ You got started in this by seeking pleasure or relaxation, and perhaps to avoid some perceived distress. That was understandable.
- ✱ You are not defective! It's just that certain substances or behaviours can lose their lustre and eventually become a real problem for some people.

The Risk-Reward Analysis is a powerful instrument that enables you to see what you are doing to yourself and others. It also gives you a glimpse ahead at the possible impact on your life of continued use as well as the possible impact of changing your behaviour.

The fourth point of the SMART Recovery 4-Point Program is Living a Balanced Life which includes balancing long-term satisfactions against short-term satisfactions. Comparing the two may help motivate you to change your lifestyle and habits.

This exercise is an important tool for establishing motivation if you are contemplating quitting. It will also have value as you work toward quitting your substance abuse or other maladaptive behaviour. During challenging situations, your Risk-Reward Analysis can be an anchor for you to refresh your memory of your reasons for quitting.

* This is the basis of the **Cost Benefit Analysis** (CBA) tool used within SMART Recovery
Risk-Reward Analysis

Let's Get Started

Begin with a blank piece of paper and organize a better understanding of your own personal situation.

Create 4 boxes: Risks of Using, Rewards of Using, Risks of Quitting, and Rewards of Quitting.

Below are examples to prompt your thinking and get you started on your own document.

We believe this is where the real work starts, and that you're worth it!

Risks of Using

Examples:

- DUI or multiple DUIs
- Trouble with the law
- Problems with employment
- Financial difficulties
- Relationship problems
- Loss of self-respect and from others
- Health considerations
- Loss of ambition
- Fear of the future
- Fear of AIDS
- Loss of custody of a child or children

You will have some things to highlight or to add to this list for your own inventory. Be as honest and as specific as you can.

A good definition of addiction is the condition of finding yourself continuing in a behaviour when you know it is against your better judgment. You find that you have been "hooked", so to speak. That's probably why you let things get to this stage. In SMART Recovery® we are interested first in having a clear picture of the problem. (This list of risks is a very good place to start!)

Risks of Quitting

Examples:

- No more getting stoned
- People will think I'm different
- People will think I can't handle it
- Won't be able to resist temptation
- I'll be on unfamiliar turf
- I'll lose my secret best friend



I'll get the shakes (fear of withdrawal)
I won't have the "liquid courage"
I'll begin to see my real self
I'll have to be a goody-goody
If I fail, I'll be worse off than before
I'll have an empty place inside and nothing to fill it
I'll have to stay away from usual friends and contacts
I'll have to face the uncomfortable things that cause me to drink
Can't think of how and where to find anything else better to do

...Once again, highlight and add things to make this list personal.

These examples are enough to get an idea of things to think about when you consider quitting. It is important to make your list as fair as you can and face the issues, rather than avoid them. Otherwise they will come back and bite you in the ass later. Also remember that many of your fears are based on faulty thinking that you may have been using to justify your behaviour.

Rewards of Using

Examples:

Getting stoned, feeling a rush, feeling a buzz
Weight management or loss
Social aspect, "let the good times roll"
Like the taste of it
Relaxation
Mask feelings of guilt
Drowning sorrow
Loss of inhibition
Escape from problems, reality, people
Avoiding withdrawal

...Once again, highlight and add things to make this list personal.

We emphasize again that to seek pleasure and to avoid pain are healthy and normal things to do. It is when the use of the substance or behaviour takes over your better judgment, that you need to reassess the risks and rewards of continuing what has become a harmful habit.

If you want to end the addiction, establishing new alternative rewards is an important objective.

Rewards of Quitting

Examples:

Better physical and mental health
Custody of child or children
More control over myself
No more fear of a DUI
Keep the judge happy

Increased self-awareness
Peace of mind
Better job security
Improved relationships
New friends and interests
Feel optimistic
Feel self-growing up inside
Not feel guilty all the time

The rewards of quitting are long-lasting. How attractive are these rewards of quitting to you, personally? This is the time to clearly see your choices. It's up to you to decide.

Summary

Make it yours personally, think about it privately, see what's best for you, keep it and then believe it -it's what you really think! Keep it to remind you about your personal advantages of long-term satisfactions over short-term satisfactions.