Recovery – Where to start….

**Motivation to change – Do you *want* to change, or just know you *should*?**

Are you riding an emotional wave from some crisis in your life? What happens when the crisis subsides and life returns to 'normal?' Will you still want to change?

It's easy to make a list of annual New Year's resolutions and worthy goals – lose weight, save money, become a better parent, stop this or start that. Think of the last time you made such a list. How long did it take before your life found its way back to where it was before?

So, how do we stay motivated to make the change we sincerely want? One of the biggest challenges most people face in recovery is maintaining their motivation. "Wishing" is not a reliable strategy. Some of us talk about the changes we want to make as if just talking about them will get us there.

You may have heard that SMART is a self-empowerment programme. It may sound a bit like pop psychology. It isn't. This concept is important as you prepare for the work ahead. You have power over the choices you make, how you behave, and the goals you set for your future.

**Building Motivation to change – Cost Benefit Analysis**

Change is born from understanding. In the journey of recovery, a deep, insightful understanding is often sparked when we honestly assess the full scope of our addictive behaviors. This isn't about judgment; it's about clarity, insight, and, ultimately, empowerment.

The Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) tool is a deceptively simple yet profound exercise. It involves drafting a four box table to list out the advantages and disadvantages of both carrying on with and stopping our addictive behaviors. This methodical approach paves the way for an objective appraisal, often unearthing startling truths about the real impacts of one's choices.

See appendices for a worksheet you can use for this exercise - follow this QR code for more information and a video on the use of this tool - or search for ’Smart recovery CBA’**A qr code on a white background

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**Nothing changes if nothing changes**

“Nothing changes if nothing changes” is an important phrase that invites you to make the changes in your life necessary for recovery. This phrase reminds you that your life is ultimately shaped by the seemingly small decisions made daily.

Recovery is more than simply stopping your drug of choice (DoC) —it involves changing your lifestyle and daily routine.

Changing your life is the first rule of recovery. Simply refraining from using your DoC is not enough to achieve lasting recovery. If you do not change your life and work towards creating a lifestyle that makes it easier to avoid your DoC use in the future, the same factors that led to DoC use in the past will still be present and make it difficult not to fall back into long-standing patterns.

Many people enter into recovery hoping they won’t have to change. They view the need to change as something negative and wish for the familiarity and comfort of their old lives back. What they don’t realize is that their “old life” was filled with challenges and negative thought patterns that led to their DoC use and contributed to continued DoC misuse.

The CBA tool mentioned before is a good place to start in regards to looking at changes you might chose to make – another very simple tool for looking at your life is the 3 column tool – all columns should be in balance.

See appendices for a worksheet you can use for this exercise

**Lapses vs Relapses**

Lapse – short return to DoC, the key is that it is you that decides to stop again

Relapse – medium to long term return to DoC, usually only stopped by A&E, Police or an Ultimatum that cannot be ignored.

A lapse is a common part of the recovery journey. If you’ve had a drink or used drugs again after stopping for a while, it can be difficult to know how to move forward. You might feel guilty or disappointed, like you’ve let people down, or you’ve thrown away your hard work. It’s completely natural to feel that way, but rather than viewing it as a complete setback, recognise that it's a temporary challenge in the bigger picture of recovery and it offers important things to learn.

So, does this mean that even a brief lapse must lead to a full-blown relapse? Does it mean a person must continue with DoC until the use returns to the initial level? Is spiraling out of control inevitable? Simply put, no. A lapse need not become a relapse. After a slip, you have not unlearned all that you have learned. You have not unchanged all that you have changed in your life to support your recovery.

Your lapse becomes a tool to move forward and to strengthen your motivation to change, your identification of triggers and urge-controlling techniques, your rational coping skills, and the lifestyle changes needed to lead a more balanced life.

Does this mean that a person should view these lapses as a good thing? Of course not! Clearly, if one wants to abstain, lapses are not preferred. But by recognizing that mistakes can happen and learning how to quickly right oneself, long-term abstinence can be achieved. Lapses may occur, but relapse is not inevitable.

The SMART recovery ABC tool can be used to learn from a lapse;

A – Activating event – what happened what was the trigger

B – Belief – what was your thought process before picking up – usually it could be things such as “I will just have one” or “I just want to use and forget X” etc

C – Consequence – had a lapse

D – Dispute the irrational belief – look back on the Beliefs, how can you dispute these, was it just one? Did using help you forget, if so for how long, overall did it help?

E – Effective new belief, once you have disputed the irrational belief what could you have thought instead e.g. “using won’t help it’ll just make things worse, I’m going to go for a workout instead”

See appendices for a worksheet you can use for this exercise - follow this QR code for more information and a video on the use of this tool - or search for ’Smart recovery ABC’A qr code on a white background

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**Urges / Cravings**

Everyone who’s engaged in addictive behavior will experience uncomfortable cravings (“I want it badly”) and urges (“I have to do it now”). They are normal. And fortunately, they always pass with time, often after 10 or 20 minutes.

Cravings and urges will decrease in strength and frequency over time. You can make this happen by adopting some coping strategies that work best for you.

**Learning to resist cravings**

For many people, urges and cravings to use drugs or alcohol trigger automatic responses. They are without conscious thought: I want [fill in the blank]. = I get it. Learning to say NO to these intense, ingrained desires is one of the biggest challenges in recovery. The good news is that you can understand these desires and learn to resist them.

See appendices for the DEADS and DISARM tools you can use for help with urges or cravings - follow these QR codes for more information and videos on the use of these tools - or search for ’Smart recovery DEADS’ or ’Smart recovery DISARM’

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**Appendices**









