



SMART Family & Friends

Facilitator Handbook

Advance Training Copy

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This document is an advance copy of the SMART Family & Friends Facilitator Handbook, prepared for use in SMART Recovery facilitator training. It has not yet undergone final design review and should be treated as a working reference only.

Permitted Uses

This copy may be used for:

- Facilitator training sessions
- Personal study and preparation
- Leading SMART Recovery Family & Friends meetings

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- Shared outside of SMART Recovery training contexts
- Posted publicly or distributed digitally
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Section One

How to Use This Handbook

This handbook is designed to support facilitators and professionals who are guiding SMART Family & Friends meetings. It serves two purposes:

First, it pairs with the eLearning course *SMART Recovery Family and Friends Facilitator Training*. The course introduces key concepts and tools visually and experientially. This handbook adds depth by offering facilitator-focused context. Why a tool matters, when it is most useful, and how to introduce it in a way that supports discussion rather than instruction.

Second, this handbook works as a standalone guide. Section Two, Facilitating the Tools of SMART Family & Friends, can be used as a practical, meeting-by-meeting roadmap. This section walks you through how to introduce and facilitate each tool with a group, including what to emphasize, common challenges, and ways to adapt tools to what participants bring into the room.

For new facilitators especially, we recommend using this section as your primary guide as you build comfort and confidence leading SMART Family & Friends meeting

SMART Family & Friends is not about fixing or changing a loved one. It is about helping participants change how they cope, communicate, and care for themselves. This handbook reflects that focus throughout.

Your role is to help participants explore what feels useful to them in the moment, while maintaining a respectful, supportive group environment.

Before moving on, it may be helpful to note that the Appendix includes a Facilitator Essentials handout. This resource brings together the key themes and lessons woven throughout this handbook—participant empowerment, emotional safety, adaptability, curiosity, and self-compassion—into a concise, practical reference.

Many facilitators choose to keep this handout nearby during meetings or return to it when they feel unsure how to respond in the moment. It is not meant to replace the chapters that follow, but to distill their core guidance into an accessible summary.

Chapter One

What Is SMART Recovery—and Where Family & Friends Fits

SMART Recovery is an accessible, adaptable, and affirming approach to addiction recovery. It is a global, nonprofit mutual-support organization that helps people make positive changes related to addictive substances and behaviors.

Founded in 1994, SMART Recovery was created to offer a science-informed, self-empowering alternative to traditional recovery models. From the beginning, SMART Recovery has focused on helping people build practical skills for change rather than adopt labels, follow a prescribed path, or accept a single explanation for addiction.

SMART stands for Self-Management and Recovery Training. The name reflects the program's core idea: people can learn skills to manage their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in ways that support meaningful, self-directed change.

SMART Recovery meetings are:

- Self-empowering, not directive
- Science-informed, not belief-based
- Nonjudgmental and inclusive, welcoming people with many different goals
- Focused on skill-building, not storytelling or advice-giving

Participants decide what changes they want to make, how they want to make them, and what kinds of support feel helpful along the way. SMART Recovery does not require abstinence, adherence to a specific philosophy, or identification with a particular label.

SMART Family & Friends: A Program of Its Own

SMART Family & Friends was developed in response to a clear and ongoing need: support for people impacted by a loved one's addictive behavior.

Family members, partners, friends, and others often experience intense stress, fear, frustration, grief, burnout, and uncertainty. While many recovery programs focus primarily on the person engaging in addictive behavior, SMART Family & Friends recognizes that loved ones also deserve support, skills, and relief, regardless of whether the person they care about is ready or willing to change.

Family & Friends is *not* a secondary track or a simplified version of SMART Recovery. It is a distinct, stand-alone program with its own focus, tools, and outcomes.

Family & Friends helps participants:

- Cope more effectively with stress and emotional pain
- Communicate more clearly and constructively
- Set and protect healthy boundaries
- Reduce unhelpful patterns such as rescuing, pleading, or self-blame
- Take better care of themselves, even when circumstances don't change

The goal of Family & Friends is not to:

- Convince a loved one to change
- Monitor or manage someone else's recovery
- Decide what another person "should" do

Family & Friends is built on a simple but powerful understanding: people cannot control another person's behavior—but they can change how they respond. Those changes can reduce suffering, improve relationships, and help participants reclaim a sense of balance, agency, and self-respect in their own lives.

A Science-Informed and Practical Foundation

SMART Family & Friends draws from well-established psychological and behavioral approaches, including:

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT)
- Motivational Interviewing (MI)

These approaches share several core ideas:

- How we think influences how we feel and how we act

- Change is rarely linear, and ambivalence is normal
- Compassion and curiosity are more effective than pressure or blame
- People are more likely to change when they feel respected and empowered

Family & Friends tools translate these ideas into practical, accessible skills that participants can use in real-life situations. No clinical background or professional training is required to benefit from—or facilitate—the program.

What Makes Family & Friends Unique

SMART Family & Friends stands apart from many traditional family-support approaches in several important ways:

- It centers the participant, not the loved one
- It avoids labels that define people by behavior
- It welcomes multiple pathways, including abstinence, moderation, harm reduction, treatment, or no change
- It emphasizes choice, flexibility, and learning from experience
- It supports self-compassion, not self-sacrifice

Participants are encouraged to decide what feels useful for them and to move at their own pace. There is no expectation that anyone confront, detach from, rescue, or persuade their loved one.

Why Having a Trained Facilitator Matters

Because SMART Family & Friends is participant-driven and skills-based, the role of the facilitator is especially important.

Facilitators are not there to provide answers, give advice, or tell people what to do. Instead, they help create a space where participants can:

- Reflect on their experiences
- Learn from one another
- Practice responding differently
- Explore choices without judgment or pressure

This handbook is designed to support you in that role.

Whether you are new to SMART Recovery or experienced in facilitation, the chapters that follow will help you understand not just what the tools are, but how to introduce and guide them in ways that support emotional safety, meaningful conversation, and empowerment.

Chapter 2

The Science Behind SMART Family & Friends

SMART Family & Friends is grounded in well-established psychological and behavioral science. While participants do not need to understand theory to benefit from the program, facilitators benefit from knowing *why* the tools work and *how* they support change. This chapter offers that foundation.

The science behind SMART Family & Friends emphasizes one core idea: how we think influences how we feel, and how we feel influences how we act. By learning to think more flexibly and respond more intentionally, participants can reduce distress, improve relationships, and build a more balanced life—even when their loved one's behavior does not change.

A Self-Management Approach to Change

SMART Family & Friends is a self-management program. Rather than focusing on diagnosing problems or analyzing the past, it focuses on practical skills participants can use right now. The emphasis is on developing awareness, strengthening coping skills, and making choices that align with personal values.

This approach reflects decades of research showing that people are more likely to make and sustain changes when they feel empowered, respected, and supported in making their own decisions. Facilitators reinforce this by avoiding advice-giving and instead helping participants explore options and outcomes for themselves.

Cognitive-Behavioral Foundations

SMART Family & Friends draws on principles from cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT is a well-established approach that helps people understand how their thoughts, emotions, and actions influence each other.

Over time, many reactions to stressful situations become automatic. By increasing awareness of these patterns and experimenting with new ways of responding, participants can reduce distress and respond in ways that better align with their values—even when situations are challenging.

CBT teaches us that:

- Thoughts influence emotions
- Emotions influence behavior
- Behavior influences outcomes
- Changing one part of this cycle can create change in the others

SMART tools help participants *notice* these patterns and *practice* different responses, not through judgement but through curiosity and experimentation.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is sometimes described as a “third wave” of cognitive behavioral theories. Rather than focusing solely on changing thoughts, ACT emphasizes accepting thoughts and feelings while committing to actions that match personal values. This builds what psychologists call psychological flexibility, the ability to be present with experiences without being driven by them, and to choose actions that align with what matters most.

In SMART Family & Friends, ACT concepts show up in tools that encourage participants to:

- Notice distress without reacting impulsively
- Stay grounded in the present moment
- Clarify what they value in relationships and life
- Commit to actions that support those values

ACT complements CBT by inviting acceptance of uncomfortable emotions (not avoidance of them) and by aligning choices with values rather than automatic reactions.

Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT)

CRAFT is a family-support model originally developed to help loved ones support people with substance use issues. It teaches family members how to communicate effectively, reinforce healthy choices, and take care of themselves. Importantly, research shows that family members can benefit emotionally and behaviorally even if their loved one does not immediately change.

CRAFT emphasizes:

- Positive reinforcement of healthy behaviors
- Reducing unhelpful pressure or punishment
- Developing reliable communication skills
- Encouraging self-care and personal satisfaction

SMART Family & Friends echoes these ideas by helping participants reshape their interactions so that they *increase connection rather than conflict*, and *reduce suffering even without control over another person's choices*.

Invitation to Change: Integrating the Best of Several Approaches

The Invitation to Change approach intentionally blends CBT, ACT, CRAFT, and Motivational Interviewing into a compassionate framework for supporting people impacted by others substance use. It focuses on empowering participants with *evidence-based skills* while reducing shame and blaming.

This integrated perspective supports what SMART Family & Friends does:

- Helps participants understand *why* certain patterns are reinforcing (CBT/CRAFT)
- Encourages acceptance of difficult emotions without being driven by them (ACT)
- Focuses on *communication and connection* (CRAFT/MI)
- Keeps the emphasis on *personal choice* rather than directive advice

Motivation, Ambivalence, and Change

Whether drawn from CBT, motivational interviewing, or ACT influences, SMART Family & Friends recognizes that ambivalence is normal and change is rarely linear. Tools like Cost-Benefit Analysis and Awareness Worksheets help participants explore where they actually are

– not where they think they should” be. Understanding your own motivations and barriers is critical before any shift in behavior becomes sustainable.

Emotional Regulation and Distress Tolerance

Emotions such as grief, anxiety, guilt, and frustration can be intense when one cares about someone struggling with substance use. CBT helps participants *see* how thoughts can intensify emotions, while ACT encourages *acceptance* of those emotions so they no longer drive automatic reactions. Together, these frameworks underlie tools that help participants stay present, slow their reactions, and choose responses that protect their well-being.

Why This Matters for Facilitators

Understanding these scientific influences helps facilitators:

- Explain tools in ways that resonate with participants’ experiences
- Understand why tools focus on skill-building and awareness rather than advice
- Validate emotional experiences without reinforcing unhelpful patterns
- Support exploration of alternatives rather than prescribe solutions

SMART Family & Friends does not ask facilitators or participants to align with a single model. Instead, it brings together elements from multiple evidence-based approaches to create a flexible, compassionate roadmap for supporting change in real life.

Self-Compassion in SMART Family & Friends

Self-compassion is an evidence-based foundation of SMART Family & Friends. Many participants arrive feeling exhausted, guilty, or overwhelmed by the impact of a loved one’s behavior. Without self-compassion, even helpful tools can feel punitive or unsustainable. With it, participants are better able to tolerate discomfort, learn from setbacks, and continue making choices that support their well-being.

Psychologist **Dr. Kristin Neff** defines self-compassion as treating ourselves with the same care and understanding we would offer a close friend during a difficult time. Research shows that self-compassion is associated with greater emotional resilience, lower anxiety and depression, and increased motivation for healthy behavior change.

SMART Family & Friends tools reflect this research by encouraging curiosity rather than judgment—especially when emotions are intense or old patterns reappear.

The Three Core Principles of Self-Compassion

Dr. Neff describes self-compassion as three interrelated practices:

Self-Kindness (instead of Self-Judgment)

Responding to personal struggles with warmth and understanding rather than harsh self-criticism. In Family & Friends meetings, this often means noticing rigid or punishing self-talk and allowing space for learning rather than blame.

Common Humanity (instead of Isolation)

Recognizing that struggle, uncertainty, and imperfection are part of being human. Family & Friends meetings help counter shame and isolation by reminding participants that they are not alone in their experiences.

Mindfulness (instead of Over-Identification)

Noticing thoughts and emotions without being consumed by them. Tools such as Emotional Check-Ins, Anti-Awfulizing, and Pause and Allow help participants create space between what they feel and how they respond.

Why Self-Compassion Matters for Change

Research consistently shows that self-compassion supports motivation more effectively than self-criticism. People who practice self-compassion are more likely to persist after setbacks and re-engage with their goals.

For Family & Friends participants, self-compassion helps reduce burnout and supports values-based choices—even when circumstances with a loved one remain challenging.

Bringing the Science Into the Room

The science behind SMART Family & Friends is not meant to turn facilitators into clinicians or meetings into lectures. Its purpose is to explain why small shifts in thinking, language, and behavior can make a real difference, even when a loved one's behavior does not change.

Across CBT, ACT, CRAFT, and Motivational Interviewing, a consistent theme emerges: people are more likely to change when they feel respected, understood, and empowered to make their own choices. Awareness, flexibility, and compassion support growth far more effectively than pressure or judgment.

For facilitators, this science works mostly in the background. It helps explain why SMART Family & Friends emphasizes curiosity over certainty, skill-building over advice, and self-

compassion over self-criticism. It also reinforces why meetings are designed to be participant-led and adaptable to the needs of the people in the room.

SECTION 2

Section Two: Facilitating the Tools of SMART Family & Friends

This section is where SMART Family & Friends moves from ideas into practice, offering a flexible, repeatable way to support meaningful conversations week after week. It is designed to support facilitators in walking through the SMART Family & Friends tools week by week, tool by tool, in a way that feels consistent, grounded, and supportive for participants.

For many facilitators, especially those new to SMART, having a reliable structure matters. Participants benefit from knowing what to expect when they arrive at a meeting, and facilitators benefit from having a familiar rhythm to return to. Consistency helps create emotional support, reduces anxiety, and allows the group to focus on meaningful discussion rather than logistics.

Why Consistent Structure Matters

While no two meetings are ever the same, SMART Family & Friends meetings work best when they follow a consistent format. A predictable structure helps participants settle in, especially when emotions are high or life feels chaotic. Over time, this consistency builds trust, encourages participation, and reinforces the idea that meetings are a stable resource participants can return to week after week.

In this section, you'll find guidance on:

- The recommended meeting flow and why it works
- How to introduce tools in a way that invites exploration rather than instruction
- Common discussion points that help participants connect tools to real-life situations

The format offered here is not meant to be rigid. It is a framework you can rely on, especially as you are building confidence and fluency as a facilitator.

Using This Section as a Guide—Not a Script

The facilitator talking points and discussion guides that follow are starting points. They are meant to help you understand the *spirit* of each tool, what tends to be most helpful to emphasize, and where participants often get stuck.

You do not need to memorize language, deliver tools perfectly, or have all the answers. In fact, trying to do so often gets in the way of genuine connection.

As you facilitate over time, you will naturally:

- Develop your own language and style
- Learn which prompts resonate most with your group
- Adjust pacing based on participants' needs
- Become more comfortable letting discussions unfold organically

That process is not a detour—it *is* the journey of becoming a SMART facilitator.

You Don't Have to Know Everything

SMART Family & Friends does not expect facilitators to be experts. It expects them to be present, curious, and supportive. It is always okay to say, *"I'm not sure—let's explore that together,"* or to invite the group's wisdom into the conversation.

What you bring to the meeting—your authenticity, your curiosity, your willingness to learn alongside participants—is what makes each meeting unique. This section is here to support you as you find your footing, not to dictate exactly what to say or how to say it.

Use this guide as a steady companion. Over time, you'll make it your own.

A Consistent Structure for Every Meeting

Below is the recommended structure for all Family & Friends meetings.

Welcome, Opening Statement, and Group Guidelines (about 5 minutes)

Meetings begin with a brief welcome and opening statement to help participants settle in and transition into the meeting space. This is also when facilitators review group guidelines and reinforce expectations around respect, confidentiality, and choice. While printed or shared handouts may be used, facilitators should note that the most current versions of SMART Recovery meeting guidelines and handouts are always available on the SMART Recovery website.

Check-In (about 15 minutes)

The check-in gives participants an opportunity to briefly share what has been most present for them since the last meeting. This may include challenges, successes, questions, or simply how they are feeling that day. Sharing helps participants feel seen and heard and often surfaces themes that the group may want to explore more deeply.

Facilitators can remind participants that sharing is always optional and that listening is a valid and meaningful form of participation.

In some meetings, check-ins naturally spark discussion and may run longer than planned. That can be valuable. At the same time, facilitators should try to ensure there is still time in the meeting to explore SMART tools, which are a central part of the program. When needed, facilitators can gently guide the group back to the meeting agenda or encourage participants to keep check-ins brief so everyone has a chance to share.

If one participant begins speaking at length or dominating the discussion, facilitators can respectfully redirect the conversation. For example, you might say, *“Thank you for sharing that. Let’s pause there so we can hear from a few others as well.”* These small interventions help keep the meeting balanced while still honoring each person’s voice.

Tool-Focused Discussion and Activities (about 60 minutes)

The main portion of the meeting is devoted to exploring one or more SMART Family & Friends tools. This may include group discussion, guided reflection, brief activities, or demonstrations. The following pages provide facilitator talking points and discussion guides for each tool.

SMART tools are one of the main ways participants learn practical skills they can apply in their daily lives. For this reason, facilitators should aim to protect adequate time for tool-focused discussion whenever possible.

These scripts are starting points, not requirements. Feel free to adapt the timing, sequence of activities, and level of engagement based on your participants’ needs. The goal is not to “cover” material, but to foster a supportive, collaborative space where participants feel empowered to contribute in the way that works best for them.

Checkout and Closing (about 10 minutes)

Meetings typically end with a brief checkout, where participants can share a takeaway, reflection, or intention. Some facilitators choose to include a short mindfulness exercise during this time, such as those found in tools 4.4–4.6, to help participants leave feeling grounded and regulated.

Supporting SMART Recovery

SMART Recovery meetings are offered free of charge and are supported by donations from participants and the community. When At the close of the meeting, facilitators briefly invite participants to “pass the hat” or share other ways to support SMART Recovery and help cover

meeting expenses. Contributions are always voluntary, and no one should feel pressured to give.

Maintaining this consistent meeting format helps create a dependable structure for meaningful conversations. Within that format, facilitators and participants can explore tools together, learn from one another, and build skills over time.

How to Use the Guides That Follow

The pages ahead are here to help you lead SMART Family & Friends meetings with structure and confidence. Think of these guides as a **roadmap**, not a script.

Each guide follows a chapter in the *Family & Friends Participant Handbook* and includes:

- Suggested discussion topics
- Key ideas to highlight
- Sample facilitator language
- Reflection questions
- Approximate timing to help with planning

You don't need to memorize everything. You don't need to say it perfectly. The guides are there to support you.

Let the Group Guide the Pace

The suggested timeframes are just that, suggestions. In fact, you likely won't fit everything from a guide into a single meeting. The timing often adds up to more than an hour on purpose.

Some conversations will naturally go deeper. Others may move more quickly. Your job isn't to "cover" everything. Your job is to create space for meaningful discussion and skill-building.

You might:

- Focus on one discussion or tool and save the rest for next time
- Choose a single exercise from a section
- Pause mid-chapter and simply pick up where you left off the following week

There's no wrong way to move through the material. If the group is engaged and the conversation is helpful, you're on the right track.

Remember Your Role

You are not there to fix anyone, give advice, or have all the answers. You are facilitating.

That means:

- Introducing ideas in a clear, simple way
- Inviting reflection
- Encouraging participants to connect tools to their own experiences

Often, the most powerful insights come from participants responding to one another. You don't need the "perfect" words. You just need to create a respectful space for learning and exploration.

Use this Handbook as a Companion

It can help to review a chapter before your meeting or keep the handbook nearby as you facilitate. Over time, you'll grow more comfortable and rely on it less.

What matters most isn't whether you follow the guide exactly. What matters is that participants feel supported, respected, and empowered to explore what works for them. You're building confidence, both theirs and your own.

Note: The guides are labeled to match the chapters in the *Family & Friends Participant Handbook, 2nd Edition*. For example, the first guide is labeled **Chapter Two** because that is where the corresponding content appears in the handbook.

Chapter 2: First Steps

Discussion: System 1 & 2 Thinking (20 Min)

Read this section of the participants handbook together, then ask the following questions.

- What are some examples of ways you have used system 1 thinking?
- What are some benefits of system 1 thinking?
- What are some examples of system 2 thinking that you use?
- When thinking of your loved one, describe times you have noticed them using system 2 thinking.
- What areas of your own life would you like to begin incorporating more system 2 thinking?

Tool 2.1: Build understanding and empathy (30 Min)

Say to participants: Many family & friends may wonder why their loved one may engage in addictive behavior. People engage in addictive behaviors because they get something that they like, want, or need out of them. Even if those same behaviors have major downsides. This exercise is called Build Understanding and Empathy and will give us the opportunity to think about why they make the choices they do.

Key Points to highlight:

- People engage in addictive behaviors even when there is a downside.
- We may not agree with everyone else s decisions or choices.
- This tool is about the participants personal perception (good time to remind the participants that SMART is about Self Management and Recovery Training)

Step 1. Say to participants: I would like you to take a moment and review this list. How do you think your loved one would answer the question: what does my addictive behavior do for me?" Encourage the group to share.

A follow up question may be, when you are (fill in blank with the response they gave), what are some ways you may manage that?"

Step 2. Now that we have several reasons on our list that our loved one may engage in addictive behavior, note which ones are the top three."

Step 3. Reflecting on your list, how does this impact your understanding of your loved one?"

Discussion: The Words You Use Matter (20 Min)

Read the Words You Use Matter section of the participants handbook together, then ask the following questions.

- When looking at this list, what are some terms you may have heard others call your loved one?
- When you heard others use the "terms to avoid" list toward your loved one, how did you feel and what was your response?
- What are terms you may have used yourself?
- What are the potential benefits of changing the words we use?

Tool 2.2: Journaling (20 Min)

Read the *Journaling* section of the Participant Handbook together.

Then invite discussion with questions such as:

- What has your experience with journaling been, if any?
- How might journaling help you better understand your thoughts and emotions?
- When supporting your loved one, what might be helpful to write down?
- What concerns or barriers might get in the way of journaling?
- What could be the benefits of keeping a record of your progress and experiences?

Close by reinforcing that journaling is a flexible, personal tool. There are no rules – participants can use it in whatever way feels helpful and manageable.

Chapter 3 Change and Motivation

Tool 3.1: Your coping behaviors (20 Min)

Say to participants: Sometimes our relationships with our loved ones may feel like a roller coaster. We may feel like we've tried everything and nothing has worked. Some of those strategies may even be wearing us out. Let's take a look together at what strategies you have used by applying the Your Coping Behaviors tool.

Step 1. Ask the participants to give some examples of ways they have tried to change their loved ones behavior and the results. Write them down on a whiteboard.

Step 2. Ask the participants to give some examples of ways they have personally tried to cope with the situation and the results. Write them down on a white board.

Once all written out, and allowing for group interaction, you can ask follow up discussion questions:

- What benefits did you get when you tried to change your loved one?
- How do we break some of our own unhelpful habits?
- What may we replace them with?

Tool 3.2: Cost–Benefit Analysis (30 Min)

Say to participants:

Every coping behavior we engage in gives us something, otherwise we wouldn't keep doing it. For example, yelling at our loved one might temporarily relieve stress or release pent-up frustration. It may help us feel heard, powerful, or in control in that moment.

At some point, even if we didn't consciously think it through, the immediate benefit felt stronger than the cost. This tool helps us slow down and ask: "Is that still true today?"

Invite participants to choose a coping behavior they'd like to examine (for example: arguing, rescuing, checking up on a loved one, avoiding conversations).

Draw four boxes on a whiteboard (or virtual board):

When I Do the Behavior

- Benefits
- Costs

When I Don't Do the Behavior

- Benefits
- Costs

Invite the group to brainstorm while writing responses on the board. Encourage participants to note what resonates in their handbook.

Prompts to Guide Discussion

When I Do the Behavior

- What do I get in the short term?
- How does it help me feel?
- What are the downsides?

When I Don't Do the Behavior

- What might I gain long term?
- What feels uncomfortable or difficult about stopping?

After listing responses, say:

Note the long-term benefits and long-term costs. Where might short-term relief be competing with long-term goals?

Close with:

The goal isn't to force change – it's to see the full picture. Awareness helps us make more intentional choices.”

Discussion: Stages of Change (20 Min)

Say to participants: Change is a process that has various stages we may go in and out of before achieving our new normal. Even then, we may return occasionally to an old pattern of behavior.

Share the image of the stages of change in the handbook as you read the descriptions of each change.

Questions for the group:

- When thinking about a change you would like to make or one you are currently working on, what stage do you feel you are at?
- What are some changes you would consider yourself in contemplation about?
- What are some changes you have made in the past that you would consider are now in the maintenance stage? What motivated you to get there?
- When looking at a change you would like to make, what do you think can help you move from one stage to the next?

Tool 3.3: Check your readiness to change (20 Min)

Say to participants: Rating scales are often used in behavioral therapies to help us gain insight into what we might choose to explore further to enhance our motivation to change. When reflecting on where we are at with a change, we can use the tool Check your readiness to change.

Step 1. Ask the participants: on a scale from 0 to 10, how do you feel about changing your behavior? Zero being not considering change, all the way to 10, already changing?

As you listen to where participants are rating themselves, ask the follow up question: what would help you move forward?

If they have ideas on what would help them move forward, you can ask the follow up question of, have they begun to implement that idea? If they answer that they are not sure how to move forward, you may open it to the group on what they would do (or have done themselves).

Step 2. Ask the participants: on a scale of 0 to 10, zero is not important and 10 being very important, how important do you think it is for you to change?

Then ask the participants: on a scale of 0 to 10, zero is not important and 10 being very confident, how confident do you feel that you could change?

Some reminders:

From the handbook: Instead of focusing only on why you don't rate yourself higher on a given question, consider why you don't rate yourself lower. That can help you identify strengths that you can build on as you continue your change journey.

As some people may have a few things they may want to change, encourage they use this tool separately for each change.

Potential further discussion question for the group: What are ways that you have built confidence in the past?

Tool 3.4: Create a Change plan (20 min)

When you have decided you want to make a change and determined that you are ready, the Change Plan helps you put our plans into action.

Facilitator's Role:

- Focus on realistic, specific actions.
- Gently challenge vague goals (e.g., "Stop screaming matches" → "learn one new method to communicate" or "take a 10-minute walk after work").
- Reinforce strengths and creative ideas shared by participants

Discussion: Hula Hoop (10 min)

Say to participants: Sometimes it can be challenging to determine what is in our control and what isn't. Imagine you're standing inside a hula hoop. (Everyone else is, too.) This visual can

help remind you that what you can control is all inside your hula hoop. Everything outside of it is probably outside your control.

- What are some things you would consider in your control, or in your hula hoop?
- What are some examples of things outside of your hula hoop?
- How do you feel when we focus on things outside our hula hoop?
- How often are you in someone else's hula hoop? Are they in yours?

Chapter 4 Self-compassion and Self-Care

Discussion: Oxygen Mask (10 min)

Read the Remember Your Oxygen Mask section of the participants handbook together, then ask the following questions.

- Share a time you let you put your oxygen mask on last, or didn't put it on at all, and what were the results?
- What may be some mental or physical results of not putting your mask on first?
- What are potential benefits of putting your mask on first?
- What are some ways that you could practice using your oxygen mask?

Tool 4.1: Emotional Check-In (30 min)

Say to participants: When we begin adding self-care to our lives, it can be helpful to measure our progress and well-being. Keeping a record of your emotional state will let you monitor this over time and allow you to also determine what is working and what you may want to change. Today we will go over the Emotional Check-in."

Step 1-7. Ask the participants: on a scale from 0 to 10, zero being hopeless to 10 being hopeful, where are you at today? (repeat for each section)

As participants give scores, additional questions on each can be a mix or all of the following:

- What made you score that high / low today?
- If you would like to increase your own score, what are some ideas to implement that this week?

- If participants are at a higher bracket, what are some things you have done to feel more hopeful (or any of the 10" scores)?

Additional discussion questions

- As you review your personal scores, what stands out to you?
- What events today are positively or negatively impacting your ratings?
- What rating scales are impacting one or another for you? (their emotions may be tied to one incident)
- Instead of focusing on changing all 7 ratings, what are your top two you would like to work on this week?

Facilitator notes

This tool can help to untangle different emotions for participants. Unsafe and Anxious, for instance, may be related to one event, but encourage participants to rate each separately for that event.

This tool helps give language to various emotions. For example, a participant may be "angry" with their loved one, but on the scale, that can look like Frustrated or Hopeless.

Discussion: Ideas for Self-Care / Tool 4.2 Make Plans with yourself (30 min)

Say to the participants: Self-care is a way to help put your oxygen mask on you first by nurturing and resetting yourself. At SMART Family & Friends, we focus on self-management, rather than our loved one.

Discussion questions for the group:

- What does the term self-care mean to you?
- What are things you are doing for your self-care now?
- As you look at Ideas for self-care list in the handbook, what are some self-care ideas you may want to try?
- Why may it be helpful to have a few self-care ideas from different buckets?

Facilitator note:

As self-care can also include simply taking care of oneself as stress arises, you may also refer to the Regaining Your Health page at the end of this chapter.

Say to participants: The best way to consistently meet your own needs is by planning for them. That way, they won't get lost in the shuffle of other responsibilities that can feel urgent. Let's take a moment to reflect on what you need every day and only occasionally by using the tool Make Plans for yourself.

Step 1. Ask the question: What kind of self-care do you need every day?

Affirm participants on what they know is working for them.

Step 2. Ask the question: What once-in-a-while activities feel nurturing to you?

Affirm participants on what they know is working for them.

If you are short on time or have a large group, you also can ask both questions and have the participants answer one of the two questions, whichever resonates more.

Step 3. Ask the question: What are some activities you would like to do less of and how might you do this less?

Facilitator note

If they list something that is a part of their regular life, ie work, you can ask the following questions

- If this is something that you are unable to physically do less of right now, what are ways you could put less emphasis on it in your life?
- If this is something that you are unable to physically do less of right now, what are some benefits of continuing this activity? What other ways may you achieve these same benefits?

Step 4: Ask the question: What you'd like to do more of and how might you do this more?

Follow up question:

- When reviewing "how might you do this more" box, what are some things you can implement soon and what are things that may take additional planning?

If you are short on time or have a large group, you also can ask both questions and have the participants answer one of the two questions, whichever resonates more.

Tool 4.3: Practices Self-Compassion (15 Min)

Introduction

You say:

Supporting someone with addictive behavior can be exhausting. Many family members replay conversations, second-guess decisions, and blame themselves.

Self-compassion isn't about lowering standards or ignoring problems. It's about recognizing you're human, doing your best in a difficult situation, and allowing yourself to learn without constant self-criticism."

Highlight:

- Harsh self-judgment increases stress.
- Shame drains energy needed for healthy change.
- Self-compassion supports clearer thinking and steadier boundaries.

Step 1: What Gets in the Way? (4–5 Min)

Ask:

What makes it hard to be kind to yourself in this situation?"

Common themes may include:

- "I should have handled that better."
- "It's my fault."
- Fear that self-compassion means weakness or giving up.

Normalize responses and reinforce that self-compassion is a skill.

Step 2: A Simple Practice (4–5 Min)

You say:

One way to practice self-compassion is to respond to yourself the way you would to a friend."

Briefly introduce:

- **Self-Kindness:** I m doing the best I can.”
- **Common Humanity:** I m not alone in this.”
- **Mindfulness:** This is a hard moment.”

Keep it practical and grounded.

Step 3: Reflection (4–5 Min)

Ask:

- What is your usual self-talk after a tough interaction?
- What would it sound like if you spoke to yourself like a friend?
- How might self-compassion help you respond more effectively?

Closing

You say:

Self-compassion doesn't excuse behavior. It reduces unnecessary self-punishment so you can move forward with more clarity and strength.”

Invite participants to notice their inner voice this week and experiment with a small shift.

Tools 4.4, 4.5 & 4.6: Mindfulness and Meditation

Introduction

You say:

In this section of the handbook, you'll see three different practices: meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, and visualization. We're not going to do a full exercise right now. Instead, we'll explore what each one is and how it might support you.”

These tools are about helping your mind and nervous system settle so you can respond more intentionally especially during stressful moments with your loved one.”

Tool 4.4: Meditation Practice

Brief description:

Meditation is about paying attention on purpose. Often that means focusing on your breath or noticing thoughts and feelings without reacting to them. It's not about clearing your mind – it's about gently bringing your attention back when it wanders.”

Prompt:

- When might taking even one mindful breath help you pause before reacting?

Tool 4.5: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Brief description:

This practice involves slowly tightening and releasing different muscle groups. It helps you notice where you're holding tension and gives your body a signal that it's safe to relax.”

Prompt:

- Where do you tend to carry stress in your body?
- How might releasing physical tension affect how you respond emotionally?

Tool 4.6: Visualization Practice

Brief description:

Visualization uses your imagination to picture something calming or steady – a peaceful place, a supportive person, or even a future version of yourself handling a situation well. The brain often responds to vivid imagery similarly to real experience.”

Prompt:

- What kind of image or memory might help you feel steadier in a tough moment?

Closing Reflection

You say:

These are options – not requirements. You don't need to use all of them. You can learn more about them in your handbook”

Ask:

- Which of these might work for you?
- Which one feels realistic to try this week?

- What kinds of mindfulness or meditation practices have you experimented with, even briefly? What was that like for you?

Close with:

Self-care in SMART Family & Friends isn't selfish. It's self-full. It strengthens your ability to respond with clarity, steadiness, and intention."

Regaining Your Health (15 Minutes)

Introduction

You say:

Let's turn to the last page in Chapter 4 and look at the section called *Regaining Your Health*.

This section reminds us that focusing on your own well-being isn't selfish. When you strengthen your own health, you're better equipped to respond thoughtfully rather than react automatically."

Facilitator Note: You may want to invite the group to take turns reading this page aloud, or a few quiet minutes to review it individually.

After Reading – Guided Discussion

You say:

There's a lot here. You don't have to fix everything at once. Let's just explore what stands out."

Offer these prompts:

- As you read this, what area of your health might you pay a little more attention right now?
- This may feel overwhelming- that's normal. Where might you start small, just one manageable step?
- Which suggestion feels realistic for you this week?

If helpful, add:

Remember, this isn't about dramatic life changes. Small changes count."

Ask:

- What is one small action you might consider trying before our next meeting?

Close with:

Practice, patience, and persistence apply to self-care too. You get to decide the pace.”

Chapter 5 Inner Dialogue

Discussion: Changing your vocabulary (20 Min)

Say to participants: Upset feelings can be caused by the way we are thinking about what is happening, not by the events themselves. To help change your feelings, and possibly behaviors, we are going to discuss the Changing Your Vocabulary page in the handbook.

Step 1. Say to participants: As you look through the first section titled “words”, what word stands out to you personally? Based on the word you chose, how might you feel if you used the “try this” section instead?

Step 2. Say to participants: Now let’s look through the section titled “thoughts”. What phrases resonate with you? What are some additional new “try this” phrases that you can come up with?

Step 3. Say to participants: And lastly, let’s look through the emotions section? Are there any that catch your attention? What are some other descriptions that you feel may capture your emotions in a more complete and accurate way?

Facilitator notes

Emphasize that none of these words are inherently good or bad and are all valid words that can be used as appropriate.

Note on the emotions section: Emphasize that when we are using the words “anxious” or “depressed”, we are not specifically discussing clinically diagnosed disorders. This is discussing the non-clinical versions of these words.

Tool 5.1: Three ways to Anti-Awfulize (25 Min)

Say to participants: As humans, we’re all prone to exaggeration. But when we start to believe our own exaggerations, we can lose perspective. We see life more realistically when we expand our focus. And it usually makes our problems feel more manageable. We’re not suggesting you

deny or minimize the truth. Real distress and discomfort are facts of life, and we need to recognize them. A tool for de-escalating upsets is the Anti-Awfulizing tool. With practice, this tool can be used in the moment when you are feeling distressed or overwhelmed.

Step 1. Say to participants: We are going to start with a rating. Think of the last time you felt something was awful” or terrible”. On a scale of 0 being ok” to 10 being horrific”, where would you put that event?

Step 2. Say to participants: Now let s examine that event. I would like a participant, if you are open, to answer one of the following questions about that event.

- Could that event have gotten worse?
- How often did it actually happen/did it last?
- Were you able to actually tolerate it?

Step 3. Say to participants: Now after examining that event, let s put it into a larger perspective. Who would like to share, what have you experienced or observed that you would rate as more difficult than that event? What would you say your absolute 10 is on your rating scale?

Facilitator notes: Affirm participants’ responses who are willing to share what their “10” is. This tends to bring up a wide range of experiences, from losing a job to the death of a loved one.

Emphasize that these ratings are personal. There is no universal “10.” What feels overwhelming for one person may feel different for someone else.

Step 4. Say to participants:

“Last, let’s see if we can focus on an antidote. Think back to the situation you described. Can you answer one of these questions?”

- What good, if anything, was happening at the same time?
- Is there anything positive that could come from this experience?

Follow-Up Questions for Discussion

- How has your initial rating changed now that you’ve stepped back and looked at the situation from a different perspective?

- When you think about your original rating, how intense was your **reaction** compared to the event itself?
For example, if the event felt like a 7, did your reaction feel closer to a 10?
- What are some personal takeaways from this tool?

Discussion: Resisting invitations to guilt and self-blame / Tool 5.2: Recognize invitations to guilt and self-blame (40 Min)

Say to participants: A way that we may be upsetting ourselves is through guilt and self-blame. Let's review that page in the handbook and discuss how this may be showing up for you.

Step 1. Ask for readers to read the first section and the two blue example boxes.

Step 2. Ask the following questions:

- Who here resonates with the quotes in those boxes? Either you have heard it or said it to yourself? What did it look like for you?
- While it's normal to have some regrets or make different choices, what are some impacts of excessive guilt and self-blame? (you can also have someone, or yourself, read some of the impacts directly from the handbook).
- How did you manage those feelings in the past?

Step 3. Say to participants: Now let's review some ideas for letting go of this guilt and self-blame.

- You can start by asking the group:
- What have you done for yourself to help with letting go?
- If you have tried the self-compassion tool, what have you practiced there that can help as you learn to let go?

Have the group read parts or all of the bullet pointed section of the handbook.

Step 4. Say to participants: When we get an invitation, we have the choice to RSVP yes or no. Now that we have discussed how they make us feel, we want to recognize what those invitations may look like. They can come from our loved one, ourselves, or others. Let's take a few moments to reflect on ones we may have received in the past.

Step 5. Say to participants: When have you been invited to guilt and self-blame? What was your response at the time?

Step 6. Say to participants: How much as guilt or self-blame influenced your relationship?

Step 7. Say to participants: If you let go of guilt and self-blame, what would change? (affirm responses)

Step 8. Say to participants: What would help you to let go? Is this something that you could work towards?

Chapter 6 Managing Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviors

Explanation: The ABC s of REBT (10 Min)

For Facilitators: Ask for volunteers to read through the example given at the beginning of the chapter.

Discussion: Helpful vs Unhelpful Beliefs (30 Min)

After reading the few paragraphs under this section in the handbook (yourself or asking for volunteer readers), here are a few discussion questions first:

- What is an unhelpful belief you have held in the past?
- How did holding onto that unhelpful belief affect you?
- How did you change this unhelpful belief?

Next: Share the list of the unhelpful beliefs and read the 4 categories of unhelpful beliefs after the list. Ask the following discussion:

- Which unhelpful belief from the list resonates with you?
- What category would you put this belief in?
- How would you be able to incorporate the associated helpful belief in your life?

Reminder for facilitators: participants are all different so the reasons why or how these examples resonate with them will be different. This is the time to affirm where the participants are in their journey with their loved one.

Close by asking for volunteers to read the Helpful thinking section including the last paragraph regarding helpful thinking not being the same as "positive" thinking.

Additional questions:

In thinking of an unhelpful belief you hold, what would it feel like to change this to a more helpful belief?

What is a way you can move toward changing that unhelpful belief?

Discussion: Disputing Unhelpful beliefs (30 Min)

If you have not already done so, read the ABC/ REBT example at the beginning of the chapter. Once you have either read this or reminded the group of this example say: Today we are going to expand the ABC s to include D and E. Dispute the belief and Effective thinking change. There are several ways we can dispute an unhelpful belief. One way is by asking ourselves a question from the 3 categories listed in the chapter.

Then ask the following discussion question:

- What is an unhelpful belief that you may have or have had? (As a follow up, ask one or two of the questions from the list i.e.: where is the evidence that supports this belief? Even if this is true, is it possible for me not to be upset about it?)

Next say: Another way to dispute our unhelpful beliefs is one of these 5 categories in this section of the handbook.

When we consider the times we have been upset, does any of our thinking fall into one, or more of these categories?

- Which category resonates with you the most?
- If you are comfortable, is someone willing to share an example of when your belief was demanding in nature? (you can continue to ask for examples for each bucket).

Facilitator Note:

- Whether you have done the helpful and unhelpful beliefs discussion, you can use the examples from that list, in addition to any that are brought up by the group, as examples of D and E.

- You can also use Tool 6.2 as a guideline for this discussion practice or let the participants know where to find this practice tool in the handbook.

Tool 6.1: ABC Exercise (30 Min)

You say: Sometimes we may feel sad, angry, or upset. Practicing the ABC tool is a way for us to manage our own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Let's work through this tool as a group.

Facilitator note: Feel free to use the example provided with the tool (and what we will use for this example) or use an upset that a participant has brought up. You can use a whiteboard or the editable tool from the website.

Step 1. If you are using the example with the tool, you say "in this example, we are parents who has a daughter that has come home obviously drunk"

Start with C (Consequences):

- What are some of the feelings you would have?
- If anger, what would this look like in your house? (yelling? Fighting? Cold shoulder?)
- If sad, what would be your reaction? (crying? pleading?)

If using the tool example, A (Activating Event) would be the daughter coming home obviously drunk. If using an example from the group, ask clarifying questions to be able to write down details of what was happening at the time.

- What led to the upset?
- What was the most upsetting part?

Then explore B (Beliefs):

- What are you telling yourself at that moment?
- What thoughts made you feel angry? Sad? Scared?

Now move to D (Dispute):

- Turn the unhelpful beliefs into questions
- Which of those thoughts were unhelpful?

- How could you challenge them?
- What s a more helpful belief?

Finally, reflect on E (Effective New Belief):

- With this new belief, how do you feel?
- What are new or different ways to respond to our loved one?
- What are things you can do for yourself when you are upset?

Facilitator s Role:

- Write responses down as you go.
- Encourage honesty without pressure.
- Highlight the emotional and behavioral shift between C and E.

Step 3: Encourage Practice and Reflection You Say: You can use the ABC tool anytime you have an upset. Over time, it helps you catch and challenge the beliefs that are causing emotional distress."

Optional Reflection Questions:

- What part of this process stood out to you?
- How might it help to pause and challenge your thinking next time?
- What s one situation where you might try using ABC this week?

Chapter 7 Positive Communication

Discussion: Types of communication -Includes Nonverbal Communication (30 min)

Say to participants: Many of us may find it hard to communicate with our loved ones in a way that benefits and nurtures both parties. When addictive behavior is layered in, it can impact all communication. Great news! Our communication style is in our control. Today, let s focus on nonverbal communication and different communication styles. Some research says that 80% of what we communicate is nonverbal. Let s look at this first.

Questions for participants:

- What are some examples of nonverbal communication you use?

- What do you notice the most when others communicate with you?
- In your last positive interaction with your loved one, what nonverbal communication did you use?
- How can you incorporate that in your next interaction?
- When you are upset, what nonverbal communication do you use the most?
- How might you improve your nonverbal communication skills?

Facilitator notes:

You can also bring up this section in the handbook to go over additional tips offered there.

Discussion: Communication Styles (30 min)

Say to participants: It is often suggested that there are 4 major communication styles. By understanding, not only your style, but also that of your loved one, you may be able to communicate more effectively with them. You may also find that you may share aspects of several styles depending on the situation. Let's reflect on these 4 styles.

Facilitator notes:

- It's important to note, however, that not everyone perceives communication the same way. This can be particularly true for neurodivergent individuals.
- Share the page from the handbook and ask for readers of each box.
- Remind participants that there is no "right or wrong" style, but instead to use this as a tool to better understand themselves.

Discussion Questions:

- After reading through these different styles, what do you feel most aligns the way you communicate?
- Is there something about your style that you think is a strength in certain situations?
- Which do you use when you feel comfortable and in control?
- How about when you're at your most stressed?
- Is there something about this style you would like to change?

- When thinking of your loved one, what style most fits them?
- Now reflecting on your style and your loved ones, how might that impact the way you communicate with them?

Discussion: Motivation Interviewing / OARS (30 min)

Say to participants: You may have noticed: People hate being told what to do. Telling someone what to do often makes them defensive. If you've ever pleaded with or threatened your loved one to change, you may have experienced this. And when you're hoping a loved one will change, that reaction is not what you want. Motivational interviewing is a particular way of talking with people about change and growth using four elements: partnership, acceptance, compassion, and empowerment.

Step 1. In the MI page of the handbook, ask for a reader for the "start practicing" bullet points.

Discussion Questions:

- What practice feels the most challenging?
- Which of these practices can you incorporate easiest?

Step 2. Share the OARS page with the group. Say to participants: OARS is a helpful way to remember key practices of motivation interviewing.

Discussion Questions:

- When you are in a calm discussion, is there anything on this list that you incorporate now?
- Reflection on the last time you had a stressful conversation, which one you think would have been helpful?
- Would anyone like to share which one they plan on starting to practice?

Facilitator Note: How to Approach this Section (Planning for positive communications)

The tools in this section on Planning for positive communications build on one another. They are designed to work together.

Rather than treating them as isolated exercises, consider presenting them as parts of a single communication skill set. If time allows, you might even consider including Reflective Listening from the next chapter in the series, or break these into two meetings.

You may want to devote an entire meeting to this topic. Positive communication is foundational in SMART Family & Friends. It affects boundaries, reinforcement, and how conflict unfolds. Giving it space allows participants to:

- Understand the structure
- See how the tools connect
- Practice in manageable ways
- Ask questions about real-life situations

You might say to the group:

These tools work best together. Today we'll look at how they connect and how they can support more intentional conversations."

Communication patterns develop over time. Practicing new ones takes patience.

on and tool: PIVA

Facilitator Framing

You say:

The tools in this chapter build on one another. They are not separate communication tricks. They form a skill set."

We begin with listening. Then we practice asking open-ended questions. Then we learn to reflect. Finally, we use PIVA to plan intentional conversations."

These tools are designed to work together."

Step 2: Introduce PIVA as the Integration Tool (8–10 Minutes)

You say:

PIVA brings these skills together when you want to plan a meaningful conversation."

PIVA stands for:

- **Positive intention**
Start with care and clarity about the relationship.

- **I-statements**
Speak from your experience rather than blaming.
- **Validate**
Acknowledge your loved one's perspective, even if you disagree.
- **Ask**
Make a clear, respectful request.

You might say:

PIVA helps you lower emotional intensity and increase the chance of being heard. It does not guarantee the outcome. It increases the odds of a productive exchange."

Step 3: Apply to a Real Scenario (5–7 Minutes)

Invite participants to think of a manageable conversation, not the most explosive topic.

Guide reflection:

- What is your positive intention?
- How could you frame this using an I-statement?
- What might your loved one be feeling that you could validate?
- What is one reasonable request you could ask?

Encourage writing in the handbook.

Remind:

You cannot control their response. You can control how you prepare and how you show up."

Closing Reflection

Ask:

- Which of these communication tools feels most natural?
- Which feels most challenging?
- How might using these together shift the long-term dynamic?

You say:

These skills take practice. Small improvements in communication can change the emotional tone of a relationship over time.”

Practice, patience, and persistence apply here.”

Chapter 8 Reflective Listening

Tool 8.1: Simply Listen (45 Min)

Step 1. Say to participants: In our last chapter we focused on ways that we communicate including motivation interviewing. Motivational interviewing requires us to ask questions and then really listen. Too often we aren't really listening to people we're talking with. How often have you already thought of a solution for a friend's problem before they even finish asking you for help? Instead of listening, we're too busy reacting, judging, providing solutions, or disagreeing. Let's work on an exercise today called Simply Listen. We will be paired in groups of two for this one.

Facilitator notes:

- Ask, if comfortable, that people pair with individuals they do not know as well.
- If you are online, you will be using the breakout rooms for this exercise.
- If you are in person, you can ask someone to be the timekeeper.
- If there is an extra person, you can pair with that person.

Step 2. Here are the instructions for the exercise.

- There is a Speaker and Listener to start.
- Each speaker will get 2 minutes to talk.
- The listener's role is to not speak for those 2 minutes.
- After the 2 minutes are done, the listener has 1 minute to practice affirmations and summary statements based on what was said.
- Then you will switch. The listener will become the speaker and vice versa.
- The topic that everyone will use to discuss is to talk about a time you overcame a challenge.

Step 3. When everyone is back in the room (in person or on online), you will open it up to ask the following questions - taken directly from the tool:

- What did you notice while you were listening?
- What feelings or sensations did you notice?
- What thoughts did you have?
- How strong was the pull to talk or comment or plan your response?
- Did you experience anything positive while simply listening?
- As the speaker, what was the experience like to be listened to uninterrupted?

Tool 8.2: Create Open-Ended Questions & Tool 8.3: Form Reflective Statements

Facilitator notes:

These tools are both good as practice for the participants, or to follow directions as a group directly from the handbook.

Reflection Questions for the group:

- Which example did you find the most challenging to rewrite?
- How do you think your loved one will respond if you begin using open ended questions or reflective listening?

Chapter 9 Safety and Support

Discussion: What is violent behavior (30 min)

Say to participants: Today we will be discussing the topic of violence. Addictive behaviors can result in violence. Violence includes verbal, psychological, and physical abuse. Even if things are fine right now, you probably recognize the potential for violence in your life. It could be between you and your loved one or a byproduct of the addictive behavior.

Discussion Questions:

- When I say "violence", if you feel comfortable sharing, what has been your personal experience?

- How did you manage during the times of violence?
- If you are in a safe place now, how were you able to remove yourself from that situation?
- What do you think is the most common type or examples of violence you have come across?
- Are you currently in a situation you would like support to remove yourself from?

Facilitator notes:

This may be a difficult or uncomfortable conversation to have with the group. Remind the participants that this is a supportive space. If you do not have a lot of engagement, you can also begin the conversation by sharing the examples directly from the handbook and ask how they would handle these examples if they came up.

Tool 9.1: Develop a Support Network (20 min)

Say to participants: As we consider navigating a loved one's addictive behavior, we may have noticed that we have become isolated. This may include no longer accepting invitations with friends to go out, or just feeling disconnected altogether. Possibly out of shame or fear of judgement. Isolation can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and a loss of perspective. Developing and maintaining a support network is an important form of self-care. Let's work through the tool Develop a Support Network and see what ideas we may come up with.

Step 1. Either write on your screen or on a white board some of the answers to the questions in the tool. If you do not have either options, you can also use the questions as open discussion.

Follow up questions for reflection:

- If someone is ok with sharing, did you struggle with thinking of responses for the questions in this tool?
- If there is a question you would like to work on further for yourself, which one and what steps would you take?
- Were there any surprises as we filled this out?
- Are there any other tools that may help in working on these questions more? (examples change plan; ABC; practice self compassion)

Discussion: Develop a safety plan (20 min)

Say to participants: Today we are going to be discussing how to develop a safety plan. Even if our loved one has never been violent, a safety plan is like having an insurance policy. We have it and hope to never use it.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some safety plan basics that you think might be helpful?
- How do you think a support network could help?
- What are some resources in your area that you would be able to utilize?
- What are some online or app based resources you might be able to use?
- What are some red flags you may be looking for?

Facilitator notes:

You may also choose to have volunteer readers for this page in the hand book and then ask specific questions from the above list.

Chapter 10 Setting and Protecting Healthy Boundaries

Discussion: Boundary topics - first 3 pages of this chapter in the handbook (60 min)

Facilitator notes:

This discussion is going to use questions interspersed with the handbook.

We start with questions.

Discussion Questions:

- When I say the word boundaries, what comes to mind?
- What do healthy boundaries look like?
- What are boundaries you may already have in place?
- How do you currently communicate boundaries?

- Who benefits from boundaries? (parents, spouses, children, friends, peers, colleagues - examples if they are not named)
- Who is currently struggling with setting boundaries?
- What is a reason that you may not have previously set a boundary or protected one you had in place?

Say to participants: Thank you all for sharing. Chapter 10 of the handbook is all about boundaries. Now that we have had some discussion, let's take a look at some of the highlights from the handbook.

Facilitator notes:

You have the choice of having volunteer readers read the first two pages of the chapter or you may summarize the section. Below will be high level summaries with follow up questions you can use regardless of if you choose to read as a group or summarize.

Summary (opening paragraph, what are boundaries, healthy boundaries):

Boundaries are how we define reasonable, safe, and permissible ways for other people to behave with us. Clear boundaries help us minimize miscommunication and enjoy healthier relationships. Boundaries are not about the other person or their actions. They are about ourselves. We have value and are worthy of safety. Safety can be physical, mental, financial, or any other ways you define it for yourself. They are there to help protect us.

Questions:

- What are some examples of healthy boundaries?
- Are there any boundaries that you are considering putting in place?

Summary (Unhealthy boundaries, What boundaries are and aren't):

When we think of unhealthy boundaries, that may mean that we let people override them to keep the peace or maintain a relationship. Boundaries are not brick walls - they are fences. They mark out personal space, rights, and preferences. They're not a way to keep people out. They are there to be able to continue a relationship with someone in a healthy way.

Questions:

- Would anyone like to share a time that someone crossed a boundary?
- How did that feel and what was the result?

Summary (what sort of person has boundaries, identifying issues with boundaries):

As we covered in the beginning of the discussion, all people have a sense of how they wish to be treated, so all people have boundaries. If we don't practice communicating boundaries regularly, we may be frustrated when others violate them. We also may not be communicating them because we are unsure if a boundary needs to be addressed.

Question:

- What are some physical signs that a boundary needs to be addressed?
- What are some emotional signs that a boundary may need to be reviewed?

(a list is in the handbook that you can also point to after participants share)

Summary (who benefits from talking about boundaries, how to establish healthy boundaries):

As previously mentioned, we may have held back in communicating boundaries to avoid drama or it seems easier. It also may be a difficult conversation to have. But realistically, avoiding addressing the issues only prolongs them. There is also a benefit to our loved one. It is a chance to communicate specific problems and request alternate behaviors. It also can open dialogue with them to discuss what their boundaries are. Honoring their boundaries sets a positive tone in the relationship.

Let's all look at the handbook to review the steps of how to establish healthy boundaries. (If you cannot share the page with the group, you can also just read it out loud or have it pre-written on a white board).

Question:

- After reviewing these steps, which step do you find the most challenging?
- What do you think you can work on this week?
- How do you feel about being able to set up boundaries after this discussion?

Tool 10.1: Practice Positive Reinforcement & Tool 10.2: Create Affirmations (30 min)

Say to participants: One of the gentlest ways to start reinforcing boundaries is to affirm behavior you appreciate. It's often easier to notice when someone violates our boundaries than when someone respects them. But taking time to acknowledge positive behaviors can help

your loved one feel more open and accepted. To help work on these skills we are going to cover two tools today that work really well hand in hand.

Facilitator notes:

- These two tools work really well together, but if you are short on time or want to focus on only one, that is an option as well.
- These can be done by sharing a screen with the tools and writing down the answers or you may choose to complete these tools verbally.
- You may also give participants to fill out their copies of the tool (via handouts or in their book) and their responses as a group.

Step 1. Say to participants: Let s start with practicing positive reinforcement. This is Tool 10.1 in the handbook. (Describe whether you will be writing them down for the group, verbally reviewing the questions, or having them write down their answers ahead of time).

Step 2. Sharing your screen or verbally communicating the questions on Tool 10.1 As you go through the three questions with the group, affirm their responses. If anyone needs suggestions, this is an opportunity to open it up to the group for brainstorming.

Step 3. Say to participants: Now that we have covered several ways to practice positive reinforcement, let s think about affirmations. Affirmations are ways you can verbally reinforce behavior you appreciate. They also help people around us feel loved, even when our relationships are challenging.

Step 4. Sharing your screen or verbally communicating the questions on Tool 10.2 As you go through the first section of this tool, affirm what is being shared.

Step 5. The bottom of this tool is a helpful way to think about what affirmation they would like to use during the week and then going through the questions with the group at the next meeting. Say to participants: During this week, I would like for each of you to set a goal of providing one affirmation a day for a week. You can practice on anyone, not just your loved one. Next meeting we will discuss the effects you may have noticed.

Discussion: Communicating a boundary effectively & Tool 10.3: Practice Communicating Boundaries (40 min)

Say to participants: Now that we have learned what a boundary is and practiced how to positively reinforce them, let s take a closer look at how to communicate a boundary effectively.

Let's start with a quick refresher. What is a boundary?

Facilitator notes:

Allow multiple participants to respond to this question. Affirming and clarifying as you receive responses. If not brought up by participants, here are the high level boundary details to cover before reviewing this section:

- Everyone has boundaries
- Boundaries are fences, not brick walls
- Boundaries are a way to continue a healthy relationship with another person
- Boundaries are about your safety (physical, mental, financial, etc) not about the other person.

Step 1. Say to participants: Thank you all for sharing and covering what boundaries are.

Step 2. You can either ask for readers or summarize the first paragraph in the handbook under "communicating a boundary effectively"

Step 3. Whether summarizing the paragraph or reading it outloud, share the example of the inform - request model in the handbook, including the two examples given.

Step 4. Either read the last few paragraphs after the examples or summarize: While the examples in the handbook are in the form of questions, you may choose to use statements. Another option may include eliminating the word "you". There is no right or wrong way to word your boundary request. You get to decide the language that works for you and your loved one.

Discussion Questions:

What is a boundary you think you might like to put in place?

What do you think the response would be if you communicated using this model?

What are some examples of reactions you may get when you communicate a boundary?

What are some other tools you may use to help prepare you?

How often is it helpful to communicate a boundary?

If you have ever crossed someone else's boundary, what was your reaction?

How were you able to discuss it with the person afterwards?

Step 5. You have an option to read the several paragraphs under what happens when you communicate a boundary, or you can use the above discussion questions to cover the material in the handbook.

- Here are the high-level points in the paragraphs in case any are missed during the participants responses:
- Boundaries are sensitive for both people involved
- Resistance is normal
- Lean on tools like PIVA and I-statements in chapter 7.
- You may need to communicate a new boundary multiple times.
- Your immediate safety is first. It is ok to postpone a boundary conversation not going well. If you receive a violent response or behavior, engage your safety plan.
- You have a right to hold and express your preferences through boundaries and are not obligated to defend them.

Step 6. Say to participants: Sometimes it is easier to start with small boundaries before you move on to bigger ones. Let's go over tool 10.3: practice communicating boundaries. As a group, would anyone like to share what is a small boundary you would like to communicate?

Step 7. As people share their small boundaries, you can walk them through the 3 columns: Who, What, and How.

Step 8. Say to participants: Wonderful, thank you all for sharing. Are there larger boundaries you may want to communicate with practice? (you may also give this out as something to think about over the week and come to the next meeting ready to go over the Who, What, How portion if you do not have any participant examples yet).

Discussion: When boundaries aren't respected (40 Min)

Say to participants: Sometimes we can communicate a boundary and they are not respected. That can lead to us feeling hurt, frustrated, or helpless. Protecting a boundary may need a plan too. Let's discuss what options we have in these situations.

Discussion Questions:

- How do you feel when someone does not respect your boundary?

- How have you reacted in the past?
- What was the outcome?

Say to participants: As we look at chapter 10 in the handbook, under "when boundaries aren't respected", we can see a list to work through.

Facilitator notes:

As you cover the 4 levels of the list, you can either have a reader, simply share on your screen, or you can verbalize them.

Follow up question:

- How would doing an ABC exercise help you?
- What do you think the reaction will be like if you communicate with your loved one how their behavior affects you?
- Do you have plans for how you would protect your boundary?

Say to participants: As we look at the last one, follow through on your plan to protect your boundary, what has that previously looked like in the past? How often have you taken this action in the past?

Facilitator notes:

As you listen to the responses, remember to affirm the participants. If their responses were not as helpful (i.e. yelling) you can follow up with the question: What was the outcome of (yelling or other unhelpful behavior)?

Say to participants: Inform - request model for communicating a boundary can be slightly adjusted to communicate a boundary violation. It now becomes the inform - remind - inform model. The first "inform" stays the same, while the "request" becomes "remind". Remind the other person of what you originally requested. Now add that if they are unwilling to follow the request then you will take protective action.

Facilitator notes:

You can read / share this directly from the handbook including the examples.

Follow up question:

- How might your interactions change if you used this inform - remind - inform model?

- What are some protective actions you may choose to take?

Tool 10.4: Communicate a protective action (30 Min)

Step 1. Say to participants: Let's practice using the inform - remind- inform model. In these examples, we will pretend that we set an initial boundary and these are examples of ways they were not being respected. We will take 2-3 of these examples and then turn them into an inform-request-inform sentence.

Step 2. If you have a small group, you may choose to complete all 5 examples.

Step 3. Follow up question:

- What were some insights you are taking away from the inform-remind-inform model?
- How might this look if the boundary is with a spouse or partner?
- How does this change when we think of boundaries for adult children?
- What are things we may consider if they are dependent/ under 18?
- What might a boundary look like if the person does not live with us?

Chapter 11 Recovering from Mistakes

Discussion: Lapses and relapses / Learning from lapses/relapses (30Min)

Say to participants: Implementing change is hard work and few people do it perfectly. Lapses and relapses to old patterns of behavior is normal for any of us when making changes. Let's discuss what that may look like for us.

Discussion Questions:

- What is the difference between a lapse and a relapse? (you can highlight that the difference is time and intention - temporary vs returning to completely to an old pattern of behavior)
- What are some examples of lapses?
- If someone feels comfortable sharing, when was the last time you may have lapsed during a process change and how did you overcome it?

- Does a lapse mean a relapse is coming?
- What can cause a lapse?

Say to participants: Thank you all for sharing. As you shared, there are various things we may lapse from, and it also doesn't mean we have to return to old patterns of behavior. There are 3 big steps we can take to learn from a lapse. We can accept what happened, even if we are uncomfortable or unhappy about it. We can ask ourselves, "why did it happen?", and then we can ask "what would we do differently?".

Facilitator notes:

- When covering "why did it happen", remind participants that practicing self-discovery is not the same as ruminating on the negative. This question is focused on triggers.
- Feel free to use some of the discussion questions below and/or the "find the why" questions in the handbook, as well as "envision what could be different".

Discussion Questions:

- Accepting what happened can be difficult, what are some tools you can use to challenge any self-defeating thoughts? (ABC, Vocab exchange, etc.)
- Were there any events leading up to the lapse?
- What are some steps we can take to do something differently?
- What are some emotions that come up when you or your loved one lapses?

Tool 11.1: Explore ambivalence (15 min)

Say to participants: Lapses are a natural reflection of our ambivalence to change. Ambivalence is the experience of wanting two conflicting things at the same time. Even when we are committed to change, we are bound to have moments, hours, or weeks where we doubt our path. Even when we know the benefits. Let's review the tool Explore Ambivalence.

Facilitator notes: This can be used as a discussion tool by asking the group the 6 questions. You also give the group a few minutes to write down answers on their own and then share as a group.

Tool 11.2: Reflect on your loved one's ambivalence (20 min)

Say to participants: Now that we have focused on our own ambivalence, let's look at it from our loved one's perspective using the tool "reflect on your loved one's ambivalence".

Step 1. Say to participants: When we think of our loved ones' addictive behavior, we may only see the drawbacks. So what would be the reasons to change?

Step 2. Say to participants: What would be reasons not to change?

Facilitator notes:

The second question may be more challenging for participants initially. Affirm their responses, and clarify that this is our perspective on their lived experience.

Step 3. Ask the next 3 questions of the tool for group discussion.

Step 4. Say to participants: Now that we have thought about our loved ones' ambivalence, let's think about how we react when we witness it.

Step 5. The last two questions can be asked for further discussion.

Tool 11.3: Revisit your motivation (15 Min)

Say to participants: As family & friends, we may be disheartened when we don't immediately see improvements or changes around us. We can become demotivated to continue and slip back to our old ways of behaving. It may have been a little bit since you reviewed your personal change plan from chapter 3, but this is a good time to revisit some of the things we planned to put in place for ourselves. The tool "revisit your motivation" has 5 questions that can help. Let's go through them one by one as a group.

Follow up question:

After answering these questions, are there any changes you want to make to your change plan? Do you want to create a new change plan?

Chapter 12 Optimizing your Behavior

Discussion: Identifying unhelpful behaviors & Tool 12.1: Who are you helping? (30 Min)

Say to participants: At times we may feel that we've taken on managing our loved one's behavior, if not our loved ones themselves. We have developed our own coping strategies, including what we felt, helping our loved one when it felt important or where it prevented problems. Some in the recovery community may call this action "enabling". Instead, we are

going to encourage the use of helpful or unhelpful behaviors or even productive or counterproductive. We can't change our loved ones, but we may be able to influence their choice.

Facilitator notes:

- You may choose to either read the paragraphs under "identifying unhelpful behaviors" as a group, or you may choose to ask the following discussion question to understand the same info.
- Remind participants that what may be unhelpful/unproductive for some people, may be helpful/productive for their experience.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some examples of unhelpful behaviors you may have tried in the past?
- What was the outcome of using those unhelpful behaviors?
- When does a "helpful" behavior become "unhelpful"?
- What works in a healthy relationship that may become unproductive when addictive behaviors are present?

Facilitator notes:

- If able, share on the screen or pass out, Tool 12.1
- You may also decide to consider only some of these on the list, instead of all. May depend on how much time or participants you have in the meeting.

Say to participants: When we consider helpful vs unhelpful behaviors, we may also see that sometimes, long-term damage can come from short term wins. Let's look through this list together and decide, for each of these activities, is this helping them or helping you?

Discussion: Natural consequences (20 min)

Say to participants: Now let's look at natural consequences. The problem with unhelpful behaviors isn't the behaviors themselves. It's that they prevent your loved one from experiencing natural consequences.

Facilitator notes:

- You may choose to either read the paragraphs under “Natural consequences” as a group, or you may choose to ask the following discussion question to understand the same info.

Discussion Questions:

- When considering our unhelpful behaviors, what does our loved one take away when we do them?
- What would happen if we did not do those behaviors and instead allowed for natural consequences?
- What would it feel like if you allowed natural consequences to occur?
- How do you think your loved one would react in the short term and long term if you did not continue your unhelpful pattern?

Facilitator notes:

- Either read as a group or have someone read “Be a lighthouse”
- You may choose to either read the paragraphs under “Why pleading doesn’t help” & “consequences for you” as a group, or you may choose to ask the following discussion question to understand the same info.

Discussion Questions:

What has been the result in the past of pleading with your loved one?

How do you feel when you are fixing things for, protecting, and pleading with your loved one?

How do you think you would feel if you stopped those unhelpful behaviors?

Tool 12.2: Pause and allow (15 min)

Say to participants: At times, we may feel overwhelmed, hurt, upset, or frustrated when we are in an argument or situation with our loved one. We are going to go over the Pause and Allow tool.

Facilitator notes:

- You may choose to either go through this tool as discussion, one question at a time, or have participants write their answers out and you can discuss afterwards.
- If you do not have participants that want to share a common argument or situation, some examples may be: Your loved one is not cleaning up after themselves after you agreed to chore duties; Your loved one lied to you.
- On Step 3. Which of your values can anchor you in this moment, you may want to spend a few minutes and ask the group to define their values.

Tool 12.3: Brainstorm behavior alternatives (15 min)

Say to participants: You may feel like you've tried every possible way to motivate your loved one toward recovery. This activity can help you generate new ideas, based on your loved one's own motivators. Just remember: This activity only generates ideas. Whether and how you make any suggestion to your loved one should depend on your relationship's current state.

Facilitator notes:

- You may choose to either go through this tool as a discussion or have people write out their answers and then share if they are open.
- You may also use this as a brainstorming exercise with the group if someone is struggling with feeling helpless.

Homework: Tool 12.4: What it feels like to try something new

Facilitator notes:

- As this tool asks that participants write with their non-dominant hand, you may choose to allow them to do it on their own time and then come back to the meeting to discuss the questions associated with it.
- Alternatives to writing with their non-dominant is brushing their teeth with their non-dominant hand, or even doing something like doing their morning routine in a different order.
- To be inclusive, you want to clarify that whatever they choose to do, the purpose is to find something that they naturally/ habitually do every day and try doing it a different way.

Chapter 13 Trust, Forgiveness, Grief, and Letting Go

Discussion & Tool: Trust Bank & Tool 13.1 – Rebuilding Trust (40 min)

Say to participants:

Many people in Family & Friends feel disappointment, frustration, hurt, or anger about their loved one's behaviors. When addictive behaviors are active or someone is early in recovery, expecting immediate trust can be unrealistic.

Today we'll talk about how trust works in relationships and explore a tool for rebuilding trust over time.

Discussion Questions

- What is the difference between **hope** and **trust**?
- When might trusting a loved one be **unsafe or premature**?
- How long do you think it can take to rebuild trust?
- Would anyone like to share a time when you may have **lost trust in yourself**?

Step 1

Ask for volunteer readers or read the **blue Trust Bank box** from the participant handbook together.

Facilitator clarification (after reading):

The Trust Bank is a metaphor. Think of each relationship as having a trust account.

Actions such as honesty, follow-through, and respectful communication are **deposits**. Broken promises, dishonesty, or hurtful behavior are **withdrawals**.

The important idea is that **each person manages their own account**. We cannot make deposits into someone else's account for them. Our loved ones rebuild trust through their own consistent actions over time. At the same time, our actions also affect the trust they have in us.

Trust is rarely rebuilt through words alone. It usually grows slowly through **repeated, reliable behavior**.

Step 2

Share **Tool 13.1** on your screen, via a handout, or draw the four boxes on a whiteboard.

Step 3

As you go through each of the four boxes, invite participants to share examples and write their responses on the board or screen.

Encourage participants to think about both sides of the relationship: what builds trust and what erodes it.

Follow-Up Questions

- Looking at these Trust Bank boxes, what is **one small deposit** you might try this week to strengthen your loved one's trust in you?
- Are there items here that you may **not have noticed or acknowledged before**?
- Are there deposits that may matter **more to you than to your loved one**, or vice versa?

Discussion & Tool: Acceptance and Forgiveness / Tool 13.2: Explore the option of forgiveness (45 min)

Say to participants: Today we are going to discuss both acceptance and forgiveness. Let's start with acceptance. The concept of acceptance has been a common thread through many of our tools. It alone can be a powerful tool in helping you move forward.

Discussion Questions:

- What would you say is your biggest challenge with acceptance?
- When our expectations in a situation are not met, what emotions surface?
- What may be some benefits when you accept the realities of a situation?

Facilitator notes:

Remind participants that acceptance does not mean approving of it, liking it, or allowing it to continue. It simply means you accept the reality of the situation, no matter how objectionable.

Say to participants: Thank you all for sharing. Now that we have talked about accepting situations, let's discuss the option of forgiveness. Note, that, like all of these concepts, the option to forgive someone is a choice that you are allowed to make regardless of the situation.

After that conscious choice, comes intentional action to change your thinking about your loved one and their actions.

Discussion Questions:

- When we don't let go of anger or resentment, how do you feel physically?
- How do you feel mentally?
- After spending countless hours reliving past events and harboring grudges, how might you feel emotionally?
- When we forgive, are we required to forget?
- If someone is comfortable, can you share a time you forgave someone and how the situation changed for you?
- Is someone willing to share a time they were forgiven for something. What did it feel like?
- How hard might it be to forgive someone?

Facilitator notes:

- It might be helpful to share the box in the tool on "forgiveness may be... or is not.."
- Share with participants that forgiveness can start small. For example, consider forgiving fellow drivers, shoppers, and coworkers who are less than considerate. Recognize that they had reasons that made their actions seem appropriate to them.
- For tool 13.2, you may choose to either go through this tool as discussion, one question at a time, or have participants write their answers out and you can discuss afterwards.

Discussion: Processing grief & When to let go (30 min)

Say to participants: Sometimes we have worked all the tools, we have changed, we have new coping mechanisms and our loved one may still be challenged with addictive behaviors. Today we are going to focus on processing grief and letting go. When I say grief, you may only be thinking of someone passing, but there are several ways we may experience grief.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some of the ways you have come across grief? (loss of life, loss of relationship, or the hope for a different life for your loved one)
- If someone is comfortable, would you share a way that you have processed your grief?

Facilitator notes:

Affirm all shares. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Say to participants: Thank you all for being open to discussing grief. It may show up differently for each of us. As mentioned, through this entire process, you may have changed and grown. You are also allowed to forgive, accept, and move on with your life. You deserve to be happy and that happiness does not have to be earned by suffering. There may come a time when you and your loved one need to part ways. To assess whether you've reached that point, there is a list of questions you may ask yourself in the handbook.

Facilitator notes:

- Either share on your screen or via a handout, the list under "when to let go" in the handbook.
- As you share this list, ask the group to spend a moment reviewing it and share which one resonates with them and why.

Tool 13.3: Resolving Fears (20 min)

Say to participants: Fear may hold us back from making difficult decisions or just moving forward in life. Fear can keep us stuck and unwilling to make a change. If you have ever felt frozen in fear, then Resolving Fears may be a helpful tool for you!

Step 1. You can choose to share your screen and write this tool out, or you can verbally ask each column of questions instead. You may also choose to write three columns on a whiteboard and then fill in the responses.

Say to participants: This tool is very straightforward but might still not feel easy. So, let's do this together. Would anyone like to share a fear they currently have?

Step 2. Fill in the fear exercise based on what the participant's fear is. Follow the next two columns accordingly.

Step 3. If the last column leads to another fear, put that back in the first column and repeat the process.

Discussion Questions:

Now that we have written out a plan using the resolving fear tool, how do you feel about this fear?

Is the plan that we wrote together something that is manageable and realistic?

Facilitator notes:

- Sometimes a participant's fear can be the death of the loved one. Yes, you can still use the resolving fear for this as well. Be mindful and create a supportive environment to share as they work through this tool .
- If the participant has trouble with column three on how they would respond, this is an opportunity to open it to the group and ask how someone else may have or would respond in this situation.
- Taking the spotlight off of a participant that is emotionally not prepared to discuss a plan" and putting it back to the group may allow this participant to be able to regroup and join the discussion.

Section 3 Key Facilitator Skills

A Few Key Facilitator Skills to Remember

As you grow more comfortable facilitating SMART Family & Friends meetings, tools and structure will start to feel familiar. What continues to matter—no matter how long you facilitate—are a few **core skills** that help conversations stay supportive, participant-led, and meaningful.

These skills are not steps to follow in order. They are practices you return to again and again as you help participants explore ambivalence, recognize strengths, and move toward change in their own way.

Motivational Interviewing: A Helpful Framework, Not a Formula

SMART Family & Friends is strongly informed by **Motivational Interviewing (MI)**, an evidence-based approach that helps people explore mixed feelings about change in a respectful, nonjudgmental way.

MI is especially useful because ambivalence is common in Family & Friends meetings. Participants may want relief and change while also fearing what might happen if they stop rescuing, set boundaries, or respond differently to a loved one.

MI gives facilitators a way to support this exploration without pushing, persuading, or fixing.

OARS: Core Communication Skills

You'll often hear MI described using the acronym **OARS**:

- **Open-ended questions**
- **Affirmations**
- **Reflective listening**
- **Summaries**

These skills help facilitators invite conversation, highlight strengths, and ensure participants feel heard. You do not need to use all four in every interaction, or in any particular order. Think of OARS as a toolbox you dip into as needed.

Used well, these skills help participants clarify their own thoughts rather than react to advice or instruction.

Change Talk and Sustain Talk

MI also pays attention to *how* people talk about change.

- **Change talk** includes statements that express desire, ability, reasons, or need for change.
- **Sustain talk** includes statements that favor staying the same or express fear, doubt, or hesitation.

Both are normal and important. Sustain talk is not resistance or a problem to overcome—it is information. When facilitators respond with curiosity rather than correction, participants often begin to hear their own motivations more clearly.

The goal is not to eliminate sustain talk, but to create space where change talk can naturally emerge.

Throwing It Back to the Group: The Boomerang

One of the most powerful facilitation skills is **throwing questions back to the group** rather than answering them yourself. This is sometimes called the *boomerang*.

When a participant asks a question or expresses a dilemma, consider responding with:

- "What have others found helpful in situations like this?"
- "Does anyone relate to that?"
- "What ideas does the group have?"

Why this matters:

- It reinforces that wisdom lives in the group, not just the facilitator
- It reduces pressure on you to have the "right" answer
- It encourages peer connection and shared learning

In most cases, participants benefit more from hearing multiple perspectives than from receiving advice from a single voice.

The Power of Silence

Silence can feel uncomfortable—especially for new facilitators—but it is one of your most effective tools.

After asking a question or reflecting something back, try **not filling the space immediately**. Some facilitators find it helpful to silently count to 10—or even 20—before speaking again.

Silence gives participants time to:

- Think
- Notice their internal reactions
- Find words they might otherwise skip past

Often, the most meaningful insights emerge *after* a pause.

Avoiding the Expert Trap

It can be tempting to explain, educate, or correct—especially when you care deeply about participants and want to be helpful. This is known as the **expert trap**, and it's easy to fall into.

When facilitators take on the role of expert:

- Participants may become passive or deferential
- Conversations can shut down
- Ambivalence gets pushed underground instead of explored

SMART Family & Friends works best when facilitators remain **curious guides**, not authorities.

It's okay—and often helpful—to say:

- "I don't know."
- "Let's think about that together."
- "What do you make of that?"

Your role is not to provide answers, but to create conditions where participants can discover their own.

Reflecting on Your Meeting

Facilitating SMART Family & Friends meetings is a learning process. No facilitator gets it "right" every time—and that's okay. Moments of uncertainty, missteps, or discomfort are part of growing into the role.

Reflection gives you a way to learn from each meeting without self-criticism. By approaching your experiences with kindness and curiosity, you can notice what worked, what felt challenging, and what you might try differently next time. This mirrors the same self-compassion and growth mindset we encourage in participants.

Taking a few minutes to reflect helps you build confidence over time and stay connected to why you facilitate in the first place.

Reflection Questions

After each meeting, consider these guiding questions to deepen your learning and refine your approach:

- What moment during the meeting made me feel proud or energized?
- What did I notice about how participants engaged today, and how might I have contributed to that?
- Is there a small adjustment or experiment I could try next time to make the meeting even more engaging?

Why Reflect?

Regular reflection supports your growth as a facilitator and helps create meetings that feel supportive, responsive, and empowering for participants.

Facilitator Tip

You may find it helpful to jot down brief reflections after meetings or talk them through with a trusted co-facilitator, friend, or family member. Over time, this can help you notice patterns, progress, and growth.

Prioritizing Your Own Wellbeing

Facilitating a SMART Family & Friends meeting can be meaningful and rewarding, and it can also be demanding. Taking care of yourself is not optional; it's part of sustaining your ability to show up for others.

A few reminders to keep in mind:

- **Set boundaries.** Decide in advance how much time and energy you can realistically give. It's okay to say no or step back when needed—doing so protects both you and the meeting.
- **Watch for burnout.** If you're feeling drained, overwhelmed, or resentful, it may be a sign to slow down. Small acts of self-care and rest can make a big difference over time.

- **Share the role.** As your meeting grows, look for participants who may be interested in becoming co-facilitators. Shared leadership strengthens meetings and gives you the support needed.
- **Reach out for support.** You don't have to navigate challenges alone. The SMART Recovery team is available to help when you need guidance or a break.

Taking care of yourself isn't selfish, it's how you remain present, grounded, and effective as a facilitator.

Bringing It All Together

These skills take practice. Facilitation is a skill that develops over time, shaped by experience, reflection, and the people who show up in your meetings. Trust that what you bring—your presence, curiosity, and willingness to learn alongside participants—is enough.

SMART Family & Friends is not about doing it "right." It's about creating space for people to think, feel, and choose differently, one conversation at a time.

The Journey Begins Here

By reading this handbook, completing facilitator training, and choosing to show up for others, you've taken an important step, not only for the people who will attend your meetings, but for your own growth as well.

Now comes the part that matters most: starting your meeting.

You may not feel fully ready, and that's okay. Readiness doesn't mean certainty or confidence. It means being willing to begin, to listen, and to learn alongside others. You already have what you need to do that.

Start Where You Are

It's common to wonder:

- *Am I ready to do this?*
- *What if I make a mistake?*
- *What if I don't have the right words?*

Nearly every facilitator asks these questions at the start. You are not behind, unprepared, or alone.

One thing facilitators often say after they begin is:

I m so glad I started my meeting. I only wish I hadn t waited so long.”

What starts as nervousness often turns into confidence, not because everything goes perfectly, but because facilitators discover that showing up matters more than getting it right.

You don t have to know everything. You can just begin.

Real Learning Happens in the Meeting Room

This handbook and your training give you a strong foundation. They offer structure, language, and guidance. But the deepest learning happens in real time, through shared stories, quiet moments, unexpected questions, and honest conversations.

Every meeting is a chance to learn what works for your group. Some meetings will feel smooth and energizing. Others may feel quiet, messy, or uncertain. All of them count.

Mistakes will happen. That s part of the process. What participants remember most is not whether you used the perfect tool, but whether they felt respected, heard, and welcome to be themselves.

Your Presence Matters

When you listen instead of fixing, stay curious instead of judgmental, and make space for many paths forward, you model what SMART Family & Friends is all about.

Even when meetings feel slow or challenging, your presence has impact. Sometimes the most powerful thing you offer is consistency—showing up again, holding space, and trusting the process.

That matters more than you may realize.

Stay Connected and Keep Growing

You re not doing this alone. SMART Recovery offers ongoing support, including:

- Facilitator training led by staff and volunteers on Zoom most weekdays
- Motivational Interviewing Coaching Circles
- Support from your Volunteer Support Coordinator

You'll also find resources, tools, and encouragement on the SMART Recovery website along with reminders that facilitators everywhere are learning right alongside you.

A Final Word

You've done the preparation. You've learned the tools. You've reflected on what matters.

Now, let go of perfection.

Lean into presence.

Trust the process—and trust yourself.

You're ready.

And if you're not quite sure?

That's okay.

Start anyway.

Appendix Handout: Facilitator Essentials

A practical guide for SMART Family & Friends facilitators

Facilitating a SMART Family & Friends meeting is not about having the right answers or delivering material perfectly. It's about creating a space where participants can think more clearly, feel less alone, and choose responses that support their own well-being.

You've explored these ideas throughout this handbook in greater depth. This section brings them together in one place as a simple guide you can return to for quick reminders and encouragement.

What SMART Family & Friends Is

SMART Family & Friends is:

- A **self-management program** for people impacted by a loved one's addictive behavior
- A **participant-driven space** focused on learning, reflection, and shared experience
- A place to explore **choices, boundaries, communication, and self-care**
- A program that supports **multiple pathways**, including abstinence, moderation, harm reduction, treatment, or no change at all

What SMART Family & Friends Is Not

SMART Family & Friends is not:

- Therapy or crisis counseling
- A place to diagnose, label, or fix a loved one
- A forum for giving advice or telling people what they "should" do
- A debate about which recovery approach is right

Your Core Role as a Facilitator

Your role is to **guide the process, not solve the problem.**

As a facilitator, you help participants:

- Explore what is **within their control**
- Clarify what feels **helpful right now**

- Learn from one another s experiences
- Practice responding differently, even when circumstances don t change

You do this by staying curious, calm, and grounded—not by being an expert.

The Facilitator s Default Stance

When in doubt, lean into:

- **Curiosity over certainty**
- **Reflection over explanation**
- **Choice over persuasion**
- **Compassion over correction**
- **Process over outcomes**

These principles help keep meetings participant-led, emotionally safe, and focused on growth rather than fixing.

Eight Core Facilitation Skills

These are skills you ll use again and again, often without realizing it.

Ask open-ended questions

Invite exploration rather than yes/no answers.

Reflect and reframe

Help participants hear themselves, often with a softer or more neutral lens.

Bring it back to control

Gently redirect from fixing the loved one to caring for the self.

Normalize ambivalence

Mixed feelings are information, not resistance.

Slow the room down

Pause. Let silence work. Insight often comes after space.

Throw it back to the group (the boomerang”)

What have others noticed?

Does anyone relate to that?”

Name patterns, not prescriptions

Highlight themes without telling people what to do.

Protect emotional safety

Keep tone nonjudgmental, participation optional, and boundaries clear.

If the Meeting Starts to Drift...

Try one of these gentle resets:

- Let s pause for a moment—what feels most helpful to focus on right now?”
- I m noticing we re moving toward problem-solving. Would it be okay to slow down and explore what this has been like for you?”
- How does this connect to something within your control?”

If Someone Asks You for Advice

You don t need to refuse—just redirect.

- I don t have the right answer, but I m curious what you ve already tried.”
- What have others found helpful in similar situations?”
- What option feels most aligned with your values right now?”

If Strong Emotions or Safety Concerns Arise

- Validate the emotion without escalating it
- Slow the pace of the conversation
- Avoid asking for details that could overwhelm the group
- Gently orient participants to supports and safety resources when appropriate
- Remember: **you are not expected to manage crises alone**

One Last Reminder

You don t have to get this right.”

Participants remember:

- How the space felt
- Whether they were respected
- Whether they felt less alone when they left

Visit support.smartrecovery.org for more resources, participant handouts, information on how to start or edit your meeting information, and more!