

Meeting Management Instructions
SMART Recovery Scripted Meetings
4/7/21

There are only 3 circumstances when the host speaks in a scripted meeting:

- 1) Reading the primary script or topic script (and the around the circle questions in them)
- 2) Responding to the answers to these questions (often as briefly as “thank you”)
- 3) If needed, interrupting the conversation to enforce a meeting rule

1. Especially for the first 3 months you are a host, READ the script: No more, no less, no improvising. These scripts have been worked out over many years. Perhaps you will someday improve one of them. However, start by using them as they are, to understand how they work.

For instance, if the script has: “To be or not to be, that is the question,”
But the actor says: “At times I think I want to kill myself,”
It’s the same general idea, and even the same rhythm (iambic pentameter),
but it’s not Shakespeare!

READ the script: No more, no less, no improvising.

2. WHEN YOU ARE IN OPEN DISCUSSION it is better NOT to respond to each participant. We want participants to talk to each other, not talk through you.

However, as stated in the script, you will go around the circle several times (for check-in, for check-out, for each question of the topic script). It is important that each time you have called on someone for participation that you thank them when they are finished. Your response could simply be “thank you.”

If their statement has been important or emotional, it would be valuable to say more than just thank you. If you understand what an “empathic response” is, this is the time to make one. If the term empathic response is unclear to you, here is some initial guidance:

Typically you would wait until the participant finishes, but you could also speak during a pause (*do not interrupt!*)

It is often easier to acknowledge a situation, rather than attempt to reflect a feeling:
“that was challenging; that caught you by surprise; that was very upsetting; etc.”

If another participant expresses empathy, you may not need to do so also. You might thank them both, “thanks X, and thanks Y for your response.”

If a participant has just described a recent addictive problem, and feels guilty and ashamed, it can be helpful to summarize, and then ask a question: "You are upset about what you did. I'm curious though, was there any immediate benefit [to your drinking]?" You can emphasize that, even though the participant is upset about the longer-term negative consequences of the addictive behavior, in the moment of deciding to engage in it there was short-term benefit. Once you have heard that benefit you can say "thanks for telling us that" and move on to the next person.

Even if you are not sure what to say (especially if the participant has been emotional), you can still thank them for attending the meeting. Attending when emotional is a significant accomplishment for many: "I'm glad you made it; I'm glad you're here; This is a good time for you to be here," etc.

Putting several of these ideas together, you might say: "You are upset that you drank (or drank too much) last night, but it did put to rest the intense anxiety that you felt. Thanks for joining us tonight and telling us about it. I'm glad you are here."

As a general rule, we always accept what is stated, in a respectful, warm, and non-judgmental way. We recognize that each participant is doing their best, as they understand it. We can point out the short-term benefit, even if there is long-term cost. We are pleased they attended the meeting and spoke about what happened. The difficulties they express may become a source of strength to other participants.

You can find additional guidance on empathic responses in *Listening Well: The art of empathic understanding*, by William R. Miller. This 102 page book was written by one of the co-developers of motivational interviewing.

3. The primary rule in a SMART meeting is "do SMART Recovery." The following rules support that primary rule.

The general formula for enforcement is "I'm interrupting you because..."

Rule: No one talks too long or too often

Comment: This rule is the most frequently broken one, and it is often the hardest to enforce. We all love attention. A SMART meeting is a hi-risk situation for someone who wants more than their fair share of attention. One way to soften the interruption is to make an empathic statement first. "That sounds like a very difficult and stressful situation. However, I'm interrupting you because..." Don't suggest that you will return to what the participant is saying unless you actually intend to.

Examples of what to say: I'm interrupting you because...

- we need to finish check-in
- we need to allow time for others to have a turn
- it's time to move on to the next person
- we need to allow time for others who have not spoken as much

Rule: Stay on the topic of addictive problems and related concerns

Comment: It is better to allow some flexibility about this rule. You might interrupt after several sentences, rather than the first sentence of off-topic discussion. We want a meeting in which people find common interests with one another. Brief off-topic discussions can serve that purpose. With luck the off-topic discussion shortly winds down on its own, and you do not need to do anything about it.

Examples of what to say: I'm interrupting you because...

- our conversation has gone off topic. Let's return to our earlier discussion.
- I can see this conversation is of interest, but it is off topic. Perhaps those who are interested can return to it after the meeting.
- we do not criticize other approaches to change. Nothing works for everyone. Nearly everything works for someone. Let's stay focused on doing SMART Recovery.

Comment: Here also flexibility is valuable. Years ago SMART decided that we would not be a "trauma support" group for those who were upset with AA. Therefore, we do not have extended discussions about what participants perceive as AA's shortcomings. However, a brief comment, such as "I don't really like the AA approach. It never made any sense to me. I prefer SMART much better," might simply be responded to by saying "I'm glad you find SMART helpful" and moving on.

Rule: No advice

Examples of what to say: I'm interrupting you because...

- that sounds like advice. Can you re-state what you are saying by describing your own experience?
- that sounds like advice. Can you identify the options you think could be considered here?

Rule: No requirement to talk about addictive problems in any specific way

Examples of what to say: I'm interrupting you because...

- even though the term alcoholic/alcoholic is not typically used SMART, anyone is free to use it if they like [this comment might be made after someone says "we don't use that term."]

-SMART does not have a position about whether addictive problems can be a disease. How to understand addictive problems is up to each participant. Our slogan is "Discover the power of choice."

-belief in a higher power is not part of SMART. Most of our participants believe in a higher power, and you are free to mention that belief, but we don't discuss it. This is a God-helps-those-who-help-themselves approach.

Comment: Someone might start a self-description then become tongue-tied as they realize our language is different than what they are used to. You could say: "You can talk in your own words. We won't criticize how you speak. If we don't understand what you mean we can ask questions."

Some rules are easier to enforce:

-Meeting is free (when passing the hat emphasize it is for donations but there is no charge),

-Meeting is open to anyone (don't refuse anyone entry)

Unless you are in a private meeting, which should not be publicized to the public.

-Participation is not required (allow them to say "pass;" if they say or do nothing say "I interpret that as a pass" and move on. Even though you have no information about which to be empathic, you can still thank the participant for attending: "Thanks. I'm glad you're here. I hope you find the meeting helpful.")