

Substance Abuse Group Activities



There are many substance abuse group activities to attempt in your recovery group.

The key to using activities in recovery groups are to assist the clients with getting in touch with their feelings and learning how to express them in a constructive manner. For example, a client can learn how to process their feeling and not rely on the use of outbursts of anger when they are upset. Instead they can learn how to express if they are hurt and how to process these feelings. Group therapy activities can be an invaluable tool in therapy.

Why Substance Abuse Groups Are Effective ?

According to The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), "One reason for this efficacy is that groups intrinsically have many rewarding benefits—such as reducing isolation and enabling members to witness the recovery of others—and these qualities draw clients into a culture of recovery. Another reason groups work so well is that they are suitable especially for treating problems that commonly accompany substance abuse, such as depression, isolation, and shame."

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1. Beach Ball Activity with the Group Topic

Buy an inexpensive beach ball at a dollar store or discount store. Write questions or statements related to the group topic on masking tape and place them randomly around the beach ball and pass it around to group members. When the clients catch the ball, they have to talk about the statement or answer the question their right thumb touches.

2. Self-Affirmations

Often the hardest people to forgive for substance abuse clients are themselves. Have the members of your recovery group practice reflecting on their self-love. Ask your clients to close their eyes, breathe deeply, and try to clear your mind. In a calming voice read affirmations to your recovery group. Have the clients repeat after you with their eyes closed. Do this activity for approximately seven to ten minutes. Doing this longer than ten minutes may make your clients feel uncomfortable. Afterwards have the clients discuss how this exercise made them feel.

3. Tombstone Activity

Pass out pre-printed outlines of a tombstone is another substance abuse group activity.

Tell your clients to think about this exercise seriously. Ask your clients to share what would their tombstone would say if they were to die today. Have your group members explore the following questions:

How would their loved ones remember them?

What do they wished they could change in their lives?

How do they want to be remembered?

What can they do in their recovery to become more like the person they want to be remembered for starting today?

This can be a very emotional exercise. It forces the client to look at lives as a whole and highlights that we all only have a certain number of chances. Make sure to give the group plenty time to process after this activity.

4. Discuss Loneliness

As therapists we know loneliness can sometimes be a trigger for our clients. In your recovery group have the clients discuss being alone. Ask them to share if they can be alone and not be lonely? Explore what balance they need in being alone and not feeling isolated.

5. Collage Your Positive Affirmations

Here is another substance abuse activity worth trying. Before your group type about 50 or more positive traits and affirmations, be sure to double space. Print out the sheet and cut out the positive sayings and affirmations into strips, for larger groups print out three or more copies of the affirmations. You will want each group member to have at least twelve strips of paper to apply to their posters. The purpose of this exercise is designed to allow clients to discover and celebrate their positive traits and affirmations, so make sure the clients have lots of strips to choose from and add to their posters.

Place all of the strips into bowl or paper bag. Supply small cardstock posters for each client. Provide a glue stick for each client. You will also need some markers that the clients can share. When the clients come into group give each client a cardstock poster.

Explain to the clients that today they will be focusing on their good traits. Have the clients write their name in the middle of their poster with a marker of their choice. Next pass around the traits and affirmations strips. You can also spread the affirmations on a table for your group participants to look through. For the first half of group allows your clients to paste the strips to their posters.

During the last part of group allow all your clients who would like to share their poster with the class an opportunity to share. Ask the group how doing the project made them feel. Some examples of traits and affirmations include:

- 1)I choose to be proud of myself.
- 2)I am self-reliant, creative and persistent in whatever I do.
- 3)I love change and easily adjust myself to new situations.
- 4)I am well groomed, healthy and full of confidence. My outer self is matched by my inner well-being.
- 5)My confidence, self-esteem, and inner wisdom are increasing with each day
- 6)I nourish my body with healthy food.
- 7)I am grateful for this moment and find joy in it
- 8)All is well in my world. I am calm, happy, and content.
- 9)I am talented.

You can use single descriptive words for the client's positive traits:

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| 1) Considerate | 10)Expressive |
| 2) Disciplined | 11)Faithful |
| 3) Adventurous | 12)Resourceful |
| 4) Easygoing | 13)Flexible |
| 5) Trustworthy | 14)Listener |
| 6) Effective | 15)Hard Working |
| 7) Funny | 16)Friendly |
| 8) Smart | 17)Energetic |
| 9) Creative | |

6. What are Your Fears?

Before group, cut sheets of paper in half. Pass out one half sheet of paper to each client. Ask the group participants to write down their fears. Collect the papers in a bowl or paper bag. As the counselor read each fear, but do not ask any of your participants to identify who wrote the individual fears. Let the group know prior to writing their fears that you will not ask participants to identify their fears. This will help make the clients more comfortable to share if everyone remains anonymous. This exercise will allow everyone in the group to see that they all have fears, they are not alone in their fears and they can offer comfort to each other.

7. Review the Importance of Self-Care.

In group discuss the importance of self-care. Ask each group member to share what they do to take care of themselves. Ask about the clients about their nutrition and sleep habits. Ask what are you currently doing to achieve these goals? Have the group share how they can improve their self-care