DISARM the Addiction Salesman

Destructive Imagery and Self-talk Awareness and Refusal Method

Defeat the Addiction Salesman in Your Head

DISARM is a tool that helps us see the self-talk and images that tell us to use as lies, excuses, and rationalizations. It challenges those urge-producing thoughts at every opportunity, shooting them down like a gunslinger or reducing them to the point of absurdity.

All humans, not just humans with substance abuse problems, have thoughts, urges, or other impulses, which, if followed, would harm their long-term interests. Realizing the power of what you think/believe about strong urges to use, and changing that distorted thinking, is crucial to your success. Indeed, the trouble with a philosophy of 'Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die' is that tomorrow comes and we aren't dead!

So, we are wise to first make ourselves aware of our destructive self-talk (thinking that is contrary to our long-term interests) and then refuse to go along with it. While you cannot will yourself not to have certain thoughts or feelings, including strong urges, you can learn how to recognize those thoughts for what they are: lies, excuses and rationalizations. You can learn to DISARM them and walk away from the situation or get yourself involved with something other than focusing on your urge to use.

WHEN IT IS USED: When you're having strong urges—whether or not you've given in to them.

Ask and answer the following questions:

1. Question: Do I have to give in to the urge because it is intense and hard to resist?
   Answer: No, I don't have to give in. Because the urge is strong, it would be easy to give in, but I don't HAVE TO. I have had urges that I did not give in to, therefore it must be possible to resist.

2. Question: Will it be awful to deny myself by not giving into the urge?
   Answer: No, it won't be awful. It may be quite unpleasant, but unpleasant is not awful, it's just unpleasant. If I don't give in to the urge, it will get weaker and come less frequently. If I do give in, the urge will stay strong, be harder to resist next time, and show up more frequently.

3. Question: Is it really unbearable not to give into this urge?
   Answer: I don't like the way it feels to deny my urge, but since it doesn't kill me not to give in, I can keep on resisting. (Remember, individuals drinking large amounts of alcohol may need to go to a detox center when they first stop because the sudden end of alcohol really could be injurious.)

4. Question: Am I somehow entitled to be able to give up using without strong urges to go back to using?
   Answer: No! I don't have a note from God, my mother, SMART Recovery group members or anyone else which entitles me not to have strong urges to use. It may be unpleasant to resist some of my urges, but no one gave me a 'get out of unpleasantness free' card.

The DISARM method allows the individual experiencing the craving to carefully and rationally answer a few key questions. The results will help the individual to understand that the urge truly can be overcome, and that as success is experienced, the urges will be less strong and will occur less frequently.

DISARMING the 'Salesman'

Some people find it helpful to use a technique to dissociate themselves from the voice inside each of us which says, 'It's a good idea to do something self-destructive.' It is a game you can play with yourself, which might help you to:

a.) identify the specific thoughts which, if followed, would lead to using when you have already decided that, in the long term, this choice is not for you, and

b.) steadfastly refuse to go along with this thinking no matter how attractive it might seem.
Instead of talking yourself into lapsing you can develop powerful countering and coping statements. To do this, it may help to invent and personify an 'enemy' who lives in your mind, and whose only purpose is to get you to use. The 'salesman' (your alter ego) knows you well, and can change form to take advantage of your weakest moments. Name your salesman (e.g. gangster, enemy, diplomat, weasel, etc.). When urges come, ask yourself, 'What is she/he telling me now? How is she/he trying to trick me?

When thoughts are identified:

1. Without debate, ATTACK the salesman with powerful counter statements: 'Nice try, jerk. You can't fool me!' You can be as aggressive or profane as your nature allows with the salesman—after all, s/he is trying to screw up your life.

2. Then quickly FOCUS on some other thoughts, images, or activities which are consistent with what you want in the long run and inconsistent with what the salesman is saying. The salesman then loses his power and fades away.

Later on, you can submit the salesman's tricks to an ABC analysis in order to dispute them. You usually discover irrational themes and patterns in the thoughts and arguments the salesman throws at you. While coping statements alone will often work, it is important not to omit disputing. If your coping statements aren't working, it is because you don't believe them as strongly as you believe your salesman's pitch. Through disputing we can develop powerful coping statements for use in the future. Through actually resisting the salesman's suggestions, you become increasingly better at doing it.