

Facilitator Guide: Customize DENTS for you

Introduction: Why Managing Urges Matters

You Say:

"Urges can feel overwhelming, but they are temporary and manageable with the right strategies. In SMART Recovery, we use practical tools to help participants regain control over their choices. One effective tool is **DENTS**, which stands for Deny/Delay, Escape, Neutralize, engage in Tasks, and Swap.

Today, we'll explore how to apply DENTS to cope with urges in a structured and practical way."

Key points to highlight:

- Urges are **temporary** and typically pass within **10–20 minutes**.
- Using structured strategies like **DENTS** can help disrupt automatic responses to urges.
- This tool empowers participants to **actively choose** their responses rather than reacting impulsively.

Step 1: Group Brainstorming – What Makes Urges Hard to Manage?

You Say: "Before we practice using DENTS, let's discuss what makes urges difficult to manage. Have you ever experienced an urge that felt overpowering? What made it so difficult to resist?"

Encourage participants to share experiences. Examples might include:

- Social triggers (e.g., being at a party where others are drinking)
- Emotional triggers (e.g., stress, loneliness, boredom)
- Habitual routines (e.g., smoking after meals, drinking after work)

Facilitator's Role:

- Normalize the struggle. ("It's completely natural to experience urges, but we don't have to act on them.")

- Reflect & summarize without offering solutions. ("So, it sounds like boredom and stress are big triggers for many people.")
- Encourage **self-exploration** rather than "fixing" the problem.

Step 2: Introducing the DENTS Tool

You Say:

"DENTS is a simple and structured way to manage urges. Each letter represents a strategy you can use when you feel an urge coming on. Let's go through them one by one."

D = Deny/Delay – Refuse to act on the urge immediately. Remind yourself that urges **always pass** if you wait.

What are some ways you can practice denying or delaying an urge?

E = Escape – Remove yourself from the situation that is triggering the urge.

What are some places, people, or routines you might need to step away from to reduce triggers?

N = Neutralize – Challenge the urge with logic and observation. Remind yourself that an urge is just a feeling, not a command.

How have you used logic to reduce the power of an urge?

T = Tasks – Engage in an activity to redirect your focus. The goal is to give your brain something else to do.

What tasks or activities help you shift your attention away from an urge?

S = Swap – Change your internal dialogue or do something different to shift your mood.

What positive thoughts or actions have helped you in the past?

Step 3: Participant Practice – Applying DENTS to Real-Life Situations

You Say: "Now, let's apply the DENTS strategy to real situations. Think of a time when you experienced an urge. We'll work together to apply each step of DENTS to your scenario."

Instructions:

1. **One participant shares** a recent urge they experienced (or you can provide a scenario if no one volunteers).
2. The group **brainstorms how to apply each step of DENTS** to manage that urge.

3. The participant **practices stating their response** as if they were experiencing the urge again.

Facilitator's Role:

- Guide participants to use **clear, realistic strategies** for each step.
- Redirect if responses **sound like avoidance rather than coping** (e.g., "I just try not to think about it" → "What could you actively do instead?").
- Keep the focus on **skill-building**, not judgment.

Closing the Exercise

You Say: "Managing urges takes practice, but tools like DENTS can make a real difference. The more you use these strategies, the easier they become. If an urge feels strong, remember **it's temporary, and you have options**."

Try practicing just **one part of DENTS** this week and see how it works for you."

Optional Reflection Questions:

- How did it feel to apply DENTS to a real-life urge?
- What challenges might you face when using this strategy?
- What's one small change you can make this week using DENTS?

Facilitator Quick Tips:

- Keep it **participant-driven**—let them brainstorm and refine their own strategies.
- Gently **redirect unhelpful patterns** (e.g., "I just ignore urges" → "Let's explore what happens when we actively manage them").
- Encourage **realistic, small steps** toward better urge management.

Summary

The **DENTS** tool gives participants a structured way to **pause, evaluate, and respond to urges** rather than reacting automatically. By practicing **Deny/Delay, Escape, Neutralize, engaging in Tasks, and Swapping thoughts or behaviors**, participants can gain confidence in managing their cravings.

Encourage ongoing practice—every urge resisted strengthens the ability to handle the next one!