

# Facilitator Guide: Disputing Unhelpful Beliefs

## Introduction: Why Challenging Thoughts Matters

### You Say:

"Our thoughts shape how we feel and act, but not all thoughts are true or helpful. In SMART Recovery, we recognize that some thoughts can be automatic and unexamined things like 'I'll never succeed' or 'I'm just a failure.' These unhelpful beliefs can keep us stuck.

Today, we're going to learn how to **dispute unhelpful beliefs** so we can take back control over our emotions and choices."

### Key points to highlight:

- **Thoughts are not facts**—just because we think something doesn't mean it's true.
- Unhelpful beliefs often go **unquestioned**, shaping our emotions and actions.
- By **disputing these beliefs**, we can replace them with more accurate, helpful perspectives.

## Step 1: Group Brainstorming – What Are Some Common Unhelpful Beliefs?

**You Say:** "Before we practice disputing unhelpful beliefs, let's explore some common ones. What are some thoughts that have held you back or made things harder for you?"

### ◆ Encourage participants to share examples. These might include:

- "I'll never change."
- "If I slip up, I'm a failure."
- "Nobody cares about me."
- "If I don't succeed right away, it's not worth trying."

### Facilitator's Role:

- Normalize the experience. ("Everyone has unhelpful thoughts from time to time.")
- Reflect & summarize without offering solutions. ("It sounds like a lot of these thoughts make change feel impossible.")
- Encourage **self-exploration** rather than "fixing."

## Step 2: Introducing the DIBs Tool

### You Say:

"When we challenge unhelpful beliefs, we break their power over us. The Disputing Unhelpful Beliefs (DIBs) tool helps us do that by asking three simple questions."

### Step 1: Is This Thought True? – What is the actual evidence for or against this thought?

*What proof do I have that this thought is 100% true?*

*Would this hold up in a court of law?*

### Step 2: Is This Thought Logical? – Does this thought fit with everything else I believe?

*Am I jumping to conclusions?*

*If a friend had this thought, would I agree with them?*

### Step 3: Is This Thought Helpful? – Does believing this help me or hold me back?

*What happens when I believe this thought?*

*What would be a more helpful way to think about this?*

## Step 3: Participant Practice – Disputing Real Beliefs

**You Say:** "Now, let's apply this to real situations. Think of an unhelpful belief that has affected you recently. We'll go through the three steps together and find a more helpful way to think about it."

### Instructions:

1. **One participant shares** an unhelpful belief they struggle with (or you can provide a common example if no one volunteers).
2. The group **applies the three disputing questions** to challenge the belief.
3. The participant **practices reframing the belief into a more balanced statement**.

### Facilitator's Role:

- Guide participants to **look for facts, not just feelings**.
- Redirect if responses **reinforce negativity** (e.g., "I have no evidence against it" → "Let's explore if that's really true.").
- Keep the focus on **skill-building**, not judgment.

## Closing the Exercise

**You Say:** "Our thoughts don't have to control us. The more we challenge unhelpful beliefs, the easier it gets to replace them with thoughts that support our goals. This week, try using the three-step DIBs process when a negative thought pops up."

## Optional Reflection Questions:

- How did it feel to challenge an unhelpful belief?
- What challenges might you face when using this strategy?
- What's one small way you can practice this technique this week?

## Facilitator Quick Tips:

- Keep it **participant-driven**—let them generate their own more helpful beliefs.
  - Gently **redirect extreme thinking** (e.g., "I never do anything right" → "Let's find an example where you did succeed.").
  - Encourage **realistic, small steps** toward better thought patterns.
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## Summary

The **Disputing Unhelpful Beliefs (DIBs)** tool helps participants **question negative thoughts** so they don't automatically shape emotions and actions. By **asking if a thought is true, logical, and helpful**, participants can shift to a more balanced and empowering mindset.

**Encourage ongoing practice**—every time participants challenge a belief, they strengthen their ability to manage emotions and make intentional choices!