

Assessment of Young People Who May Want to Quit Tobacco

The assessment is an important opportunity to meet each interested student, get to know them briefly, and determine if they are appropriate for the group. Each individual initial assessment should take about twenty minutes in a school setting, but for some young people in complex situations more time may be necessary, with the time required being dependent upon the case rather than the setting. To begin, take a smoking history by having candidates fill out the standard assessment form found at the end of this chapter. The assessment aims to answer four main questions:

1. How addicted to tobacco are they?
2. How motivated to quit are they?
3. What aspects of their social environment are likely to help or hinder their quit attempt?
4. Are they willing to attend a group or go for individual stop smoking support?

If possible, arrange the assessment appointments for the first period in the morning, considering that the student will probably have smoked that day before school, and will therefore obtain a higher carbon monoxide (CO) reading for comparison with later measurements. If this time is not available, then lunchtime could serve as an option for conducting the assessment.

Demographic Information

The first part of the assessment gathers basic demographic information on each participant. Record the date of the assessment, the student's name (or unique identifier), address and contact information, as well as date of birth, age and grade level. Confirm that the contact information given to you is that which can best be used to reach them for a 6-month follow up after their quit day. This is especially important for those students who will be graduating that school year and may move away from their current home. This is also a good time to ask how the adolescent heard about the program to assist with future recruitment efforts.

Obtaining a Baseline Carbon Monoxide Reading

Before performing a carbon monoxide (CO) test, it is important to ask the student how many cigarettes he/she has smoked that particular day as well as the time since his/her last cigarette. This way, you will have a reasonable expectation as to what they'll score. Measurement of expired carbon monoxide (CO) is one relatively simple assessment procedure that takes less than a minute using a handheld digital monitor. Afternoon concentrations of expired CO are typically in the range of 8 to 30 parts per million among young daily smokers and drop down

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to 0 to 4 (nonsmoker levels) in ex-smokers within two days of quitting. The CO measurement is largely affected by the amount smoked on the day of the assessment, but when used in standard conditions, people with a higher baseline CO tend to find it harder to quit.

Perhaps the CO monitor's greatest use is as a motivational tool. At assessment, the staff member can explain to the smoker that his/her reading is high, indicating that the poisonous gas, carbon monoxide, is replacing oxygen in the blood, meaning that the heart has to do more work to pump oxygen to the body. This is part of the reason why smoking causes cardiovascular diseases, and shortness of breath. For those students who are involved or interested in sports, explain to them that carbon monoxide is one of the reasons why they might not be able to perform as well as if they did not smoke. The good news, though, is that when the smoker quits, the CO reading will drop down to that of a non-smoker. Once the students start cutting down and quitting, they will be reinforced by actually seeing their CO levels decrease. In order for students to see the greatest improvement, it is important to get a high baseline CO reading at the assessment and at the first session of group. This is most likely during the start of the school day, as students are more likely to have smoked before coming to school than during the course of the school day on prohibited grounds. For this reason, the assessments and the first group session should be scheduled as early in the day as possible. Later, the follow-up CO measurement can serve as an indication that quitting is already benefiting health. This can also biochemically confirm claims of having quit smoking.

Tobacco Use History

It is important to find out how long the youth has been using tobacco on a regular basis, what types of tobacco are used, and how frequently the young person is using tobacco. Record the number of cigarettes smoked on an average weekday, as well as on an average weekend day. Be sure to probe for use of all types of tobacco. If you find that the students are using unusual forms of tobacco (eg. Gutka, bidis, etc.) don't hesitate to contact the Tobacco Dependence Program at UMDNJ – School of Public Health for advice. Most important is the need to establish the number of days each month that a student uses tobacco. If a student responds that he has smoked on 20 of the last 30 days, this is an indication that the student is most likely a daily smoker. Daily smoking is one criteria used in the diagnosis of nicotine addiction. Next, it is important to probe the student, in a non-judgmental way, for why they choose to smoke. The remaining questions specifically relate to one of two indexes used to score a person's dependence on tobacco. The two indexes are known as the *Fagerstrom Index* (as noted by the bold F) and the *Hooked on Nicotine Checklist* (HONC), as noted by the questions marked with a bold "H". It is optional, yet recommended, that you add up the scores for both of these indexes for each student in order to verify the level of dependence. Scoring instructions can be found on the final page of the assessment form.

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Quitting History

Talk to students about any previous quit attempts. Have they tried to quit before? If so, how many times and for how long? What happened that caused them to relapse? What helped and what made it difficult? The responses to these questions will assist in determining the level of addiction, the level of motivation to quit, and likely aids or barriers in their next quit attempt. The lack of prior quit attempts may indicate questionable motivation.

During the assessment, ask those students who have had previous quit attempts about the kinds of withdrawal symptoms they experienced. Onset of nicotine withdrawal symptoms and tobacco cravings during a prior quit attempt are indicative of nicotine addiction, as is heavy smoking (i.e., 10 or more cigarettes per day) and smoking early in the morning (e.g., within an hour of waking). These questions will explore the youth's response to past quit attempts. Again, a number of questions in this section are related to the Fagerstrom and HONC tools, as well as the DSM IV diagnosis tool for nicotine addiction (explained in chapter 2). The questions that relate to each index are labeled (with a bold "D" denoting the DSM IV) for scoring purposes. The responses to these questions will determine the diagnosis of and severity of nicotine addiction.

Stage of Change Assessment

This section will assess the motivation of the youth smoker to quit at this point in time. The questions are asked in a way that makes it easy to identify at precisely what stage the smoker is, allowing you to tailor your message and level of support.

Additional Probing

Ask the students what their main reasons are for wanting to quit smoking. Find out what the students' lives are like, including their social and environmental stressors. What is their support system? Do they have any behavioral or health problems? Do their friends and/or parents smoke? Are they allowed to smoke in the house? Have they gotten into trouble for smoking? If so, with whom? Assess with them their overall situation. An important aspect of the session is to begin building a supportive relationship.

Beyond the initial questions, it is helpful to ask students what they like and don't like about smoking. Ask about any particular worries they might have regarding quitting. What do they believe smoking helps them with, and what kinds of problems has it caused them? For some students, particularly those being individually counseled, they may simply desire to manage the smoking so that they don't get into trouble. Such young people are not appropriate for a stop smoking group until they have made a clear decision that they are ready to quit.

Determining the Quitting Plan

At the end of the assessment it should be clear whether or not the student is appropriate to participate in a stop smoking group (i.e., motivated to quit soon) or whether he/she requires further individual counseling. Similarly, the level of dependence should be clear, and those youth who are heavy smokers who have failed on previous quit attempts should be encouraged to consult with a medical doctor about whether NRT may help them to quit. They will benefit from group support regardless of whether or not they obtain additional pharmacological support.

Those who are appropriate to participate in Quit 2 WIN should be given clear written information about the group, its format and its dates. Be clear to explain to them that the goal of the group is to try to quit smoking, and that there is a quit date set for the fourth week of group. If needed, give students a parental consent form (see example at the end of this chapter). Parent(s) can then read and sign the forms, and teens should return the forms to the school staff member who is involved in running the program.