

UIC Solutions Suite Webinar Series

Journeys to Quitting Smoking, Cutting Down, and Remaining Smoke-Free

Recorded by Matthew Crilley and Anne Thieling

Announcer: Thank you for visiting the University of Illinois Chicago's Health & Recovery Solutions Suite. The following recording comes to you from the UIC Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Visit our online Solutions Suite to obtain free tools that promote health, self-direction, and employment for the behavioral health field.

Matt: Welcome to *Journeys to Quitting Smoking, Cutting Down, and Remaining Smoke-Free*, where we explore real stories and practical tools for recovery and wellness. I'm Matt Crilley, and I'm a Program Development Specialist at Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey. Today I'm joined by Anne to talk about a powerful new guide for people living with mental health or substance use challenges who are thinking about cutting down or quitting tobacco.

Anne: Hi everyone, I'm Anne Thieling and I'm the chief operating officer at Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey or CSPNJ. It's a pleasure to be here with you all!

Matt: What Is this Guide? This guide is different. It's not just facts and figures. It's actually built around real people's stories. Anne, can you share a bit about what makes this guide so unique?

Anne: Absolutely. The guide includes 10 personal stories from people who've lived through the challenges of tobacco use while managing mental health or substance use issues. These stories reflect real-life struggles and successes, and they're grounded in research from the CDC. This topic is near and dear to my heart, so I'm happy to report that my personal story is shared within the guide as well.

Matt: Right. And it's not just about quitting. It's about understanding why people smoke, what keeps them smoking, and what helps them move toward change. You'll see these reasons or "whys" come up throughout the stories in the guide. For instance, several people highlight the social aspect of smoking as one of the key "whys" behind their habit, whether it was to seem "cool," deal with peer pressure, or manage anxiety in social situations. So, for some of the folks we interviewed, smoking has become a social coping mechanism. There were some other barriers and "whys" too. Could you tell us a little bit about that, Anne?

Anne: Sure. The topics varied, but other common reasons for smoking included stress relief, using it to focus, the normalization of smoking within one's family or peers, and the general dependence and addiction that often come with it. There are plenty of others mentioned in the guide, so be sure to take a look at them.

Why It Matters: People with behavioral health conditions are more likely to smoke, and less likely to get support to quit. This guide helps fill that gap by offering relatable, hopeful stories.

Matt: And it's not prescriptive. It invites reflection. Whether you're someone who smokes, a peer supporter, a clinician, or a family member, this guide will help you understand the journey and will help you support it.

Each story touches on common themes, like using smoking to manage stress, the challenge of relapse, or how social settings can trigger smoking.

Anne: Yes, and it also highlights strategies people used to cut down or quit, like finding new coping tools, building support networks, or using self-assessments to figure out what they wanted to do next. We cover the specific factors and techniques that helped people to either cut down or quit altogether. The guide includes plenty of examples, but some common ones include becoming more educated and aware of the health risks involved with smoking, realizing the financial burden that smoking can cause, and simply wanting to improve the overall quality of life.

Matt: There's even content for providers. So, we offer ways to use the guide in groups, one-on-one sessions, or as a part of wellness planning.

Anne: If you're thinking about quitting, start by reading a story or two. See what resonates. At CSPNJ, we often say that there are many pathways to recovery and this is no different. Simply, take what you need and leave the rest. We also include a "What's Next" page to help you plan your next steps, if you're considering cutting back or quitting smoking.

Matt: And if you're a provider or supporter, use it to open conversations. It's a great way to build trust and explore what wellness looks like for each person. Be sure to check out the "What's Next for Providers" page, which outlines practical ways that you can support the individuals you're working with.

Thanks for joining us today. You can find the guide online or through your local behavioral health provider. Share it. Talk about it. Use it to spark conversations that matter. We'll also have this content featured in our webinar.

Anne: And, as you reflect on what you've heard, remember that the guide was shaped by the real experiences of people like me who face barriers to quitting, like stress, loneliness, or fear of losing a coping tool, and still found ways to make meaningful change. Their strategies, from leaning on peer support to discovering healthier routines, offer hope and insight for anyone ready to take the next step. Best of luck on your journey and I hope you get as much out of this guide as I did!

Announcer: Thank you for listening. You can obtain additional Solutions Suite recordings, or download a transcript, by visiting the Center's website.