

Evidence-Based Interventions for Treating Stimulant Use Disorders

Catching Up With COSSAP, October 2020

Stimulant use disorder and stimulant-involved overdoses are widespread and debilitating public health problems in the United States. Many people receiving treatment for an opioid use disorder also struggle with stimulant use.^{1,2,3,4,5} Unlike treatments for opioid or alcohol use disorders, there are currently no medications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to treat addiction to cocaine, methamphetamine, and other stimulants. Certain behavioral and psychosocial interventions, however, have been shown to be effective in treating addiction to stimulants.

In 2020, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) published [Treatment of Stimulant Use Disorders](#).⁶ It identifies four interventions for treating stimulant use disorders: motivational interviewing, contingency management, community reinforcement approach, and cognitive and behavioral therapy. This article briefly describes them and gives examples of their use.

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing is a collaborative, person-centered counseling style that helps individuals overcome their ambivalence about substance use and strengthen their motivation to change their behavior.⁷

Contingency Management

Contingency management is a behavioral therapy that reinforces positive behaviors using incentives such as prizes or vouchers.^{8,9} Currently, Medicaid and State Opioid Response grants can be used to provide contingency management incentives.^{10,11}

Overview

This article briefly describes four interventions that have been shown to be effective in treating stimulant use disorders:

1. Motivational interviewing
2. Contingency management
3. Community reinforcement approach
4. Cognitive and behavioral therapy

Community Reinforcement Approach

The community reinforcement approach to therapy focuses on helping people discover and adopt a healthy lifestyle that is more rewarding than one involving substance abuse.¹² It includes multiple behavioral and psychosocial interventions.^{13,14}

Cognitive and Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive and behavioral therapy is a short-term, goal-oriented psychotherapy treatment. It helps individuals evaluate their thinking, feelings, and actions to change their patterns of behavior.¹⁵

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Case Study From Iowa

YSS is a nonprofit organization that provides a comprehensive variety of prevention, treatment, and transition programming for Iowans from birth to adulthood. YSS's stimulant treatment programming includes both residential and outpatient services. Although it focuses primarily on adolescents, YSS also serves adult clients, typically those of college age. YSS's individualized approach to treatment, which focuses on the needs of the client, is able to incorporate motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral therapy, multidimensional family therapy (MDFT), or pharmacotherapy (or a combination of these interventions) for mental health conditions. (MDFT is a family therapy model that includes adolescent, caregivers, and extrafamilial components [e.g., school, courts] to support healthy relationship building.)

YSS further supports clients seeking stimulant treatment through an e-recovery tool, the Connections App from [CHESS Health](#). Clients receive access to the app when they are preparing to discharge from residential treatment and use it to support their treatment and recovery over the long term. The app enables clients to receive appointment reminders and check-ins from YSS staff and to reach out for support from advocates or other youth when necessary. Maintaining these relationships supports the overall treatment and recovery of YSS clients.

Next Steps

If you work with people who have substance use disorders, you should understand the four treatment options outlined above. Even if your organization does not provide these evidence-based interventions, you can access the information you need to refer individuals to other organizations that *do* offer them. Review SAMHSA's *Treatment of Stimulant Use Disorders* resource guide and the other resources cited in this article for more information.

References

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