

“Don't Think About It”

Tell everyone:

“For the next 60 seconds, do NOT think about a pink elephant.”

Then say:

“Don't picture one. Don't imagine what it looks like. Don't think about its ears, trunk, or color.”

After 30–60 seconds ask:

“How many of you thought about a pink elephant?”

Almost everyone will raise a hand.

Then make the connection:

**“The brain doesn't respond particularly well to ‘don't think about it’ or ‘just don't do it.’
Effective behavior change usually requires something to replace the behavior.”**

Write:

DON'T USE → WHAT WILL YOU DO INSTEAD?

That question is often the more productive treatment-court question.

Optional Team Challenge

Divide participants into small groups and give each group this statement:

“You need to stop using drugs.”

Give them **2 minutes** to transform it into something actionable.

For example:

Instead of:

“Just stop using.”

Try:

“When you notice a craving, what are three things you can do before acting on it?”

Instead of:

“Stay away from drugs.”

Try:

“What people, places, and situations increase your risk—and what is your plan for handling each one?”

Instead of:

“Make better choices.”

Try:

“What skill can you use when you're angry, overwhelmed, or experiencing a craving?”

This gives the team a memorable takeaway:

Don't just tell people what NOT to do. Help them identify what to DO instead.