

NextStepChristianRecovery

Recovery Management Packet

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Recovery Management

Is Recovery a Lifelong Process?

Yes. Recovery is a lifelong process, a fight for our lives and a fight for our souls, for the rest of our lives. But it can be difficult, especially early on in our recovery. What commonly happens in early recovery? And how can we frame one-day-at-a-time into the context of a lifetime?

Why is Early Recovery Difficult?

At the beginning of the journey in recovery from addiction, it can be difficult to stay away from our Step One issue without changing associations. Thinking about friends we can no longer see who are still in that world is sad, they are missed, but the lure of the addiction prevents us from seeing them. Sadly, the old adage is true; Misery loves company. If these people are a part of our inner circle, recovery will soon be lost.

Add to this struggle the world around us which is filled with the same pitfalls and struggles we left behind when entering into recovery. To make matters worse there is frustration with bills, marriage, school and life (in general) which can send years of recovery spiraling into the abyss. Life is filled with stress, and this stress and the way it is managed will become a factor in our recovery. Emotional upheavals push those in recovery into thinking about and seeking escape. Feeling overpowered can create an urge for whatever our coping mechanism was. So, what can we do to avoid the pitfalls of relapse? And how can we be happy and healthy in recovery?

Making a Recovery Management Plan

Many of us find it difficult to let go of the past but this is the only way to move away from addiction. The one, perhaps most important, suggestion that experts make to people in early recovery is to make a recovery management plan. This is a formalized worksheet where you list cravings and triggers as well as challenges and stressors and their solutions. A plan for managing our recovery helps us anticipate problems and solve them in advance. Additionally, making a plan for filling empty time is essential. Finding positive, productive hobbies and people to associate with helps recuperation. We need to stay away from people uninterested in our success. This is why a recovery management plan is a CRUCIAL part of thinking through our old behaviors so that we can replace them with healthier alternatives.

How to Get Through Early Stages of Recovery

- **Keep confident.** Have faith in the process. Have faith in God.
- **Integrate many levels of care.** Figure out your own personal 911. Who will you call when you need help? What medical team of trusted professionals can you lean on? What support groups can you attend?
- **Vent all of your anger and frustration or grief in therapy.** Support groups and psychotherapy sessions are the perfect places to talk about these stressors. No matter what form in which it arrives, a stressor is a threat to your recovery if not processed in a healthy manner. If you don't have enough therapy sessions or group meetings in a week to really work through it, add more.
- **Call on your friends and family around the clock.** Ask people who you trust and who you know support your recovery if you can call them any time, absolutely any time, when you are struggling and feeling like you might relapse. Then do it. Reach out as often as needed, especially when the urge to slip back into your old addiction arises.
- **Keep close ties with people who are also in recovery.** Seeing a daily example of life without addiction reinforces the idea that drugs, alcohol and other harmful coping mechanisms aren't necessary to have a good time or get through a tough time in life.
- **Take a 10 minute break.** If you are about to call your connection, buy a drink, or indulge in your addiction – STOP. Freeze in your tracks. Take a deep breath and look at the clock. Promise yourself 10 minutes of not turning back to your Step One issue; then take those 10 minutes to breathe deeply, meditate, read your Bible, turn on a TV show, or call a friend, anything that will help you push the “reset” button and get back on track.
- **Work on yourself.** Reacting to change in a healthy way is important, as is understanding that people are not going to automatically accept that you have changed. Most addicts have done a lot of damage and others are cautious. However, if the motivation for change is strong, you can succeed in the lifelong learning process of recovery. In a true crisis, there are certain elements of the situation that are beyond your control, and while that can be a very difficult thing to handle emotionally, it can sometimes help to focus first on the things you can control. For example, you may not be able to save your marriage from divorce, but rather than feeling immobilized by your pain, you can focus on the tangible things you need to do next in order to get a step closer to putting the experience in the past. It can be something simple, shopping for groceries, making a to-do list for the following day or walking the dog, but it should be something that helps you to move forward. When you're done, move on to the next thing and

then the next. And recite the Serenity prayer constantly if need be: “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.”

- **Adjust the manner in which you think and talk about your addiction.** Thinking of addiction or talking about it as being fun, entertaining, “cool” or other positive things reinforces a toxic notion: You’re “missing out” on not indulging in your Step One issue. Too often, reflecting upon addiction as a 100% positive thing can have a relapse-triggering effect on people in recovery.
- **Consider what you are grateful for and thank God for it.** It can help to write out a full list of all the things that you are grateful for; the blessings that you may take for granted every day. Don’t overlook things like your health or the health of your loved ones, a great pet, a good job or a roof over your head. Even focusing on little things like a thriving garden, a car that’s working well or a great cup of coffee can help to take your mind off the tough stuff that is causing you to feel unstable in recovery.
- **Outline it all in a recovery management plan.** As we mentioned earlier, having a plan to identify problems and their solutions is ESSENTIAL to addressing problems BEFORE they occur. Life is not easy for anyone. Challenges WILL come. Your chances for successful recovery will be increased if you anticipate obstacles and take action based on your personalized plan. You are unique! And so is your recovery!

Relapse Triggers

An important aspect of addiction treatment is identifying potential triggers for relapse. These triggers can squash all the progress we’ve made if we’re not careful, and worse, cause us (especially if we are in early recovery) to attempt to justify certain behaviors. Most recovery management plans call attention to possible triggers that can send us back to our “drug of choice.” In fact, a prevention plan encourages us to come up with a list of our potential triggers that either need to be avoided or dealt with once the trigger has happened.

A trigger involves any high-risk situation or stressor that sparks off a thought, feeling or action to return to our Step One issue. This spark, which is experienced as a temptation or desire to use, is called a craving or urge. So, triggers lead to cravings and urges to use.

There are two types of triggers: external (occurs outside of us) and internal (occurs within us). External triggers involve people, places, things and situations that spark a desire for us to use after a period of abstinence. Internal triggers involve our thoughts, emotions or physical sensations.

Some examples of external triggers may include:

People:

- a friend at college who you drank with every night calls you up to “hang out”
- a colleague at work who sold you pain medications tells you he just got another prescription filled
- a drug dealer sends you a text

Places:

- you’re invited to go to a bar or club you drank at often after work
- a friend invites you to his house where you used to indulge in your Step One issue
- you drive through a certain neighborhood where you went to buy your “drug of choice”

Things:

- you see a pill bottle lying on the counter of a friend’s house
- there’s an unopened wine bottle in the refrigerator
- you see rolling papers while buying something at a convenient store

Situations:

- Holidays (New Years, Christmas, Fourth of July, Superbowl)
- Certain times of the day (after work, before sleep)
- Significant events (loss of a job, loss of a loved one)

Some examples of internal triggers may include:

Emotions:

- Anger, Anxiety, Sadness, Pressure/Stress

Thoughts:

- “I won’t be able to have fun anymore without _____”
- “I can handle it this time”

Physical Sensations:

- Back pain, headaches, no energy

Top 5 Common Relapse Triggers

What are the most common and dangerous relapse triggers to watch out for?

1. Old haunts and old friends

If you routinely spent time indulging in your Step One issue in a certain place or with certain people, it's a good idea to give yourself some space from those haunts. Though old friends will probably want to check in with you, keep your focus on your recovery. If your old friends are still in their addictions, spend your free time with new friends in recovery or old friends who are sober.

2. Justification of “just once”

A toast at a reception, a glass of wine with dinner, or a puff of a joint that's being passed around at a party, it seems like a small thing, easily justified as a one-time occurrence. But it's important to remember just one time using can lead to a whole lot more if you're not careful. Simply having a drug or alcohol in hand can trigger the urge to get loaded, and the effects of the drug or alcohol will only encourage those thoughts. “Just one” can quickly turn into more, and if it happens once, it can happen again and again and again, until you're back where you were before. Or worse.

3. Toxic relationships

A high-maintenance, overly dramatic romantic relationship, friendship or roommate relationship can serve to make you feel angry, jealous, insecure, depressed or irritable – emotions that very often precede a relapse especially when it's an ongoing issue. You may feel like you want to turn back to your Step One issue before you have to deal with this person, or you may feel like the only way to calm down after an argument is to indulge in your addiction. Instead, surrounding yourself with positive, supportive people who don't thrive on drama can go a long way toward helping you to maintain balance and stability in your recovery.

4. Unhealthy choices

Surviving on junk food, camping out in front of the TV, and pounding coffee drinks all day so you don't go to sleep until the early morning are not helpful in recovery. These activities don't provide you with positive structure in your life nor do they help you maintain good physical health, mood balance or a bolstered immune system. Making good choices via eating habits, sleeping patterns and exercise can increase your ability to stay focused on positive goals in recovery and protect you from relapsing out of sheer boredom.

5. High-pressure situations (ex. Lifestyle Imbalance)

Though doing things like enrolling in a college degree or certificate program, working lots of hours to stay busy and get out of debt, or investing time in rebuilding family relationships are all excellent choices in recovery, if you overdo it and end up feeling so much pressure that you can't breathe, then it can turn into a trigger for relapse. This is where the expression “Easy does it” can be helpful, serving as a reminder that a balanced life should be as much of an aspiration as a productive one.

Lifestyle Imbalance

[provided by Unbound Word, Step #6, Freedom Steps]

I have discovered that while Satan *always* goes about as a “roaring lion” (1 Peter 5:8) I am especially prone to make poor choices when I suffer from *Lifestyle Imbalance*. This state may be defined as times when I become **overstretched**, **overscheduled**, and **overcommitted**. How do you define such occasions?

- Burning the candle at both ends
- Trying to do more than is humanly possible
- Owing more money that I can repay
- Making promises I can't keep
- Feeling unloved and unappreciated

When I am feeling overstretched and overextended, I am much more vulnerable to going back to my “sin of choice.” At such times, I frequently experience:

- Feelings of entitlement
- Increased cravings
- Return to denial
- Reduction of coping ability
- Participation in high risk behaviors

Identifying Triggers

When a trigger fires, it may lead people to feel terrified, frustrated or hopeless, believe that they are failing in their efforts to remain in recovery, and/or abandon the process with thoughts like, “What’s the point” or “I just can’t do this.” Learning to identify your specific triggers can help to counteract these unhealthy reactions and begin to develop an action plan to address them directly. Think of times when you stopped indulging in your Step One issue for a moment and something sparked a desire within you to turn back to it. . .

What was it that triggered this reaction? What were you doing? What was going on at the time? What were you feeling/thinking? What time of day was it? Who was with you? Where were you going? What was around you in that moment?

Recovery Management

Recovery management is one of the most critical components of recovery from any addiction. Everyone involved in the love and care of someone in recovery, including the recovering addict themselves, has a role to play in order to help prevent relapse. So, what steps can we take to be sure we are on the center of the path to addiction recovery? And what should family members keep in mind?

The first thing that family members, friends and we must do in order to support recovery is to be honest. If it seems like an old pattern of addiction-related behavior is emerging (i.e., disappearing for hours at a time without explanation, delusional thinking, unhealthy coping behavior, etc.) *say something!*

We must be honest with our family and friends about our thoughts of using or strong temptations to turn back to our Step One issue and reach out to our sponsor, accountability partner or therapist. Triggers can bring on strong cravings and urges, which can be overcome. If we are honest, the rest of the pieces will fall into place. With God all things are possible.

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Notes

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Challenges and Stressors

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Cravings and Triggers

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Solutions