

Preventing Relapse

Relapse prevention planning can be accomplished in a variety of treatment environments, such as inpatient, outpatient and structured support groups. Recovering individuals should become involved in individual or group counseling, 12-step support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. The goal of relapse prevention is an individual who is drug-free and comfortable in recovery. The person should be knowledgeable of relapse warning signs and have a plan of action should these signs develop.

Steps of relapse prevention planning

- **Stabilization.** A controlled environment is often necessary to discontinue use and stabilize the individual.
- **Assessment.** The individual and the treatment professional assess the chain of events leading up to the relapse episode
- **Patient education.** The areas of addiction, recovery, signs of relapse and prevention are reviewed and reinforced.
- **Warning sign identification.** The individual learns to evaluate his or her own specific behavior before relapse occurs to prevent usage.
- **Review of recovery.** Positive skills are identified and a new recovery program begins. New steps are created at this stage, because the old program was not effective in preventing usage.
- **Inventory training.** The individual develops a daily inventory of progress that tells them if they are in the process of recovering or the process of relapsing.

- **Involvement of others.** Recovery cannot occur in isolation. Specific individuals become involved and supportive in the prevention process, including the immediate family, employee assistance or student assistance counselors, 12-step groups and friends.

Relapse can be avoided. Proper education about the recovery process, support by family and friends, identification of recovery skills and relapse warning signs all contribute to the achievement of a healthy, drug-free lifestyle.

Help is available

Just talking about your problems sometimes leads to new solutions. If you or someone you know needs information, guidance or help, contact the resource and number listed below or look in the yellow pages for local professionals who can help.

Note: Contents adapted from *Just the Facts: Recovery/Relapse*, a document produced for the Florida Department of Children & Families under contract #MH614.

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Employee Assistance Program
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RELAPSE PREVENTION



What is Relapse?

Relapse is a natural characteristic of the disease of chemical dependency. A person who has abstained for a period of time and made a serious attempt at recovery defines it as a process of returning to the use of alcohol or other drugs.

Relapse does not come on suddenly nor without warning. It is a process that occurs over time. During the recovery effort, the individual is faced with many problems. The recovery response to these problems and whether there has been proper completion of the recovery stages will determine if a relapse is forthcoming.

Stages of Recovery

Chemical dependency is a disease that causes a person to lose control over the use of alcohol and other drugs. It affects every aspect of the person as well as his/her family and friends. The goal of recovery from this destructive disease is to eliminate dependence on mood-altering chemicals, achieve abstinence and return to physical, psychological, social and spiritual health. The recovering individual goes through specific stages to acquire the skills necessary to maintain sobriety. These stages include:

- **Pretreatment.** Often referred to as a “motivational crisis” in which the individual experiences the consequences of a serious event, such as the breakdown of the family, loss of employment, school failure, or jail. This phase is sometimes referred to as “hitting bottom.”
- **Choosing treatment.** Important considerations in choosing appropriate treatment include the presence of other mental and physical problems, type of drug/drugs being used and family support.

- **Stabilization.** Includes acute physical withdrawal (detoxification) from the abused chemical and motivation counseling by a qualified treatment professional.
- **Early recovery.** The individual learns to process the events, which helped him/her realize their addiction and brought them into treatment.
- **Middle recovery.** A commitment is made to a long-term treatment plan.
- **Late recovery.** During this period the individual deals with major life problems and examines their value system and behavior to prevent the recurrence of use and to develop a healthy and well-balanced lifestyle. A spiritual search may begin that reinforces the new identity of the recovering person.
- **Maintenance.** Full recovery can only be accomplished through the recognition of dependency as a chronic disease and the lifelong need for a strong maintenance plan. This consists of a daily program, which encourages ongoing recovery and personal growth.

Warning signs of relapse

Relapse is a common occurrence. Some individuals may never relapse; others may relapse once and then achieve total abstinence while others may relapse several times. Often the recovering individual feels that a relapse means he/she has failed and that no recovery progress has been made. Relapse education teaches that relapse is part of the recovery process and not total failure on the part of the individual.

There are warning signs in the relapse process that are evident before alcohol or other drug use recurs. The recovering individual and their support

system (family, friends, employer, school) should be aware of these important signs to help prevent relapse. These include:

- **Change.** A build-up of stress caused by negative or positive changes and life events such as marriage, divorce, job change or promotion or financial changes.
 - **Extreme moods.** Overly positive or negative thoughts, moods or feelings including depression, elation, irritability or numbness.
 - **Stress.** Stress increases as the individual withdraws from support systems and obsesses about returning to drug use. Frustration, despair, embarrassment and feelings of hopelessness all occur.
 - **Denial.** Denial that there is a chemical dependency problem. The individual fails to honestly share feelings in counseling or support groups, and attendance becomes sporadic.
 - **High-risk situation.** Individuals place themselves in situations where alcohol or other drug use is likely, thereby sabotaging or defeating the recovery efforts.
 - **Loss of control.** The individual begins to feel out of control and frequently has thoughts of drug usage. Relapse seems justifiable.
 - **Relapse.** Irresistible craving and urges lead to acquisition and use of alcohol or other drugs. The individual relapses.
- If you can relate to the warning signals found above, you are in a relapse stage. The severity of your stage of relapse will depend on how many of the behaviors listed above you're now experiencing.