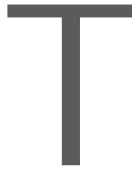


Chapter 20

What to Do If You Relapse



Pray for our Friend

*Our Friend fell today.
She fell into the trap of her addiction.
Meetings became boring,
telephone got to be too heavy.
That feeling of loneliness crept inside,
she was unable to share what she was feeling,
for she didn't know herself..
Old friend, still using, seemed like the only friend around.
Thoughts of "maybe I can just have one,
It sure would be nice, to relax".
One turned to five, She fought with herself and her friend..
Now she remembers why she can't have "Just one".
Our friend is back, the arms of AA will hug her again.
Will she find what she is looking for this time?
The courage, strength and wisdom that
we all need to not pick up that first drink?
Today please, pray for our friend,
and for all those who know it could be them.
God's Love and Peace*

-Cindy

Despite your best intentions and efforts, you may still relapse. To acknowledge this elemental fact does not confer on you permission to go out and relapse nor is it a concession that relapse is inevitable. Many of the clients that I work with have been fortunate enough to stop consuming alcohol and other drugs without relapsing (as of today). Others have not been so fortunate.

But the question still remains for you to answer, “What should *you* do if you relapse?” The simple answer is to stop consuming ALL alcohol and other drugs immediately and get yourself to a Recovery-based support group meeting. But let’s put some meat on them bones.

Here’s the danger in not stopping immediately once you relapse. It’s likely that nothing awful will happen to you if you have a few beers or smoke half a joint—the first time out. You may drink a few drinks then stop. You may take a couple of pills or do a couple of lines of blow and notice that the earth doesn’t stop spinning. Therein lies the danger.

For at this point, your using-based thinking may kick in. “Maybe I don’t really have a problem.” Or “maybe things will be different now that I’ve learned my lesson.” Or “maybe now I can control my drinking.” Or “maybe I can sneak a drink on occasion and no one will be the wiser.”

That’s what happens with relapse. Things start out innocent enough but they snowball out of control over a *very short* period of time. Why? Because chemical dependency is a chronic disease—it never goes away. Because chemical dependency is a progressive disease—it only gets worse over time and once you return to using you start where you left off, not from the very beginning.

So, it’s imperative that you *nip it in the bud* from the beginning. Stop immediately. Don’t be seduced by the lack of drama when you first return to using. I promise you, drama’s just around the corner, whether you can see it or not! Don’t wait for things to get bad again before you stop. Don’t wait for your health to deteriorate. Don’t wait for your home life to unravel. Don’t wait to develop financial or legal problems. Don’t wait to be overcome by emotional and spiritual despair and hopelessness. Don’t wait for pain to be the motivator for you to do something about your disease—one more time. Stop immediately! Stop immediately because you can and because you must!

Once you’ve stopped, what’s next? Think stabilizing. Think getting things back on an even keel. Think patching the holes in the leaky ship. Think getting yourself cleaned up, literally and figuratively.

For after you stop, the next item of importance is putting yourself back together again. Go back to the basics. It’s likely that self-care has gone out the window. How’s your physical health? How’s your emotional health? What shape is your living space in? What shape is your personal life in? What damage has to be undone to your physical and emotional well-being? What bridges do you need to rebuild to your Recovery-based support system. When and where is the next meeting you can get to? Who can you reach out to RIGHT NOW for help?

That’s right! The next step for you to take after relapsing is to return *immediately* to your Recovery-based support system. It’s likely that you broke off *honest* contact or contact *altogether* with your Recovery-based support system long before you returned to consuming alcohol and other drugs. You need to get honest about what’s

been going on with you. This means going back to Recovery-based support meetings. This means contacting your sponsor or getting a sponsor if you no longer have a sponsor. This means walking into a meeting and saying one more time, “Hi, my name is ..., it’s been x amount of hours since my last drink.”

I know. I know. I can hear you thinking. Can’t I just stop and not tell anyone? Can’t I just act like the relapse never happened? Can’t I just move on without making such a big deal out of everything? No. No. No. I understand your fear. I understand your discomfort. I understand why you wouldn’t want anyone to know. But the truth of the matter is that you can’t pretend that something didn’t happen when it has. No matter the reason(s) you have for keeping your secrets, just remember, *You’re only as sick as your secrets.*

Along with returning to your Recovery-based support system, you must forgive yourself. It’s likely that no one is harder on you than you yourself. But the point of the matter is that being hard on yourself is not going to help you remain abstinent. Forgiveness is much more powerful an agent of change than judgment and condemnation. So forgive yourself. Open yourself up to the forgiveness of your Fellowship. And get back to working THE PROGRAM.

Stopping before your using gets out of control comes first. Next, return to your Recovery-based support system and meetings. Stabilization of your physical, emotional, environmental, and interpersonal well-being comes third. After those three steps, you have to work on you. Most important of all, you have to forgive yourself. As hard as those first three steps are, next comes the really hard

work—*learning from your relapse.* Although I would never say that relapse is a positive thing, you can take something positive from a relapse—the identification of those lessons that you’ve resisted learning up to this point in time. The way to uncover what those lessons are is to honestly examine your relapse. And the only way to honestly examine what went wrong is to do so with members of your Recovery-based support system.

Just keep the following in mind. You can turn a negative into a positive. But to do so you must develop an understanding of what went wrong. Here are but a few questions for you to think about.

Pathfinder’s Compass

Potential lessons that may be embedded in one’s relapse.

- 1) What stressor(s) do you remain vulnerable to?
- 2) What Recovery-based coping mechanisms are you still unwilling to apply?
- 3) What self-sabotaging coping mechanisms are you unwilling to let go of?
- 4) What choices did you make or not make that perpetuated the activation and presence of stressors?
- 5) What choices did you make or not make that could have eliminated the activated stressors?
- 6) What happened to your connection with your Recovery-based support system?
- 7) What are you fighting about staying abstinent?
- 8) What are you unwilling to accept about the alterations you have to make in how you live your life?
- 9) What using-based beliefs do you cling to?
- 10) What Recovery-based beliefs are you unwilling to

adopt?

- 11) What alteration(s) in your lifestyle are you still unwilling to make?
- 12) What emotions are you unwilling to confront about ending your relationship with alcohol and other drugs?
- 13) What places are you unwilling to stop going to?
- 14) What people are you unwilling to say good-bye to—forever?
- 15) What feelings are you unwilling to talk about?
- 16) What circumstances are you unwilling to walk away from—forever?
- 17) What help do you need that you're unwilling to ask for?
- 18) What compulsive behaviors are you unwilling to stop participating in?
- 19) What are you unwilling to surrender to?
- 20) What are you unwilling to turn over to a power greater than yourself?
- 21) What are you unwilling to accept about being powerless over ALL alcohol and other drugs?
- 22) What secrets do you harbor that you need to reveal?
- 23) What are you unwilling to accept about who you are?
- 24) What are you unwilling to forgive about who you are?
- 25) What are you unwilling to love about who you are?

Remember, relapse doesn't have to happen to you. You have a choice as to whether or not you use again. Knowing that you have a choice doesn't make relapse

prevention any easier but it should offer you hope.

At the same time, relapse is part of the disease of chemical dependency. You have a choice about what to do if you relapse. Stop or don't stop. Return to your Recovery-based support system or stay away. Get honest or keep your secrets. Ask for help or go it alone. Learn your lessons or remain ignorant of what it is that you still have to learn.

I leave you with these final thoughts. It's infinitely easier for me to write about what you need to do to stay clean and sober than it is for you to stay abstinent from alcohol and other drugs. I openly acknowledge that the straight line from using to abstinence that I've drawn in this book will be crooked for you as you do the work that I've outlined. Crooked is good. Crooked is fine. Crooked means you're still in the game.

No matter how discouraged you may feel, don't give up. Stay with it. You *deserve* the kind of life that's infinitely better than what your life had been when you were consuming alcohol and other drugs. What we've discussed in this book is not a dream. It's not a collection of silly sentimental ideas. I see that it works. I bear witness to the miracles manifesting every day in the lives of my clients as well as in the lives of the people from all over the world from whom I receive letters every day. It exists. It's out there. It's yours for the taking. I wish you well. Thank you so much for seeing things through to the very end.

G.B.U.

Steve