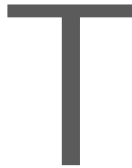


## *M*anaging Your Stressors



*Everything we do is infused with the energy with  
which we do it.*

*If we're frantic, life will be frantic.*

*If we're peaceful, life will be peaceful.*

*And so our goal in any situation becomes inner peace.*

-Marianne Williamson

*Jack Kornfield* tells the following story in his book, *A Path With Heart*. On first discovering a poisoned tree, some people only see its danger. Their immediate reaction is, “Let’s cut this down before we are hurt. Let’s cut it down before anyone else eats of the poisoned fruit.” This resembles our initial response to the difficulties that arise in our lives, when we encounter aggression, compulsion, greed, or fear, when we are faced with stress, loss, conflict, depression, or sorrow in ourselves and others. Our initial response is to avoid them saying, “These poisons afflict us. Let us uproot them; let us be rid of them. Let us cut them down.”

Other people, who have journeyed further along the spiritual path, discover this poisoned tree and do not meet it with aversion. They have realized that to open to life requires a deep and heartfelt compassion for all that is around us. Knowing the poisoned tree is somehow a part of us, they say, “Let us not cut it down. Instead, let’s have compassion for the tree as well.” So out of kindness they build a fence around the tree so that others may not be poisoned and the tree may also have its life. This second approach shows a profound shift of relationship from judgment and fear to compassion.

A third type of person, who has traveled yet deeper in spiritual life, sees this same tree. This person who has gained much vision, looks and says, “Oh a poisoned tree. Perfect! Just what I was looking for.” This individual picks the poisoned fruit, investigates its properties, mixes it with other ingredients, and uses the poison as a great medicine to heal the sick and transform the ills of the world. Through respect and understanding, this person sees in a way opposite to most people and finds value in

the most difficult circumstances.

Just as in the story above, you’ll encounter *poison trees* that you must cope with on a daily basis. What are these *poison trees*? They’re the stressors in your day-to-day life that adversely affect your physical, psychological, social, and/or spiritual well-being. And when your physical, psychological, social, and/or spiritual well-being have been adversely affected, there’s an increasing vulnerability to the process of relapse being activated.

As the story above illustrates, you have a choice about how you cope with the presence of your personal stressors. In part 2 of this book we discussed two choices with which you can cope with your personal stressors—Recovery-based coping mechanisms or self-sabotaging coping mechanisms. But before you can even choose what type of coping mechanism to apply to a stressor, you must first know what your personal stressors are.

That’s the third step in staying clean and sober—identifying those personal stressors, that if activated, will adversely affect your physical, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. Ideally, the knowledge of what your personal stressors are combined with making plans ahead of time for how best to manage your stressors will minimize the risk of activating the process of relapse.

In part 3 of this book we’ll examine what your personal stressors are and the impact that the activated stressors may have on your long-term abstinence. To examine these very important issues, I’ve divided part 3 of this book into the same categories that we used in part 1—physical, psychological, social, and spiritual.

## Pathfinder's Checklist

*A stressor is a stressful event, circumstance, or person that adversely affects your physical, psychological, social, and/or spiritual well-being.*

- 1) Physical: Your body such as pain, hunger, thirst, acute and Post Acute withdrawal symptoms, illness, or cravings
- 2) Psychological: Using-based beliefs, thoughts, behaviors, and emotions
- 3) Social: The environment in which you live, work, and play, unstructured day-to-day living routine, and toxic relationships
- 4) Spiritual: Powerlessness, hopelessness, and pride

In chapter 11, we'll examine six stressors that can adversely affect your physical well-being.

## Pathfinder's Checklist

*Stressors that may adversely affect your physical well-being.*

- 1) Consumption of ANY alcohol and other drugs
- 2) Participation in ANY compulsive behavior
- 3) Negligence of pre-existing and co-existing physical and emotional disorders
- 4) Negligence of self-care of your physical-being
- 5) Exposure to circumstances, events, and/or people that have an adverse affect on your physical well-being
- 6) Negligent management of PAW symptoms

In chapters 12 – 15, we'll examine four stressors that

can adversely affect your psychological well-being.

## Pathfinder's Checklist

*Stressors that may adversely affect your psychological well-being.*

- 1) Beliefs that may activate the process of relapse (discussed in chapter 12).
- 2) Styles of thinking that may activate the process of relapse (discussed in chapter 13).
- 3) Behaviors that may activate the process of relapse (discussed in chapter 14).
- 4) Unresolved feelings that may activate the process of relapse (discussed in chapter 15).

In chapter 16, we'll examine five stressors that can adversely affect your social well-being.

## Pathfinder's Checklist

*Stressors that may adversely affect your social well-being.*

- 1) Neglecting the upkeep of your living space
- 2) Unmanageable circumstances of your life
- 3) Unstructured day-to-day living routine
- 4) Toxic relationships
- 5) Isolation

In chapter 17, we'll examine three stressors that can adversely affect your spiritual well-being.

## Pathfinder's Checklist

*Stressors that may adversely affect your spiritual well-being.*

- 1) Powerlessness
- 2) Hopelessness
- 3) Pride

As you take the time to read the material in part 3 in a careful and thoughtful manner, don't be surprised if you feel provoked by what the exercises awaken within you. Although I believe that having things stirred up is a good thing, you may find it uncomfortable for you to stay with the work that I've outlined for you in this section.

Don't be alarmed if you find yourself skipping over some of the work. Don't be upset if you find yourself putting this book down and watching television. Don't be the least bit surprised if this book mysteriously becomes misplaced. The work in this section is as worthwhile as it is hard to do. If you feel like you're having a difficult time staying focused on the work in this section, ask for help. Ask your sponsor or a member of your Recovery-based support system or your therapist to help you. Stick with it. Trust me on this one, you'll experience a huge payoff in the end!