

Part 4

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# *Relapse* Prevention Planning

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*The beginning of wisdom  
is a firm grasp of the obvious.*

-Stanley Phillips

*I would like* to share with you the following poem,  
*An Autobiography in Five Chapters*, by Portia Nelson.

1) I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I fall in.  
I am lost ... I am hopeless.  
It isn't my fault.  
It takes forever to find a way out.

2) I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I pretend I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe I am in the same place.  
But, it isn't my fault.  
It still takes a long time to get out.

3) I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I still fall in ... it's a habit.  
My eyes are open  
I know where I am.  
It is my fault  
I get out immediately.

4) I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.

**5) I walk down another street.**

Nothing I've ever read captures the essence of Recovery more so than this poem. For as you [re]construct a Recovery-based lifestyle, you'll encounter plenty of *deep holes in the sidewalk*. And just like in the poem, at first, you'll more than likely fall into your share of *holes in the sidewalk* without understanding how or why you fell. In fact, at first, you'll be more likely to blame everyone but yourself for your misfortune. But as time goes on, you'll learn from your mistakes. Sure, you'll still fall into some *holes*, but you'll begin to understand what your part was in *falling into those holes*. At the same time, you'll also become much more adept at getting out.

And the good news is that the more time you put into [re]constructing a Recovery-based lifestyle, the less *holes in the sidewalk* you'll find yourself falling into. This will occur not because you'll encounter fewer *holes in the sidewalk*, but because you'll start choosing to engage the *holes in the sidewalk* in new and different ways. Just like in the poem above, you'll begin to recognize the *holes in the sidewalk* for what they are. You'll begin to see that you have choices as to how to engage those *holes in the sidewalk*, and eventually you'll *choose a different street to walk down* altogether.

This is one of those good news bad news scenarios. The good news is that you can absolutely stop falling into so many damn *holes in the sidewalk* and, in fact, eventually, *walk down a different street*. The bad news is that such a transformation doesn't occur by wishing and hoping but by doing some hard work. The hard work that I'm referring to is developing a relapse prevention plan that will enable you to identify ahead of time what the *holes in the sidewalk* are that you must avoid in order to stay clean

and sober and how you intend to avoid those *holes in the sidewalk*.

If you've read the first three parts of this book, you have all the tools in place to create a GREAT relapse prevention plan. The next step is to do the actual planning.

In part 1 of this book we examined what a Recovery-based lifestyle is and how to construct it. In part 2 of this book we examined two types of coping mechanisms—self-sabotaging coping mechanisms and Recovery-based coping mechanisms. As you no doubt can tell by now, self-sabotaging coping mechanisms are the coping mechanisms that empower you to dive head first into the *holes in the sidewalk*. We also examined Recovery-based coping mechanisms. Hopefully, by now, you can see that Recovery-based coping mechanisms are the coping mechanisms that will enable you to *walk around the holes in the sidewalk* and to eventually *walk down a different street*.

In part 3 of this book we examined those personal stressors that have an adverse affect on your physical, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. The personal stressors that we discussed are the *holes in the sidewalk* that you'll encounter in your day-to-day life. Being able to successfully navigate your personal stressors is what will enable you to stay clean and sober.

So how can you successfully navigate your personal stressors? How can you choose to walk around your personal stressors rather than fall into the *holes in the sidewalk*? How can you eventually choose to *walk down another street* so as to avoid even encountering your personal stressors? That's what the name of this game is and the best way to play this game is to plan ahead.

Make a plan. Don't be surprised by a stressor and

then have to scramble for how best to cope with it. Know what your stressors are ahead of time, anticipate that you'll encounter them at some point, and make a plan for how to avoid it before you encounter it or how to cope with the stressor once you do encounter it.

In part 4 of this book we'll tie the first three parts of this book together by learning how to construct a relapse prevention plan. The purpose of a relapse prevention plan is to:

- 1) Empower you to remain abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs.
- 2) Protect and preserve your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 3) Cope with abstinence-related stressors.
- 4) Minimize the onset of those stressors activated by the act of living life.
- 5) Eliminate those stressors that have been activated.
- 6) Alleviate the pain that has been stimulated by an activated stressor.

In chapter 18 we'll examine in detail the process of relapse. I'll first list the signs and symptoms that indicate that the process of relapse may be activated. Next, I'll discuss what impact Recovery-based coping mechanisms might have on a stressor and what impact self-sabotaging coping mechanisms might have on a stressor. After that discussion I'll describe what the signs of the process of relapse are once the process has been activated.

In chapter 19 we'll examine how to make a relapse prevention plan. I'll first discuss the three stages of relapse prevention planning. We'll end our discussion with an exercise in which we create a relapse prevention plan.

In chapter 20, I'll discuss the specific steps that you should take if you do relapse. This chapter is important

for you to read. Not because you're doomed to relapse but because you need to know what to do if you relapse.

In chapter 21, we'll discuss how to give yourself the best chance to stay clean and sober. I'll discuss with you the very same recommendations that I make in my office everyday to people just like you.

The most important skill that will be required of you as you learn how to make a relapse prevention plan is HOW—Honesty—Openness—Willingness. Making a relapse prevention plan requires little more of you than following a very simple formula. But making an effective relapse prevention plan requires you to honestly examine who you are, how strong your Recovery is, what you need to avoid, and what you need to incorporate into your life. Just as important as honestly assessing who you are is being open to living your life in a new and different way. You see, that's what's at the core of relapse prevention planning—altering your life to accommodate new choices. Finally, a relapse prevention plan is barely worth the paper that it's written on if you don't have the willingness to execute the plan.