

Chapter 10

**Sabotaging Your Recovery:
Behaviors to Avoid**

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*You see what you choose to see,
because all perception is a choice.
And when you cease to impose your meanings
on what you see,
your spiritual eyes will open,
and you will see a world free of judgment and
shining in its endless beauty.*

-Paul Ferrini

In Chapter 8, Feelings and Sobriety: How to Identify Your Feelings, we discussed how your irrational beliefs can become triggers for relapse because of the emotions your irrational beliefs may activate. In Chapter 9, *Feelings and Sobriety: How to Safely [Re]claim Your Feelings*, we focused on emotions—specifically anger, fear, shame, and grief—and the dangers they pose to your long-term abstinence. But irrational beliefs and emotions are not the only potential hazards to your long-term abstinence. You must also be wary of compulsive and isolating behaviors.

Compulsive behaviors and isolation are dangerous because they help you escape from your emotions. As you no doubt have already discovered, self-examination is a painful process. Before, you had alcohol and other drugs to prevent you from having to look too closely at yourself. But now, the layers are beginning to peel away. If you maintain the irrational belief that you should never be emotionally, physically, or spiritually uncomfortable after you stop consuming alcohol and other drugs, you'll likely seek out other means as a way of avoiding discomfort and/or ways of making you feel better.

Compulsive behaviors often are just what the doctor ordered to avoid feeling bad or to insure that you feel good. The problem with this is that Recovery is not only about ending your addictive behavior(s), but changing the way you cope with stress in your life. If you rely on compulsive behaviors to avoid discomfort or to create pleasure, you haven't changed your coping methods.

Besides avoiding discomfort and seeking pleasure, you may turn to compulsive behaviors because they help you avoid looking at the real issues in your life.

But compulsive behaviors can be dangerous because they may lead you back to consuming alcohol and other drugs. Perhaps you soon become displeased with compulsive behaviors as a suitable replacement for alcohol and other drugs and you decide to go back to using. Compulsive behaviors may be destructive in their own right. You may go back to alcohol and other drugs as a means of seeking relief from the problems created by the compulsive behaviors. Another danger compulsive behaviors pose to your long-term abstinence is that they may distract you from your Recovery.

Pathfinder's Checklist



Common compulsive behaviors.

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|----------------|------------------|
| 1) Eating | 5) Relationships |
| 2) Tobacco use | 6) Sex |
| 3) Gambling | 7) Work |
| 4) Spending | 8) Exercise |

Be mindful that the safe, balanced participation in most activities is not harmful. But when you cross the line from balanced to compulsive participation, a behavior may prove to be harmful to your emotional and spiritual well-being.

Another way of avoiding self-examination, feeling your feelings, and Recovery is to isolate. No doubt, being alone affords you more control over your life. Isolation is

a great way to avoid life—people, places, situations, responsibilities, even reality.

However, when you isolate with the intent of escaping life, you do yourself more harm than good. Although you may believe that isolating is a good way to recharge your battery, if your true intent is to escape, then you're not really regrouping, but avoiding.

The danger that compulsive behaviors and isolation pose to your Recovery is that they can potentially undermine the basics of Recovery that I outlined in Chapter 5, *Stability: The Foundation to A Sober Life*—stable support system, stable daily routine, and stable relationships. Compulsive behaviors and isolation can confuse your thinking. This can make you vulnerable to involvement in risky behaviors which may lead right back to consuming alcohol and other drugs.

Pathfinder's Exercise



- 1) Identify two compulsive behaviors you've already experienced.
- 2) Identify what risks they may pose to your long-term Recovery.
- 3) Create a plan for how you intend to cope with compulsive behaviors that cross the line from balanced to excessive.