

Chapter 6

Identifying the People, Places, and Situations That Are A Danger to Your Recovery

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*Every relationship has its ups and downs.
The choice you make as a problem presents itself will
determine the future of your relationship.
When you follow the much-traveled path of human
nature—pulling back, protecting or lashing out—
damage often doesn't get repaired.
When you follow the less-traveled spiritual path
of forgiveness and trust, you are led to greater love.
Which path do you want to take?*

-Stanley Phillips

As I've stated before, chemical dependency is a complex disease that is primary, chronic, progressive, oftentimes fatal, and prone to relapse. Although you'll always be vulnerable to relapse, there's no time you'll be more vulnerable to relapse than in the early days of Recovery.

Until you build a lifestyle that supports Recovery, until you make a part of your life those activities that support Recovery, until you develop the coping strategies that can protect you from relapse, you'll be especially vulnerable to relapse. Does this mean relapse is inevitable? Does it mean you're defeated before you even try? Does it mean there's no way to avoid relapse in early Recovery?

No. Relapse is an aspect of your disease, not a guarantee. Remember you have HOW—*Honesty, Openness, Willingness* on your side. If you consistently use HOW, you have every reason to believe that you can remain abstinent from alcohol and other drugs.

You've already applied HOW to evaluating your lifestyle. Next let's apply HOW to the examination of another important topic—high-risk situations. A high-risk situation is any situation that poses a threat to your abstinence.

Pathfinder's Checklist



Three types of high-risk situations for relapse.

1) Your involvement with any person, place, or cir-

cumstance that is associated with consuming alcohol and other drugs.

- 2) Circumstances that are emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually stressful.
- 3) Being around alcohol and other drugs.

An important aspect of remaining abstinent is *Honestly* identifying what circumstances are potential triggers for relapse, *Openly* discussing those triggers with others, and *Willingly* avoiding those situations.

Why should you be cautious of any person, place, or situation connected with consuming alcohol and other drugs? You're new at this. Your initial enthusiasm will carry you only so far. Right now you're more reliant on people who have *walked the walk* of sobriety for guidance and support. Your intelligence won't help you. Your family and friends who aren't addicted can't be of any help. So you have to be cautious about who you're with, where you go, and what situation(s) you place yourself in. Your logic, friends, and willpower can only protect you from so much. Don't put yourself in danger and you'll live to fight another day.

Why should you avoid being near alcohol and other drugs? Right now your ability to abstain from the consumption of alcohol and other drugs is fragile, at best. Although I don't doubt the sincerity of your commitment to abstinence, you're prone to underestimate your vulnerability to how quickly things can change for you once you've been exposed to any number of personal triggers for relapse.

Why should you be wary of any person, place, or situation that is associated with stress? Simply, when you're overstressed, you're more likely to make irrational deci-

sions. If overwhelmed by stress, you're more likely to want to relieve that stress through the consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

Relapse occurs most often in situations where an individual is unaware of and/or unprepared for potential danger. By knowing beforehand what the potential dangers are about any given person, place, and/or situation, you can better prepare to remove yourself from a situation when it becomes *too* dangerous for you.

The most effective prevention measure you can take is not to put yourself in a dangerous situation. If you can't decide for yourself whether a situation is dangerous, you can always confer with somebody in Recovery for feedback about the nature of the situation you're contemplating putting yourself in.

If you can't avoid a potentially dangerous situation, here are some tips for how to protect yourself.

Pathfinder's Checklist



Tips to protect yourself in a dangerous situation.

- 1) Take someone with you who is in Recovery.
- 2) Give yourself permission to leave if you feel uncomfortable.
- 3) Let others know ahead of time that you may choose to leave early.
- 4) Have a reliable way to leave when *you* choose to do so.