



RECOVERY TOOL

Sustaining the Gain

What to Work on After You Leave
Residential Treatment



RECOVERY PROGRAMS

Ten Steps

A big part of sustaining the gains you made in treatment lies in ten simple steps:

- 1. Stay in treatment.** There will inevitably be times when you want to drop out – resist the urge.
- 2. Remember where you started.** Recalling where you came from helps motivate you to stick with recovery in the present.
- 3. Beware experiments with control.** From time to time, you'll be tempted to have 'just one'.
- 4. Avoid high-risk situations.** Anticipate what these might be and get help figuring out how to avoid falling victim to them.
- 5. Develop your stress management skills.** Therapy or counseling is a good place to try out new skill sets that can measurably improve your life.
- 6. Set realistic expectations.** Don't try to swallow the future in one gulp. Whether we like it or not, change occurs on its own schedule, not on ours.
- 7. Learn to manage unwanted thoughts.** Everyone has them; they can be distracting, annoying, or even frightening. Learn how to deal with them.
- 8. Don't switch dependencies.** It's tempting to look around for an easier, softer way to make yourself feel better. But that can become a problem, too.
- 9. Build a support network.** Who can you turn to? There will come a time...
- 10. Carry the message.** The best way to keep hold of your recovery is to help others find theirs.

Stay in Treatment

How likely am I to drop out of treatment?

It's been said that there are a thousand reasons for dropping out of therapy, and only one for staying:

If you stay, you get better.

Treatment works best when you:

- » Stay long enough to experience the full benefits
- » Work hard to understand yourself and resolve issues, and
- » Keep your expectations realistic.

Check those statements that describe your feelings:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I think I've already gotten most of the benefit from treatment | <input type="checkbox"/> I believe that no one can solve your problems but yourself |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I believe that most problems can be solved through willpower and discipline | <input type="checkbox"/> I am sometimes suspicious of others' motives. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't like to depend on other people | <input type="checkbox"/> My situation is unique, and other people don't understand it |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I want a break from talking about my problems | <input type="checkbox"/> I am afraid of how I might feel if I get close to certain subjects in therapy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel I am very different from most people I have met in treatment. | <input type="checkbox"/> Other people have described me as stubborn. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am concerned about the cost of treatment. | <input type="checkbox"/> I always know what's best for me. |

If you checked two or more of the above, you should actively discuss your feelings about change, and your commitment to change, with your counselor.

People begin recovery from different starting points. Remembering where you came from is a way of strengthening motivation and also keeping a realistic perspective on how far you've come. Believe us, you've come a long way.

Exercise

Write out a personal history of the emotional, psychological, and behavior problems that have interfered with your ability to live a healthy, happy, productive life. Be sure to include:

- » The age at which you first experienced those problems, and how they appeared at that time.
- » The age at which you realized you might suffer from an emotional disorder that required treatment.
- » Your experience of therapy, past and present. Was it helpful, not helpful, and why or why not?
- » Previous attempts you have made to change your life for the better.
- » Why, in your opinion, were they unsuccessful?
- » Are there any reasons why now is not a good time to change your life?
- » Who (besides you) will benefit if you resolve your problems?
- » What about the possibility of success frightens you the most? (Think hard about this one)
- » Is there anyone in your life who you suspect does not really want you to succeed? If yes, then who? And what evidence makes you conclude this is true?
- » What do you regard as your most serious problem?
- » What is your plan for addressing it?
- » If you feel that your situation is different from that of others in treatment, describe in what way.

Go over this document in some detail with your therapist. What did you learn in residential treatment that you didn't realize previously? What does your therapist think about your perception of these issues?

Beware Experiments with Control

Compulsivity and the “potato chip syndrome”

It's always a temptation to think you can return to an old behavior without experiencing consequences. But if that behavior was in some way compulsive – as in alcohol or drug use, an eating disorder, gambling or sex addiction, to name a few – then you'll run straight into 'the potato chip syndrome' – you'll find it extremely difficult to stop. You may learn once again the lesson that 'one is too many, and a thousand not enough.'

Check the boxes that apply to you:

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I pride myself on being strong-willed and not depending on others. | <input type="checkbox"/> I am worried about how I will handle stress without returning to old ways. | <input type="checkbox"/> My main goal is to gain control over everything in my life and making all my own decisions. | <input type="checkbox"/> I want to feel normal, not different from other people. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have always been something of a rebel. | <input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes make impulsive decisions that are not in my best interest. | <input type="checkbox"/> I think people made a bigger issue of my behavior than was necessary. | <input type="checkbox"/> I was never as bad off as most people I met in treatment. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't like to feel limited. It makes me angry. | <input type="checkbox"/> I am easily frustrated when I can't do what I want to, when I want to. | <input type="checkbox"/> I tend to react negatively to others interfering in my life. | <input type="checkbox"/> I am not good at accepting change – I like things the way they are. |

If you checked two or more, you may be vulnerable in this area. It's definitely an issue to explore further with your therapist.

High-Risk Situations

Plan ahead to avoid or manage difficult situations

You've heard the phrase 'slippery places and people'. It may sometimes seem as if your environment is designed to make it **difficult** for you to change. And indeed, it's important to identify which situations you can handle successfully at this point in early recovery – so you can try to avoid those you aren't ready to handle.

Which statements apply to you?

- I need to avoid certain people entirely in order to maintain recovery.
- I feel it will be difficult for me to maintain my gains after I leave residential treatment.
- Certain situations or environments seem to trigger old behavior.
- I have trouble communicating honestly with others.
- I am experiencing cravings from time to time.
- I tend to withdraw and isolate myself, which isn't good for me.
- I have completed treatment in the past, only to fall back into old ways.
- I want to make new associations, but I find it hard.
- I don't feel supported by the people around me.
- I have a tendency to associate with risky people.
- I need to avoid being around alcohol and drugs entirely or I'll slip.
- I'm easily discouraged.
- I am not good at finding and making new friends.
- Certain situations really scare me.
- I worry a lot about the future.

To determine whether you need to avoid something or a situation entirely in early recovery, it helps to ask the following questions:

- A.** What **benefit** do you gain by contact with that person/ situation at this point in time?
- B.** How **necessary** (on a scale of 1 to 10) is it to your well-being to have contact now?
- C.** What **risks** could result from contact with that situation or person?

Everyone experiences stress – it's the human condition. But some people handle it better than others. Take a typical airplane flight. Some passengers are enjoying the feeling of flying. Others are bored, or even asleep. Still others are paralyzed with fright. Yet all are on the same airplane, with exactly the same risk.

Because stress is subjective, we can learn to deal with it more effectively. The list of statements can help identify areas to work on. Check those that apply to you:

- 1. There are currently a number of stressful situations I feel I **must** deal with in the near future.
- 2. I am not looking forward to what I must do in the next few months.
- 3. I worry a lot about the future.
- 4. I often feel as if others are taking advantage of me.
- 5. When I want something done, I want it done *now*.
- 6. I often find myself in conflict with others over seemingly small issues.
- 7. I tend to be suspicious of other people.
- 8. Nothing annoys me like lazy or incompetent people.
- 9. When I have a problem on my mind, I often have trouble sleeping or concentrating.
- 10. I am frequently disappointed when others fail to live up to my standards.
- 11. My expectations may be high, but I believe they are justified.
- 12. I am easily discouraged when confronted by an obstacle.
- 13. Little things bother me more than big things.
- 14. I am not a patient person

Stress Management Skill Areas

If three or more statements applied to you right now, you may want to address the issue of stress management with your therapist or counselor. Here are some skills that can help you manage stress

- A. Anger management:** Learning to understand and manage the human 'fight-flight response' can yield big dividends in terms of relationships as well as your overall emotional and even your physical health.
- B. Conflict resolution:** It's important to learn how to resolve conflicts with difficult people in a positive, non-threatening manner that nonetheless achieves your aims.
- C. Codependence:** Few activities are more stressful than trying to take responsibility for the behavior of others. Learning to identify and address your codependent traits can improve almost every aspect of your life.
- D. Resolving Ambivalence:** Sometimes we just can't seem to make up our minds. Counseling is a good place to address this.
- E. Perfectionism:** Unrealistic expectations are the gateway to unhappiness. Learn to set and achieve realistic goals based on a real-world assessment of the possibilities.

Set Realistic Expectations

The Next 90 Days

Believe it or not, overconfidence is as big an obstacle to recovery as lack of confidence – especially if it leads you to let important aspects of your program slip and slide. Complete this brief inventory:

Area of Life	Expectations for next 90 days:
Participation in therapy/ self-help groups	
Ability to handle occasional periods of high stress or worry	
Meeting needs of my family	
Diet and exercise	
Spiritual growth	

Write out, in your own words, a statement of commitment to recovery and change. Describe what you are willing to do in order to be successful. Also describe what you are not willing to do. Share it with your therapist/ counselor. (You can use the back of this page, or a separate sheet.)

Learn to Manage Unwanted Thoughts

How to Block Unwanted Thoughts

Are any of the following unwanted thoughts of concern to you?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nightmares/ Vivid dreams | <input type="checkbox"/> Sudden anxiety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Negative images during waking hours | <input type="checkbox"/> Images of past abuse or trauma |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Impulses to harm self | <input type="checkbox"/> Worries about the future |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Impulses to harm others | <input type="checkbox"/> Sudden feelings of anger |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preoccupation with certain problems or situations | |

Dealing With “Bad” Thoughts

- 1. Assume a relaxing position.** This usually means seated, eyes closed, both feet flat on the floor, and hands palm-down on each thigh.
- 2. Take a deep breath,** hold for a count of three, then release slowly over a count of six or nine until your lungs feel empty of air. Then inhale again. Repeat process five times.
- 3. Now, picture a stop sign.** Imagine yourself approaching the stop sign and coming to a full stop. Keep your eyes on the sign for at least three seconds.
- 4. Give yourself some positive suggestions.** For instance, tell yourself that you are actually in no danger at the present moment.. You don't need to dwell on an unpleasant image or feeling. You can do something to make yourself feel better. Remind yourself how well you actually doing, and how you are finally achieving an important goal. Tell yourself that you will feel much better shortly. Focus on some something good that is happening in your life. .
- 5. Open your eyes,** then *get up and walk around* for five minutes, either inside or outside.
- 6. Go back to what you were doing.** Don't worry about having had an unwanted thought. It's natural. The good news: it ***goes away by itself.***

Don't Switch Dependencies

It's tempting to relieve the stress that goes along with change by replacing too much of one undesirable behavior with too much of another. Temporary relief of anxiety or worry can become as big a problem in the future as any you experienced in the past.

Do any of these statements apply to you?

1. I have been wondering if there is a substance or chemical that I could safely use when I feel tense or anxious or can't sleep.
2. I have a tendency to gain or lose weight when I'm going through stressful periods.
3. I have a history of behaving impulsively and regretting it later.
4. I have abused a number of substances in the past.
5. I feel a medication is safe so long as it is prescribed by a physician.
6. I have a history of relapse following past treatment.
7. I am having problems sleeping.
8. I have been diagnosed with an anxiety or panic disorder.

If you agreed with two or more of the above statements, make sure to work with your therapist/counselor to monitor your use of other substances, your consumption of food, and other behaviors during the first few months out of treatment. It could save you a second treatment, for yet another painful problem.

Build Your Support Network

Find the right people to support your recovery

Here are some suggestions for picking and choosing the people you will rely on in times of need during early recovery.

1. They should be available to you when you need them. That doesn't mean they have to drop everything when you call. It does mean you should be able to reach them within a reasonable period of time. And they have agreed in advance to be available for you.
2. You should rely on more than one person for support. By spreading your needs around, they won't be a burden for any one individual. If you sense you're taxing someone's time and energy, you will probably stop calling --- which defeats the purpose of support.
3. You should seek emotional support, but not financial support. Don't borrow money or seek services from the people in your support network. It interferes with honest communication.
4. Look for people who you believe will provide accurate feedback about your behavior. This is perhaps most important of all. Your own thinking may be confused or unreliable at times. You need someone you can rely on to tell you the truth as they see it – and that's not necessarily what you want to hear at the moment.
5. Seek out individuals whose experience is meaningful to you. That means folks whose life goals are similar to yours, and who manage their daily lives in ways you might like to learn.

Approach these people, explain where you're coming from, and express your interest in talking with them on an ongoing basis, in person or by phone. Inquire as to limits on availability, and **respect those limits**. Don't be discouraged if you get turned down – it usually turns out for the best. Discuss your support network with your therapist/counselor to make sure it fits with the goals of therapy.

Carry the Message

Hang on to Your Recovery by Sharing it

There's always someone whose need is greater than your own. One of the surest ways to improve your own life is to help somebody else who needs it. You'd be amazed how much benefit you can derive from a genuine offer of help and support to another. Remember we're talking about emotional and spiritual help, not financial or material.

Here are some suggestions on how to begin 'carrying the message' of recovery—

- A. Make a list** of three persons you know who might benefit from hearing your story of hope.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- B. Contact each** to let him/her know you are available to talk about your experience should they want to. Offer to get together over coffee, etc. What was their response?
- C. If they're willing,** share with them your experience. And be willing to listen and provide feedback as they share theirs. *Be frugal with advice* – it can make you seem critical or judgmental, and other people often respond negatively.