

# Relapse Traps: What Threatens My Sobriety

## Getting Sober is One Thing, Staying Sober is Another...

There are always going to be moments in my life where I will just want to get shitfaced drunk. I fantasize about it more often than I'd like to officially admit. I'm pretty sure I won't ever actually do it, but in my wise old age of 34 I've learned that you can't ever be too sure about anything and besides, cockiness can be dangerous. My intention and mission in life is to stay sober, but if I want to maintain this I know I can't just sit around and wish on it, I have to work hard at it.

### Triggers

Triggers are threats to anyone's sobriety; they are whatever makes you think about and/or crave alcohol. Triggers ultimately lead to relapse if you're not careful and paying attention. Every day I experience a number of triggers, even at 5 1/2 years of sobriety. I am happy to say that it has gotten a bit easier, though. In early sobriety the triggers were much more frequent and difficult to deal with, as almost anything posed a potential threat:

- » a commercial
- » a song
- » a sunny day
- » a rainy day
- » getting off of work
- » feeling happy
- » feeling sad
- » watching football
- » going out in public
- » feeling uninteresting
- » holidays
- » stress
- » eating a steak
- ...you name it.



Photo by Anton Steenbock

There's a good reason that most AA meetings celebrate short increments of sobriety like 30, 60, and 90 days with coins; the first stretch of abstinence is often the hardest. You've finally given up the booze, but you haven't had the time to replace it with healthy tools and habits. Learning to approach life in new ways with a sober mind takes a shift in perspective and approach on just about everything, which takes a lot of time, energy and persistence.

Repression is a normal human defense mechanism that softens the bad stuff in our lives so we can handle it. Traumatic events from a few years ago don't seem as big of deals anymore.

There is also something called **euphoric recall**, which exaggerates the good times. Lots of people in sobriety say things like, "I messed up, got a few DUIs and lost the love of my life, but I had tons of fun when I was drinking and I think I've learned my lesson. I think I can enjoy the good times again and control my drinking. If it gets like it was before, I'll get some help, but I think I can do it again."

This "disease" is insane and I wish the medical profession could get more of a handle on it, as there are just too many unknowns. So, if you're experiencing triggers similar to those above, relapse is almost inevitable unless you are consciously at work avoiding it, in my humble opinion.

### Handling My Worst Triggers

I am finding that being further into sobriety the triggers can be quite tricky. The most troubling triggers I am experiencing lately are my vivid day dreams about boozing, hearing certain songs or the temptation I feel when I am less than an arm's length away from an open container. I've very recently realized (today, actually) just how dangerous my thoughts have become. They've snuck up behind me and have completely wrapped around my world.

I'm so aware of it at this very moment, my heart is heavy and the pain of this is almost overwhelming.

*How could I not recognize this happening?*

*If sobriety is my mission in life, why did it feel okay to consistently daydream about getting wasted?*

*Why did it feel right to be so sneaky, transporting my mind back to that secret world?*

*Why didn't the strong part of me stop it?*

*Why didn't I stop myself from listening to those songs that instantly transport me back to that place?*

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I'm just really glad I'm aware now, so I've made a plan:

1. **Redirect my drunken day dreams** – I'll start with visualizing replacing every drink with water and feeling it flow through my body, making me feel fresh and alive. I'll have to ponder this one some more, though.
2. **Turn off the music** – The songs are easy, I can just turn them off. There's only one type of music that is "trigger free" for me, so I'll be listening to a lot more Tchaikovsky and Beethoven. Get ready, hubby.
3. **Redirect my thoughts** around open containers – this is the one I'm worried about, but if I focus on the steps above, maybe it'll be easier.

I have already cut back on my exposure to alcohol substantially, but it's still everywhere. More often than not, I think about how close it is to me and how easily I could just put my lips on it and chug it down. I never tell anyone when I think these thoughts because they are all too often, and what's the point, really? Plus, it scares the hell out of me.

With one swift movement all of my hard work could go to the shitter along with my amazing life as I now know it. I do believe I'll be making a counseling appointment a.s.a.p.



In my twisted little alcoholic brain, I'm now imagining the thoughts of my readers, as I had similar thoughts about my dad when I was younger:

*"Why can't she just stop and be done with it?"*

*"Doesn't she have enough willpower?"*

*"Is she really that weak?"*

*"Why would she doubt herself? Is she looking for an excuse?"*

*"Does she not love her son enough?"*

*"Isn't her husband's threat to leave her enough?"*

Here's a shocking revelation: what you or anyone else thinks of me is none of my business. But I am aware that what I'm actually afraid of is **what I think of me**.

I will say this, my husband DID help to spark my initial sobriety, but willpower and ultimatums certainly won't keep me that way. I'm not weak or pessimistic, I'm honest and realistic. That's what I'm counting on to get me through this.

The only thing that will keep me sober is continued focus on how I can get better. How I can better think, act, react and love.

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## Prevention and Growth

Until I can see a counselor, I'm also putting the following plan into action:

### *Put ME first*

This is not selfish, it's absolutely necessary in order to be a loving, caring, productive person, friend, wife, mom and daughter. The quality of my relationships is directly related to the quality of my relationship with me.

I must do what's right for ME more often. I've been practicing lately, but I'm really going to kick it up a notch now.

### *Simplify*

My closet (amongst other closets and drawers) is a pit, overflowing with clothes I don't wear. It has been at the back of my mind for quite some time now – not a source of stress I need, no matter how small.

I don't need to see or talk to anyone on a regular basis to be happy either (except for my husband, son, brother and mom). I am perfectly content with just BEING at home most of the time.

A happy marriage requires compromise, however, so I do participate in many things to appease my husband and his relentless socialite craziness. He has been good for me in that respect, as I would likely be a fairly lazy gal, with a tendency to get a little depressed.

We've actually slowed down lately, which has been nurturing to the homebody in me, so I'll just keep it up.

### *Connect with other sober alcoholics*

This may seem like a contradiction to my prior plan to simplify my social calendar, but it's not. I need to do this on my own terms.

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It's really important to me that I feel like I belong in some sense and learn to distinguish between healthy boundaries and emotional walls; I can't think of a better way to practice and learn than with new people going through similar experiences.

This step will probably be the toughest one, due to my social anxiety. This is where my dad gets hung up...it has led to his relapse time and time again.

### *Get rid of toxic people*

Right now there isn't anyone I necessarily need to break-up with, but there are people that are in unhealthy relationships or unhealthy lifestyles that I don't want to spend time with.

There will be instances where I must, because that's just how life is, but I am going to be more diligent about keeping them out of my home (my safe place) and limiting my exposure to them.

### *Relax*

I don't consider this a luxury, nor does it fall into the "put ME first" category. Regular relaxation is essential for a healthy life. Why the hell is it so hard to do, then? If I could get a weekly massage, I would. If I ever have disposable income I will do exactly that. So, in the meantime I'll take more naps whether or not the house falls apart, or my husband bitches at me.

Yes dear, I just said that.

*SoberChrystal has been sober for over five years. She has kindly allowed Recovery Systems Institute to reprint this from her blog "SoberChrystal" at [soberchrystal.com](http://soberchrystal.com). You can also follow her on Twitter as @SoberChrystal.*

