

# THE SOBRIETY E-BOOK

YOUR GUIDE TO A BETTER LIFE.

*BY CHRIS ELKINS, M.A.*

# The Sobriety E-Book

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Your guide to a better life.

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## ***DISCLAIMER***

*This e-book is designed for general educational and informational purposes and does not render medical advice. The information provided through this e-book is not a substitute for professional health care, and as such, should not be used for diagnosing or treating an illness or health concern. Should you need immediate medical attention, please dial 911 or contact your physician.*

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# Welcome

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Hello,

I'm Dr. Timothy Huckaby, a board certified addiction specialist who is in recovery from opiate addiction and alcoholism. I was in denial when I began my recovery journey in medical school. I kicked an opiate addiction for 10 years, but I remained ignorant toward the problems alcohol was causing me.

In 2008, I relapsed for six months before a few partners and friends of mine convinced me to seek treatment. I had hit rock bottom, and I was finally ready to listen. At age 52, I achieved sobriety from painkillers and alcohol.

You don't have to wait until you hit rock bottom to ask for help. You don't have to wait for friends or family to intervene before you take proactive steps toward living a healthy life. If alcohol or other drugs are causing problems in your life, no matter how big or small, consider a life of sobriety. If you have tried to quit using alcohol or other drugs and were unable to stop, now is this time to ask for help.

By opening this e-book, you've taken one of the first steps toward a life in recovery. You've decided you want to learn more about maintaining sobriety, and you will not let alcohol or other drugs control your life.

Congratulations on taking that step. Maintaining sobriety won't always be easy. It will require work. It will require time. It will require effort. Most of all, it will require hope. Sometimes you'll be able to do it on your own. Other times you'll need help.

My advice to you: Ask for help. Turn to friends and family for support when you need it. Attend support group meetings. If you need treatment, make time for it. Learn from mistakes. Keep your head up and never quit trying.

Wishing you well on your journey,

***Dr. Timothy Huckaby***



## How to Use This E-Book

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*This e-book was designed for anyone who wishes to abstain from alcohol or other drugs. It's written to help you improve your health, happiness and well-being. You don't have to have a clinically diagnosed substance use disorder to use this e-book. It can help you even if you've never experienced symptoms of addiction or problems related to alcohol or drug abuse.*

Although this e-book was written for individuals in recovery from addiction or dependence, the information, worksheets and questionnaires can benefit anyone striving to live a life of sobriety.

Likewise, friends, family members and caregivers of people in recovery can use this e-book to better understand the challenges of sobriety. They can develop goals for supporting

their loved one, learn how to provide a safe environment and help their loved one stay sober.

This e-book does not provide a quick fix or magical cure for addiction. It does not offer a simple solution to life's problems because maintaining sobriety isn't easy. To get the most out of this e-book, you'll need to think about the words you read, determine how the information applies to you and create strategies for implementing the tips and techniques in your daily life.

To be successful, you don't need to read the entire e-book in one sitting. Read one or two sections per day. Take time to think about the information, and use it in your everyday life. Fill out the questionnaires, and analyze the results. Think about what the results mean to you.



“The biggest thing to realize is that recovery is a process. It’s not like you go to detox for five days and then you’re all better. If you’re going to make those changes in your life, there are no shortcuts.”

— Joey Fiorello, 20 years of sobriety from alcohol and illicit drugs

As you read, record your thoughts in the space provided. Be honest when you answer the questionnaires. Be realistic when you develop goals. Take your time, stay positive and never give up.

Maintaining sobriety is a lifelong endeavor. When you’ve completed the e-book, your journey won’t be over. This may only be the beginning, but you’ll be more prepared for recovery and better equipped to live a life of sobriety.



## Quick Tips for Sobriety

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*Recovery isn't a quick process. There aren't any shortcuts to sobriety. It requires work, determination and faith. However, there are basic guidelines you can follow to decrease the odds of relapse and make recovery easier.*

### Be Open and Honest

One of the most difficult parts of maintaining sobriety is admitting that you need help, but support from others is vital to maintaining sobriety. If you're reading this e-book, you've taken the first step toward recognizing that you need to learn new ways to live a healthy life.

Continue to be open to new information. Be honest with yourself and those who try to help you. Allow others to teach you about what worked for them. Many people in recovery live by spiritual principles that strengthen their resolve, and recovery is often described as a spiritual journey.

Regardless of your religious beliefs, be open to finding a new purpose in your life when you find sobriety.

### Make a Plan

Most people who regularly use alcohol or other drugs develop cravings. They may experience severe withdrawal symptoms when they try to stop. Abstaining becomes very difficult, and using seems easy.

You need to make a sobriety plan to overcome the challenges of recovery. The plan should include

steps for creating a support system, setting goals, living in a safe environment, avoiding triggers, coping with stress and avoiding relapse. This e-book will help you develop that plan.

## **Create Short-Term Goals**

Thinking of long-term sobriety can be intimidating. Achieving a life without substances of abuse is like climbing a high mountain. Climbing a mountain takes preparation, time, hard work and commitment. And it starts with a single step.

Approach recovery one step at a time. Develop short-term goals that bring you closer to lifelong sobriety. Goals give you something to work toward, help you measure progress and provide a sense of accomplishment.

## **Transition at Your Own Pace**

You can't rush recovery. It takes time. If you're attending formal treatment, work with your therapist or physician to transition through the levels of care at a pace that is comfortable for you. If you're in a 12-step program, work the steps at your own pace. Most importantly, stay in a safe environment until you're confident that you're ready for the challenges of everyday life.

If you've recently completed treatment, consider staying in a sober living house before moving home. If you took a break from work to recover, make sure you're ready for the stresses of a work week before going back. If you aren't ready to rebuild damaged relationships, wait until you have the energy and time to reconnect.

## Don't Go It Alone

Battling a substance use disorder is a lonely fight. Many people don't understand addiction, so they don't know how to react when they encounter it. But there are many resources available for individuals in recovery. There are people in your community waiting to help you.

Turn to friends and family you love and trust for support. Find a sponsor, a mentor or a peer at a support group meeting to turn to when times get tough. Call an addiction therapist. If you don't know where to go, ask your primary care physician, call one of the hotlines on page 92 or search [DrugRehab.com](http://DrugRehab.com) for information on local resources.

## Stay Positive

Addiction is a biological disease. Alcohol and other drugs cause physical cravings and withdrawal symptoms. If you have a severe substance use disorder, formal treatment is the only way to overcome the physical side effects. But overcoming physical difficulties is only the first part of the battle.

Recovery is a psychological journey. Positivity, commitment and hope increase the chances of sustained sobriety. It can be challenging to maintain a positive attitude, but it's more challenging to achieve your goals with a negative attitude. When times get tough, count your blessings, reflect on the progress you've made and keep your eyes set on the happiness you can achieve.



“There's always hope. It's hard to really believe there's hope when you're in that hole. Keep plugging away, and don't ever give up.”

— Stacy McKinney, one year of sobriety after relapsing from 20 years of sobriety from alcoholism

## Addiction is characterized by:

- Inability to consistently abstain
- Impairment in behavioral control
- Cravings
- Diminished recognition of life problems
- Dysfunctional emotional response

# Understanding Addiction

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*Recovering from addiction begins with understanding the disease. The medical diagnosis for addiction is substance use disorder. Substance use disorders are categorized as mild, moderate or severe based on the severity and quantity of a person's symptoms.*

Addiction causes physical changes in the brain. The changes make the brain crave addictive substances to feel pleasure and go into withdrawal when it doesn't receive them. Withdrawal can cause physical pain, emotional distress and other unpleasant side effects. Over time, the changes in the brain make a person prioritize seeking addictive substances over other activities that used to cause pleasure.

The disease is chronic or long-lasting. It often involves phases of remission, when someone is able to maintain sobriety for periods of time, and relapse, when he or she returns to compulsive alcohol- or drug-seeking behavior. Without treatment or participation in a recovery program, addiction causes numerous life problems and can result in premature death.

## **THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF ADDICTION MEDICINE DEFINES ADDICTION AS:**

A primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.

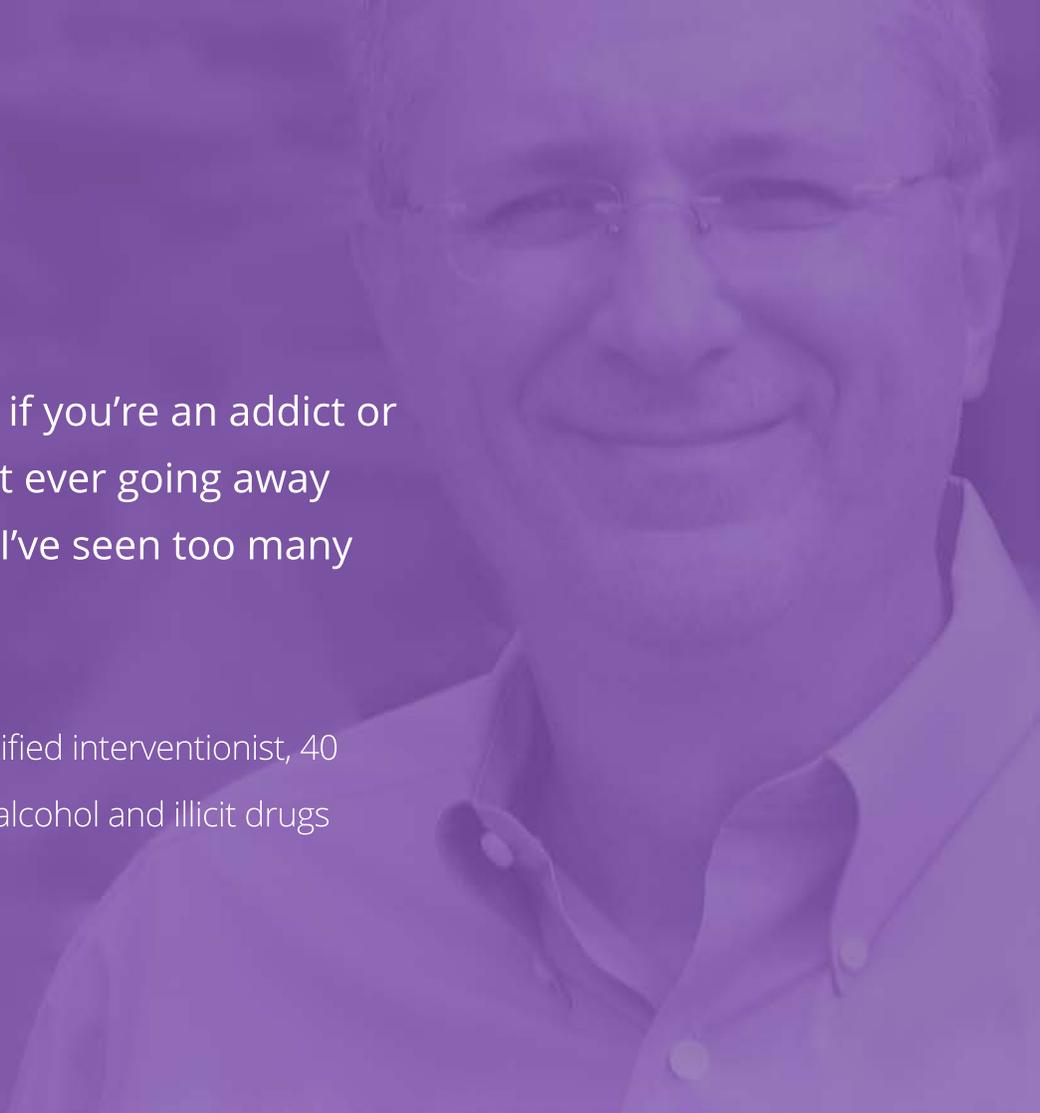
## **ASAM DEFINES RECOVERY AS:**

A process of sustained action that addresses the biological, psychological, social and spiritual disturbances inherent in addiction. Recovery aims to improve the quality of life by seeking balance and healing in all aspects of health and wellness, while addressing an individual's consistent pursuit of abstinence, impairment in behavioral control, dealing with cravings, recognizing problems in one's behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and dealing more effectively with emotional responses.



“It’s my belief that if you’re an addict or alcoholic, that ain’t ever going away until you’re dead. I’ve seen too many people relapse.”

— Jack Bloomfield, certified interventionist, 40 years of sobriety from alcohol and illicit drugs



## Recovery

Recovery is a lifelong process of abstaining from substances of abuse, maintaining health and finding purpose in life. The word means something different to everyone, and each person’s path depends on what they hope to achieve during recovery.

Some people say they’ve recovered from addiction. They no longer experience cravings, can cope with triggers and can withstand traumatic experiences without using alcohol or other drugs. Others believe they’ll always be in recovery from

addiction. They attend support group meetings or continue medication-assisted treatment for the rest of their lives.

Recovery is often a spiritual journey in which people find a new purpose in life that doesn’t involve alcohol or other drugs. That’s why many recovery organizations are built on spirituality, but there is no religious requirement to participate in most recovery activities. More information on recovery support groups is available on page 90.

## **12-Step Programs**

12-step programs are based on the steps taken by the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous support groups to recover from alcoholism. Narcotics Anonymous groups follow identical steps. The programs emphasize a lack of control over the disease and the recognition of a higher power.

## **SMART Recovery**

SMART Recovery is a support program that focuses on ways individuals can improve themselves. It emphasizes self-empowerment and self-improvement, and meetings teach members to live healthy lives using a four-point program.

During recovery, you'll overcome problematic motivators, correct self-harming behaviors and cope with dangerous situations. You'll rebuild relationships, and your physical and mental health will improve. But recovery is a process that takes time.



“Everything can really get put back together. But it’s not going to be overnight.”

— Krystle Pellegrino, 18 months of sobriety from opioid addiction

## *Stages of Change*

Most people spend a lot of time thinking about their alcohol or drug use and what their lives would be like without the substances before they decide to seek sobriety. When people make life-changing decisions, they go through different stages.

Psychologist James Prochaska developed a theory that described the five stages of change.

### **1 Precontemplation**

Everyone begins in the precontemplation stage, and some people never leave it. In this stage, people are unaware of the problems caused by their behavior, or they believe the benefits outweigh the harms. They aren't concerned with changing their behavior, and they have no intent on changing.

### **2 Contemplation**

The contemplation stage begins when a person starts to recognize the problems caused by their behavior. They're unsure if they're ready or if they want to make a change, but they think about what would happen if they did. They often lack the confidence to change.

### **3 Preparation**

After a person decides to make a change, they begin to accept responsibility for their behaviors. They develop strategies and ways to make change happen. Their confidence and faith that change can occur grows.





#### **4 Action**

During the action stage, a person begins behaving differently. They learn new ways to live and develop new skills. They make intentional decisions to act differently and avoid old behavior. The person builds momentum and enthusiasm for change.

#### **5 Maintenance**

In the final stage, a person has changed their behavior and can avoid old behaviors with minimal effort. They've learned new behaviors and have control over their thoughts and actions. The person is aware of high-risk situations and actively avoids them.

At any point during the stages of change, a person can lose momentum or change their mind. A lapse in the process or a relapse backward can be caused by social pressure, exposure to trauma or other negative influences. Lapses or relapse are temporary setbacks that can be overcome.

### ***Stages of Recovery***

The stages of change can be applied to any behavior change. Understanding how a person changes behavior can help individuals who are seeking sobriety understand challenges and build motivation. The process of recovery from addiction also involves five stages. These stages often overlap with the stages of change. The stages of recovery are characterized by the challenges and vulnerabilities the person in recovery is likely to experience.

#### **1 Stabilization**

During the stabilization period, people experience withdrawal and cravings, and they are extremely vulnerable to triggers. They often lack a supportive environment and the necessary skills for coping with stress and other triggers.

## 2 Early

During early recovery, people have recovered from their physical dependency on alcohol or other drugs, but they're vulnerable to friends or peers who use substances of abuse. They understand that they must develop new skills but don't know how to use them.

## 3 Middle

In the middle recovery period, people are living a healthy lifestyle. They've practiced the skills they learned during early recovery. The biggest challenge during this period is repairing damaged relationships and learning vocational skills. Their primary vulnerability is to practical problems such as unemployment or inadequate living situations.

## 4 Late

During late recovery, people learn from mistakes they made during the initial recovery stages. They've developed goals and a robust support system. They've corrected self-destructive behaviors and learned to cope with everyday stressors. The main vulnerability during the late period stems from inadequate time spent addressing underlying causes of addiction, such as trauma.

## 5 Maintenance

Most people live the rest of their lives in the maintenance stage of recovery. They cope with transitions, stress and relationship problems. They actively avoid relapse, but they are vulnerable to relapse if they are involved in a traumatic event or if they overestimate their ability to avoid relapse.

Some people breeze through early stages of recovery, and others get stuck. Some people struggle to develop the skills or support systems necessary to transition through the stages quickly. They require professional treatment, professional training or some kind of formal assistance.

Your recovery journey and path to sobriety may be different from a friend or family member's. A relative may benefit from a 12-step program, but you might feel more comfortable with a different type of recovery support group. You'll need to learn the coping strategies, stress-relief techniques and recovery skills that work for you.

## Relapse

Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves relapse. People fighting the disease of addiction relapse at rates similar to those of people fighting other chronic diseases, such as diabetes or hypertension, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

### **THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF ADDICTION MEDICINE DEFINES RELAPSE AS:**

A process in which an individual who has established abstinence or sobriety experiences recurrence of signs and symptoms of active addiction, often including resumption of the pathological pursuit of reward and/or relief through the use of substances and other behaviors.

Relapse can be triggered by exposure to addictive substances, risky behavior, trauma or other high-stress situations. The symptoms that precede relapse may be noticeable. People who are about to relapse usually disengage from recovery activities or isolate themselves from people who support them. Early intervention and re-engagement in recovery activities can prevent relapse from occurring or lessen the severity of relapse if it has already occurred.

# Making the Choice

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You made the choice to become sober. Friends, family members, health providers or law enforcement may have influenced that decision, but they didn't make it for you. Reflect on your decision, your life before sobriety and the life you want to live without alcohol or other drugs.

Answer the following questions in the space provided.

**1 Why did you become sober?**

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**2 What are the benefits of sobriety?**

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**3 What are the challenges of sobriety?**

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**4** What do you hope to achieve in sobriety? Think of personal, professional or spiritual goals.

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**5** Which sobriety strategies worked in the past?

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**6** Why were those strategies successful?

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**7** Which sobriety strategies didn't work in the past?

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**8** Why were those strategies unsuccessful?

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Take time to reflect on your answers to these questions. This isn't a permanent list. Add to it, revise it and revisit it.



“At first it seemed hard. After a while it became almost fun. I had something to work toward in myself, some personal improvement.”

— Marney, 30 years of sobriety from alcoholism

# Setting Goals

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*Achieving and maintaining sobriety isn't as simple as deciding not to drink or use drugs. Making that choice is the first step toward recovery, but you'll have to overcome several obstacles on your path to lifelong sobriety.*

You'll need to create a support system, develop stress-relief techniques and learn coping skills. You'll need to determine the reasons you drink or use drugs. You'll need to avoid triggers and find ways to cope with people, places and things that cause cravings. You'll also need to find a purpose for living.

Goals give you something to work toward, and they hold you accountable for your actions. There is no better feeling than checking a goal off the list, and you can reward yourself with tangible incentives when you complete a goal.

Strive to create goals that are actionable, measurable and realistic. The SMART goals framework is an easy way to create effective goals.

### SMART stands for:

- **Specific:** The goal is clear and its meaning is obvious.
- **Measurable:** Be sure you can easily determine if you accomplished the goal.
- **Attainable:** You have adequate resources for reaching the goal.
- **Realistic:** You have enough time, ability and motivation to reach the goal.
- **Time Bound:** The goal has a deadline.

Lifelong sobriety is a great long-term goal, but you'll need to achieve several small goals to get there. It's less intimidating to set a short-term goal of achieving sobriety for one day. Then, you can set a goal to achieve sobriety for three days, five days, one week, two weeks, one month and so on.

Achieving sobriety dates helps you see the progress you've made and motivates you to continue working toward future dates. You'll want to set other goals along the way that make maintaining sobriety easier.

*Source: Management Review*

## Create Goals

You've reflected on your decision to choose a life without alcohol or other drugs, and you've learned to create effective goals for achieving and maintaining sobriety. Now it's time to make your goals.

Remember, goals should be actionable and measurable. For example, you can plan to eat a fruit or vegetable with each meal today, or tell a specific person that you need help staying sober before the end of the week. Avoid indeterminate goals such as planning to eat a healthy diet or find support.

You may want to create a long-term goal first. Then develop short-term goals to help you achieve it. Figure out what works for you, but be sure to start with goals that are realistic.

An example of a long-term goal might be to stay active in a support group for one year. You can work toward that goal by making a list of meetings near you, attending a meeting five days per week or finding a sponsor by the end of the week. Reward yourself when you cross a short-term goal off your list.

This isn't a permanent list. You can add or remove goals, and your long-term goals may evolve over time. When you've completed all of your goals, create new ones. You should always have short- and long-term goals that you're striving to achieve.

**Short-Term Goal:**

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**Short-Term Goal:**

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**Short-Term Goal:**

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**Short-Term Goal:**

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**Long-Term Goal:**

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**Long-Term Goal:**

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# Creating a Support System

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*Sobriety is easier with help. Healthy relationships with friends and family are vital to recovering from addiction and maintaining long-term sobriety. In comparison, isolation is a major risk factor for relapse. Decades of research prove social support and healthy relationships help people maintain sobriety.*

You may already have supportive friends and family members. You may work for an employer that truly cares about your well-being, or you may attend school in an environment of understanding and acceptance. If so, take advantage of those relationships. In most cases, family, friends and peers want to help.

That kind of support isn't available for everyone. But you shouldn't hide in isolation because recovery is hard. If the people in your life refuse to support your recovery, you may need to repair old relationships and create new ones. That may mean reconnecting with people you haven't spoken to in years or creating relationships with people who understand what you're going through.

Most people will respond with compassion if they know you've struggled with sobriety and are making a sincere effort to abstain from alcohol or other drugs. Still, talking to friends, family members or peers can be intimidating.

Personal relationships are valuable, but many people don't understand the challenges of maintaining sobriety. Most people in recovery from addiction find value in talking to others who have been in their shoes.



“I’d say that 90 percent of friends in my life since I became sober are people who are also in recovery. The friendships with people in recovery are much deeper than the ones I used to have. They are also ones that help you stay clean and sober.”

— Jack Bloomfield, certified interventionist, 40 years of sobriety from alcohol and illicit drugs

“I’ve had surgery many times in recovery, and I’ve had to be really careful. I’ve had to tell my wife and a couple people in the program I’m going to be taking pain meds after surgery. I want them to know so I don’t go into ‘secret.’”

— Jack Bloomfield, certified interventionist, 40 years of sobriety from alcohol and illicit drugs

Almost every community in the United States hosts Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and other types of support group meetings. Many require you to begin a 12-step program, but several support groups adhere to other recovery models. Find the right support group for you. You can read more about support groups on page 90.

Relationships give you a shoulder to lean on when times are tough. They give you somewhere to go when you need a safe environment. They help you learn and develop new skills. They’re also mutually beneficial. You’ll find happiness and purpose in developing new friendships and helping others.

### Tips for talking to friends, family and peers:

- Be honest.
- Be patient.
- Be straightforward.
- Forgive past harms.
- Don’t make promises you can’t keep.
- Ask for help.

### Tips for repairing damaged relationships:

- Acknowledge past mistakes.
- Apologize for previous faults.
- Express excitement about making amends.
- Recognize that forgiveness takes time.
- Establish effective ways to openly communicate.
- Get to know that person again.

Here are some factors to consider:

- Do spouses or roommates consume alcohol or use drugs? If so, will they be willing to stop?
- Are drugs and alcohol easily available in your neighborhood?
- Are people in your home, neighborhood or work environment supportive of your recovery?

## Finding a Safe Environment

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*It's tough to avoid drinks at a bar. It's hard to say no to friends when they hand a drug to you, and it's almost impossible to abstain from alcohol or other drugs when a spouse or roommate consumes them in your home. To maintain sobriety, you need to find a safe living environment and drug-free ways to have fun.*

Residential addiction treatment programs were developed because researchers discovered safe living environments drastically increased recovery outcomes. People who return to high-risk environments after treatment are more likely to relapse than those who transition to low-risk environments.

That's why halfway houses and other sober living environments were developed. Most halfway houses require residents to have completed some form of standard treatment, but the only requirement at most sober living homes is that residents abstain from alcohol or other drugs.

Living in a structured sober living environment may not be necessary if you have a safe, supportive home to return to. You'll need to determine how risky your environments are.

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“I came home after treatment and started hanging around my old friends again. I was trying to stay sober and hang out with them. I wouldn't listen to people in the program when they said I had to change friends. I was trying to make it work. It didn't work.”

— Allison, two years of sobriety from alcoholism



Before committing to a living situation, be sure that you'll be able to avoid negative influences. That will probably mean the loss of old friendships. It may also cause others to develop negative feelings toward you. They may say hurtful things. That's their decision.

It's your decision to live a happy and healthy life. Don't let the choices or actions of others bring you down. You need to look out for your own best interest when others won't.

## Evaluating Your Environments

Think about your living, work and social environments. Do the environments threaten your sobriety, health or well-being? If so, detail the pros and cons of a short-term change (i.e., moving until a roommate commits to sobriety) and a long-term change (i.e., ending your relationship with someone or moving to a new city).

- 1 Describe the environment you live in. Is it safe? Do you have easy access to alcohol or other drugs? Are you near positive or negative influences?**

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- 2 Describe your work environment. Is it safe? Do you have easy access to alcohol or other drugs? Are you near positive or negative influences?**

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- 3 Describe the places you tend to socialize. Are they safe? Do you have easy access to alcohol or other drugs? Are you near positive or negative influences?**

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- 4 List some of your environments and the pros and cons of making changes during recovery.**

*Environment:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Pros of a short-term change:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Cons of a short-term change:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Pros of a long-term change:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Cons of a long-term change:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Environment:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Pros of a short-term change:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Cons of a short-term change:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Pros of a long-term change:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Cons of a long-term change:* \_\_\_\_\_

Be sure to consider your options before changing your living, work or social environment. Create a list of alternative environments and determine the pros and cons of those solutions before making a decision.



## Setting Boundaries

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*Relationships and friendships are valuable parts of our lives. Friends and relatives make us feel loved, happy and secure. During the best of times, they make us laugh and smile. Other times, they console us and help us overcome stress or sorrow.*

But relationships can be overwhelming. Friends and family can cause stress. They can be positive influences one day and negative influences the next.

That's why relationships should contain healthy boundaries. Most of the time, these boundaries develop naturally. However, it can be difficult for someone in recovery to explain that they no longer wish to consume alcohol or other drugs to friends they used to drink or use with.

Creating boundaries is about giving choices to people in your life and enforcing consequences for their choices. It isn't about making threats. It's about explaining what you will and will not tolerate in your life. Healthy relationships must include healthy boundaries.

Before you create a boundary, you must understand what you will and will not tolerate.

**Reflect on the reasons you became sober and the goals you set for maintaining sobriety.**

**1 How can others prevent you from achieving your goals?**

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**2 What consequences are you willing to enforce?**

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When you know what you will or will not tolerate, you must communicate with the people in your life.

## **Communicating Boundaries**

When you communicate boundaries, use "I" language, such as, "I feel betrayed when you offer me a beer." Avoid "you" language, such as, "You make me angry." Be clear with the boundary you're setting and the consequences for choosing to cross that boundary. The person you're communicating with should understand what you're saying. Don't beat around the bush. Be honest with your feelings.

Here are examples of how to communicate boundaries using "I" language:

- "I can't maintain sobriety when you offer me alcohol, and I do not like the person I become when I drink. If you offer me alcohol, I will leave. If you continue to offer me alcohol, I will no longer hang out with you."
- "I feel tempted to smoke marijuana when you smell like it. If you continue to smell like pot around me, then I won't hang out with you for two weeks. If you continue to smell like weed around me after that, then I will no longer be able to see you in person."
- "I feel discouraged when you make fun of me for getting sober. If you make jokes at my expense, our relationship will have to end."

Setting boundaries can be challenging, but enforcing them can be even more difficult. It's hard to end relationships with people we love. Don't set a consequence that you can't realistically enforce. If you don't follow through, then the person won't take you seriously in the future.

Sometimes friends and family will say they won't use drugs in front of you or they won't tempt you. Then they go back on their word. Be strong and persistent in your dedication. Your sobriety without them is more important than relapsing with them.

## Tips for communicating boundaries:

- Do not blame.
- Be direct.
- Use "I" language.
- Explain choices and their consequences.
- Follow through with ultimatums.

## Think About Your Relationships

Reflect on the relationships in your life and how they affect your health. Answer the questions in the space provided.

- 1 What type of relationships or support system do you need to maintain sobriety?**

---

- 2 What types of support systems do you already have in place? Think about relationships with friends, family, co-workers and other peers.**

---

- 3 Are the relationships helpful or hurtful to your sobriety, health and well-being?**

---

In the space provided, write the pros and cons of continuing the relationship without changes and the pros and cons of discontinuing the relationship.

- 1 Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Pros of continuing the relationship without changes:* \_\_\_\_\_

---

*Cons of continuing the relationship without changes:* \_\_\_\_\_

---

*Pros of discontinuing the relationship:* \_\_\_\_\_

---

*Cons of discontinuing the relationship:* \_\_\_\_\_

---

**2** Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Pros of continuing the relationship without changes:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Cons of continuing the relationship without changes:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Pros of discontinuing the relationship:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Cons of discontinuing the relationship:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**3** Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Pros of continuing the relationship without changes:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Cons of continuing the relationship without changes:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Pros of discontinuing the relationship:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Cons of discontinuing the relationship:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Create Your Own Boundaries

List all of the relationships you have that can be detrimental to your sobriety, health and well-being. Next to the names, write a boundary that you need to create to maintain a healthy relationship. Do not think about consequences right now. A name may have more than one boundary next to it.

1 **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Boundary:** \_\_\_\_\_

2 **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Boundary:** \_\_\_\_\_

3 **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Boundary:** \_\_\_\_\_

4 **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Boundary:** \_\_\_\_\_

5 **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Boundary:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Establish Consequences

For each relationship, think about the boundary you must set and reflect on the pros and cons list you created. Develop realistic, enforceable consequences for violating your boundaries.

1 **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consequence(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

2 **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consequence(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

3 **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consequence(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

4 **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consequence(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

5 **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consequence(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

# Triggers and Cravings

---

*Safe environments and healthy relationships decrease our exposure to triggers. Triggers are cues that remind us of alcohol or drug abuse. They're most commonly referred to as people, places and things that are linked to drinking alcohol or using drugs. The first step toward overcoming triggers and cravings is to understand them.*

Our brains naturally crave certain activities and substances. When we eat food, we're fulfilling our craving for nourishment. The brain rewards us by making us feel happy. We naturally crave social interaction. That's why interacting with friends and family members makes us feel good.

Drugs overwhelm and disrupt the pleasure and reward system in the brain. They overload our brain's pleasure center, making us feel euphoric. The brain learns to crave the substances because they cause pleasure. Cravings can manifest themselves physically and cognitively.

Through treatment or prolonged abstinence, the brain learns to live without the substance again. However, the memory of how the drug made us feel doesn't vanish as easily. When a person in recovery sees or experiences something that reminds them of the drug, the brain is triggered into craving the drug again.

## Physical cravings include:

- Rapid heartbeat
- Nervousness
- Smelling the drug
- Tasting the drug

## Cognitive cravings include:

- Thinking about the drug
- Longing for it
- Obsessing over it

### External triggers include:

- People
- Places
- Things
- Situations

### Internal triggers include:

- Thoughts
- Memories
- Stress

### Sensory triggers include:

- Sights
- Sounds
- Smells
- Tastes
- Touches

“Everybody says it: persons, places and things. You have to remove yourself from where you are to clear your mind.”

— Krystle Pellegrino, 18 months of sobriety from opioid addiction

During the early stages of recovery, it's difficult to overcome triggers. That's why most people are encouraged to avoid them. It's also why you should have a relapse prevention plan in place. If you experience a trigger, you can follow your plan to avoid relapse. You'll make an emergency relapse prevention plan after learning more about relapse on page 80.

The first time you're exposed to a trigger, you may experience a severe craving. Over time, the cravings may become less severe. The longer you maintain sobriety, the easier it gets. That doesn't mean you'll become invincible over time. Most people in recovery must always be cognizant of triggers and practice healthy ways to overcome stress and trauma.

## Craving Questionnaire

Once you understand what triggers and cravings are, you can learn how they affect you. The Alcohol Craving Questionnaire was developed by researchers from the National Institute on Drug Abuse to analyze the cravings of recovering alcoholics. An adapted version of the questionnaire is below.

It measures compulsivity (anticipation of loss of ability to stay sober), expectancy (anticipation of positive benefits from using), purposefulness (intent and planning to use) and emotionality (anticipation of relief from withdrawal, stress or other negative effects after using).

**Fill out the questionnaire below, calculate your score and determine how cravings affect you.**

*Adapted from the Alcohol Craving Questionnaire short form (ACQ-SF-R).*

Indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. When determining how you feel about each statement, think about how you feel right now. Complete each item.

**1 If I had alcohol or another drug, I would probably consume it.**

STRONGLY DISAGREE					STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5	

**2 I miss drinking or using.**

STRONGLY DISAGREE					STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5	

**3 I am not making any plans to drink or use.**

STRONGLY DISAGREE					STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5	

**4 I could not stop myself from drinking or using if I had alcohol or another drug here.**

STRONGLY DISAGREE					STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5	

**5 I want to drink or use so bad I can almost taste it.**

STRONGLY DISAGREE					STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5	

**6 I would feel less irritable if I used alcohol or another drug now.**

STRONGLY DISAGREE

STRONGLY AGREE

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

**7 If I used alcohol or another drug, I would feel less tense.**

STRONGLY DISAGREE

STRONGLY AGREE

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

**8 Drinking or using would not be very satisfying.**

STRONGLY DISAGREE

STRONGLY AGREE

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

**9 I would feel less restless if I drank alcohol or used a drug.**

STRONGLY DISAGREE

STRONGLY AGREE

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

**10 If I were using alcohol or another drug, I would feel less nervous.**

STRONGLY DISAGREE

STRONGLY AGREE

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

**11 It would be easy to pass up the chance to use alcohol or another drug.**

STRONGLY DISAGREE

STRONGLY AGREE

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

**12 Drinking or using would put me in a better mood.**

STRONGLY DISAGREE

STRONGLY AGREE

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Tally your scores using the grid below, and add them in the column on the right. For questions 3, 8 and 11, reverse the scores. For those questions, the score for strongly disagree is 5 and the score for strongly agree is 1. The score for disagree is 4, and the score for agree is 2.

	Question	Question	Question	Total
<b>Compulsivity</b>	4:	5:	6:	
<b>Expectancy</b>	1:	2:	12:	
<b>Purposefulness</b>	3*:	8*:	11*:	
<b>Emotionality</b>	7:	9:	10:	

Think about your score. Are you at risk of acting compulsively? Do you expect positive benefits from using alcohol or other drugs? Have you planned on using drugs? Do you anticipate relief from stress or withdrawal if you use?

A score higher than six in any category suggests you're experiencing cravings and are at risk for relapse. A score higher than nine in any category suggests you're experiencing severe cravings and are at a high risk of relapse.

Note: This questionnaire is a self-evaluation tool. It has been adapted from a scientifically-proven tool, but it has not been scientifically tested in its adapted form. It should not be used to diagnose a medical condition. You should seek a health care provider for an official diagnosis if you believe you currently have a substance use disorder or are at high risk for relapse.

*Source: ResearchGate*

## Avoiding Triggers

Think about the results of the craving questionnaire. List the triggers that remind you of past alcohol or drug use, or that may make you experience cravings. Remember, triggers can be external, internal or sensory.

### WHAT ARE YOUR TRIGGERS?

*People:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Places:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Things:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Emotions:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Senses:* \_\_\_\_\_

Analyze your list of triggers. Think of realistic ways that you can avoid triggers. If necessary, return to page 33 and think of boundaries you can set to avoid triggers.

### HOW CAN YOU AVOID YOUR TRIGGERS?

*People:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Places:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Things:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Emotions:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Senses:* \_\_\_\_\_



## Coping Skills

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*Now that you understand cravings and triggers, know how they affect you and have a list of ways to avoid triggers, it's time to learn to cope with them. Coping skills help you dampen the effect of triggers and overcome cravings.*

### Distraction

The simplest way to overcome a trigger is to take your mind off of it through distraction. You can distract yourself physically by walking away from a high-risk situation, practicing relaxation techniques or starting a conversation about a different topic.

Distractions are more effective if you know you're about to experience a craving. If you know you're going to a place where alcohol or other drugs will be present, make a conscious effort to avoid them or plan ways to distract yourself. The most effective distraction is to leave the area and go somewhere safe.

### Talking

Talking to supportive friends, family members or peers can help relieve the anxiety and feeling of helplessness that accompanies cravings. Sponsors and therapists are valuable sources to talk to if you experience a severe craving and are thinking about drinking or using. They can help you determine the cause of the craving and the best ways to overcome it.

Some friends or family members may worry when they learn that you're experiencing a craving. If you know someone is likely to panic and make the situation worse, you may want to avoid contacting

them. But it's important to find someone you trust to help you through the situation and to avoid isolation.

## **Going With the Craving**

One way to overcome a craving is to experience it or ride it out. It's important to do this in a safe, secure environment that is free of alcohol or other drugs.

Focus on the craving. Put the craving in words. Describe what it feels like. Think about its intensity, where it occurs and how it changes. It may be helpful to journal your thoughts.

Concentrating on the craving can make it go away and help you understand it. It's usually helpful to practice the steps before a craving occurs so you're ready to go with it when you experience it.

## **Remember Negative Consequences**

Cravings often remind us of positive experiences. However, you chose sobriety because alcohol or other drugs caused problems. When you experience a craving, think about the damage the substance caused the last time you used it. Think about the progress you've made in sobriety and the damage that relapse would cause. Think about the risks of using.

Review the list of reasons why you became sober on page 20. Recreate the list on your cellphone, on a piece of paper or in some other manner to keep on you at all times.



“It really is a step back to being honest, open and willing to begin to be able to change your coping skills, to learn new ways to live.”

— Dr. Timothy Huckaby, eight years in recovery from alcohol and opiate addiction



When you experience a craving, review the list. Without reminders, it can be difficult to recall negative consequences of alcohol or drug use while you're experiencing a craving.

## **Self-Talk**

When you're addicted to alcohol or another drug, the brain develops memories and associations with drinking and using. When you experience a craving, it may automatically trigger certain memories or thoughts. If you feel like you have to use now or if you will die without the drug, ignore those exaggerated thoughts.

You can combat negative thoughts by challenging them. Think specific thoughts to remind yourself that you don't have to use now and that you won't die without it. Normalize the craving by understanding that everyone goes through this and everyone experiences cravings. It may be helpful to verbalize positive thoughts.

## **Saying No**

Saying no to someone who offers alcohol or other drugs is one of the most difficult skills to develop. We want to appease others, even strangers, when they invite us to join them in an activity. But saying no is one of the most important skills to develop for someone in sobriety.

If friends or family members offer you alcohol or other drugs, you can say no. You can walk away. Remember the boundaries you created to maintain sobriety and healthy relationships. Enforce consequences when people choose to cross your boundaries.

## WAYS TO SAY NO:

- "I can't."
- "I don't want to."
- "I don't feel like it."
- "Not now."
- "Maybe another time."

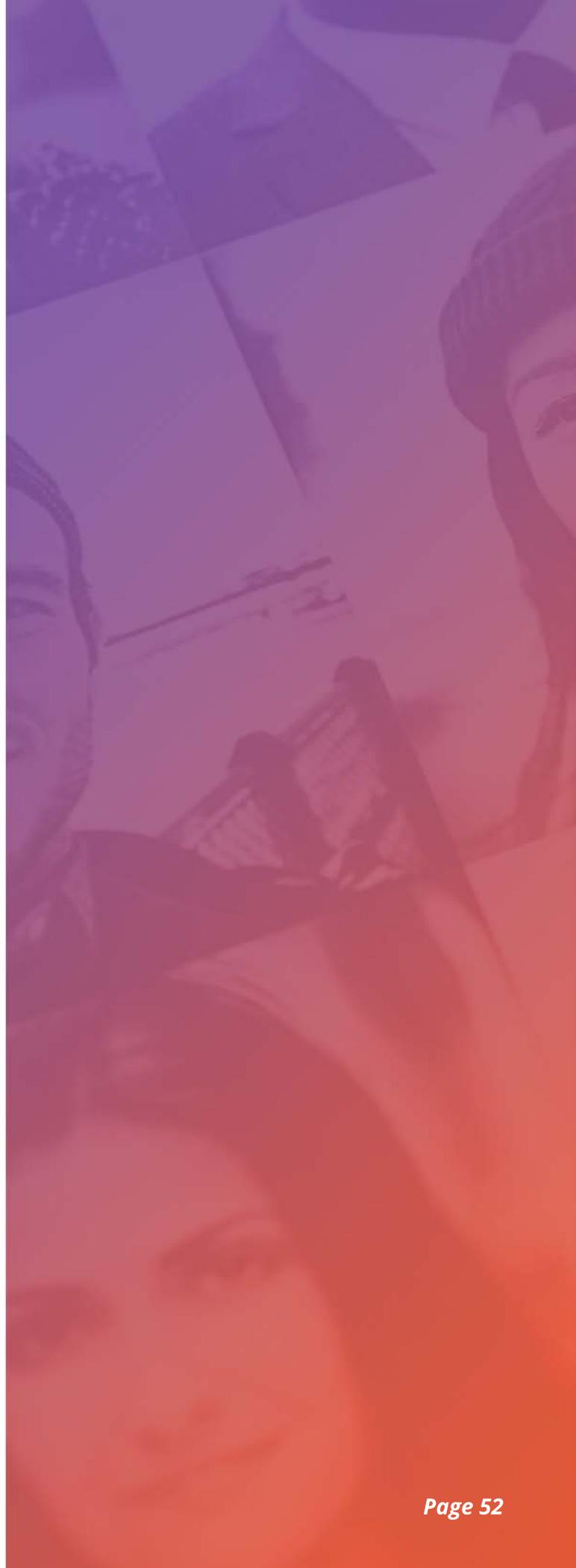
## TIPS FOR SAYING NO:

- Change the conversation.
- Propose something else to do.
- Change locations.
- Pretend you received a call or text.
- Pretend you have work or something else to do.

## Coping Behaviors Questionnaire

Coping with triggers is easier said than done. Avoiding and overcoming triggers sounds simple. In real life, it can be incredibly difficult. You can prepare for cravings by assessing your coping skills.

The Coping Behaviors Inventory (CBI) was developed to assess the coping techniques alcoholics used to avoid drinking. An adapted version of the inventory begins on the next page.



**Complete the questionnaire and determine which skills you need to practice more often or work on.**

*Adapted from The Coping Behaviors Inventory (CBI)*

Think of ways that you've tried to stop yourself from drinking or using drugs. Determine how often you have tried each of the techniques below. Circle the number that most accurately describes how often you have used the technique.

**1 Thinking about how much better off I am without drinking or using**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**2 Calling or texting a friend**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**3 Keeping in the company of nondrinkers or nonusers**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**4 Thinking positively**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**5 Thinking of the mess I've got myself into through drinking or using**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**6 Stopping to examine my motives and eliminating the false ones**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**7 Thinking of the promises I've made to others**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**8 Staying indoors or hiding**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**9 Pausing and really thinking the whole addiction cycle through**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**10 Leaving my money at home**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**11 Recognizing life is no bed of roses but drinking or using is not the answer**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**12 Going to a support group meeting**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**13** Knowing that by not drinking or using I can show my face again without fear of what others will think

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**14** Cheering myself up by buying myself something special instead

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**15** Facing up to my bad feelings instead of trying to drown them

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**16** Working harder

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**17** Realizing it's just not worth it

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**18** Waiting it out

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**19** Remembering how I've let my friends and family down in the past

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**20 Keeping away from people who drink or use**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**21 Going for a walk**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**22 Looking on the bright side and trying to stop making excuses for myself**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**23 Realizing it's affecting my health**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**24 Start doing something in the house**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**25 Considering the effect it will have on my family**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**26 Reminding myself of the good life I can have without drinking or using**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**27 Getting in touch with old friends who are better now**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**28 Making up my mind that I'm going to stop playing games with myself**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**29 Eating a good meal**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**30 Avoiding places where I drank or used**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**31 Thinking about all the people who have helped me**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**32 Saying I am well and wish to stay so**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**33 Going to sleep**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**34 Remembering how it has affected my family**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**35 Forcing myself to go to work**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

**36 Trying to face life instead of avoiding it**

USUALLY	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
0	1	2	3

The inventory measures behaviors related to positive thinking, negative thinking, avoidance, distraction and seeking social support. Review the results and think about them. Do you tend to think positively or negatively? Do you tend to avoid triggers or seek social support? Which coping strategies are effective for reducing cravings? Which strategies could you work on?

*Source: National Center for Biotechnology Information*

## Decide How You'll Cope

The best way to cope with cravings is to practice coping skills before a craving occurs. Write down realistic ways that you'll overcome triggers or cravings when they occur.

**1 What will you do when you see alcohol or another drug?**

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**2 What will you do if you see drug paraphernalia or items that remind you of alcohol or another drug?**

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**3 How will you respond if you pass a location where you used to buy alcohol or other drugs?**

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**4 How will you say no when asked to drink or do drugs?**

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**5 What will you do if you're pressured to use or drink?**

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**6 What will you do if you crave alcohol or other drugs when you're alone?**

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**7 How will you avoid going to a high-risk environment if asked?**

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**8 Who will you call when you feel like you're in a high-risk situation?**

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**9 Who will you call when you experience a craving?**

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## Keep Track of How You Cope

It's helpful to determine which skills work for you and which skills need improvement. Keep a daily record of cravings. Record the date, notes about the situation, thoughts or feelings you had and what caused the craving. Rate the intensity of the craving, and describe the coping skill you used to overcome it.

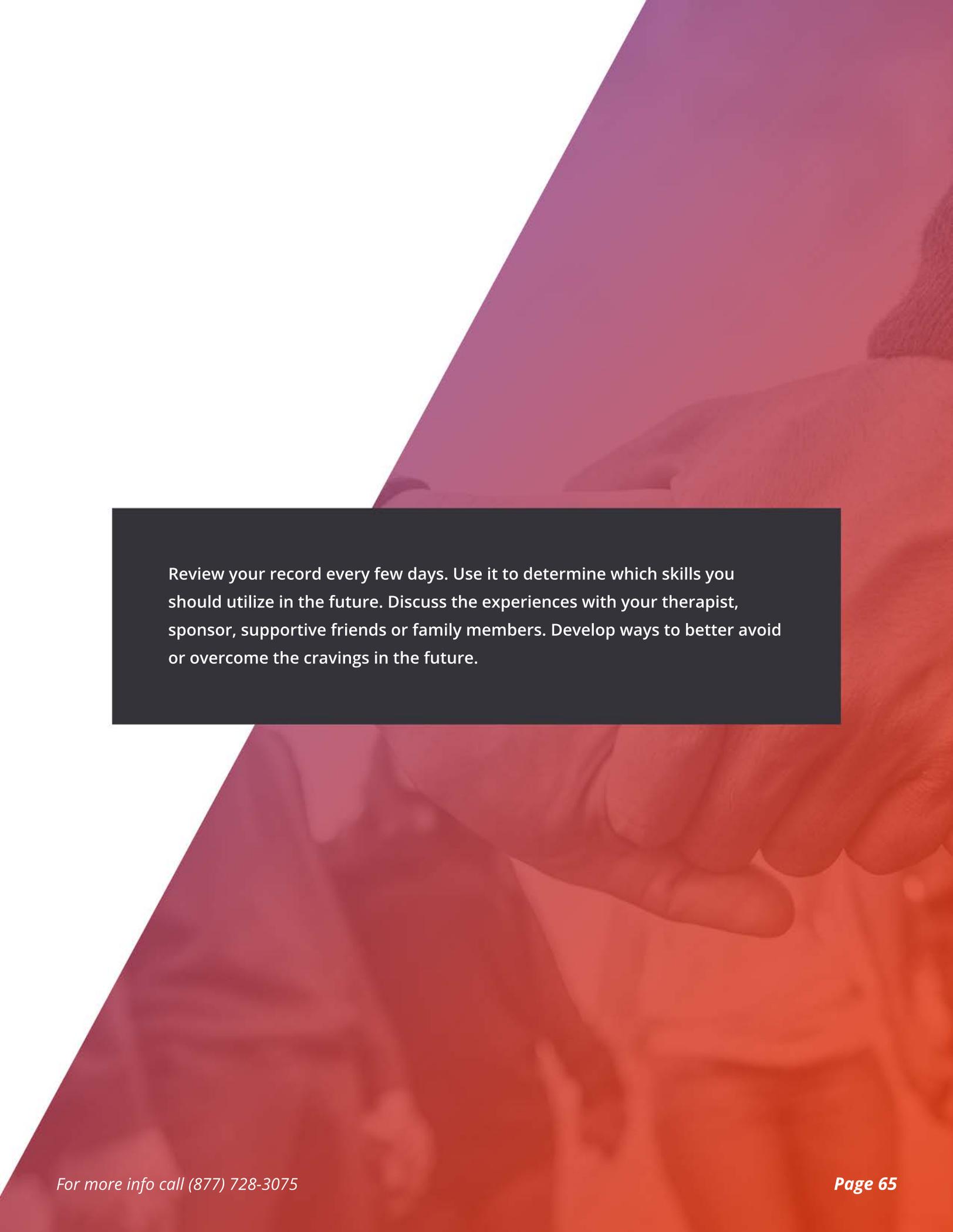
**Here is an example of a record:**

Date	Situation	Craving Intensity	Coping Skill Used
7/25/16	Argued with spouse after a long day at work.	70	Took a 15 minute walk outside with the dog. Felt better after getting fresh air.
7/26/16	Had trouble falling asleep.	50	Watched a TV show. Then I took a warm bath. The bath helped, TV didn't.
7/27/16	Went out to lunch with friends at a place we used to drink.	90	Ordered a water and asked them not to drink in front of me. Would have left if they ordered drinks.









Review your record every few days. Use it to determine which skills you should utilize in the future. Discuss the experiences with your therapist, sponsor, supportive friends or family members. Develop ways to better avoid or overcome the cravings in the future.

# Stress Management

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*Stress is one of the main reasons people turn to alcohol or other drugs. It's the biggest risk factor for relapse.*

*Developing ways to avoid and cope with stress is essential to living a healthy life.*

Several techniques that you've already learned can reduce stress. Removing unhealthy relationships from your life, setting boundaries and turning to friends and family are effective techniques.

## Change Your Environment

You learned about avoiding places that remind you of drinking or using. You know you should avoid places that contain triggers. It's impossible to find a perfectly stress-free environment. But some homes, workplaces and situations are more stressful than others.

If you know a place will cause stress, avoid it during the early stages of recovery. You may be able to return when you've developed healthy ways to deal with stress. Other places may not be worth returning to.



## Take Your Time

There's never enough time in a day, and running out of time causes stress. You'll learn effective ways to manage time later in this e-book, but one of the easiest ways to avoid time-related stress is to be patient. Make a conscious effort to take your time when completing tasks or working toward goals.

We live in a society of instant access to information, and we often expect instant gratification. Being patient requires effort and practice. When you find yourself worrying about running out of time or adding too many things to your to-do list, take a step back. Think about what you can realistically accomplish and realize that some things can wait until tomorrow.

## Relax

Relaxing is easier said than done, but there are several relaxation techniques that force your body to release tension and help your mind unwind.

### 1 Think positively

It may sound cheesy, but thinking happy thoughts is a natural way to improve mood. Repeat positive words or phrases such as, "It's OK," or "I can do this," in your mind.





## **2 Flex your muscles**

Flexing and relaxing your muscles relieves tension. Start from the bottom and work your way up. Close your eyes, and tighten your toes for five seconds. Relax for 30 seconds. Repeat the technique working your way up your body.

## **3 Visualize**

Think of a happy place, such as relaxing on a beach or visiting friends. Think of the senses you'd experience, such as the smell of salt in the air and the feeling of the sun on your body. Or think about your friends laughing or a hug from someone close to you.

## **4 Breathe deeply**

Take a deep breath, hold it for a few seconds and exhale. Repeat for a few minutes, and try to clear your head of stressful thoughts.

A variety of other techniques such as yoga or meditation are great ways to relieve stress, but they may require practice or instruction.

## **Exercise**

Physical exercise can improve your mood, and research suggests that people who regularly exercise experience relief from symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. You don't have to run for miles or lift heavy weights to experience benefits from exercise. Walking, stretching or performing light exercises can help relieve stress.



## **Eat a Healthy Diet**

Nutrients from a healthy diet provide energy that supports concentration and emotional stability. Stress makes us less energetic, weakens our ability to concentrate and lowers self-esteem. If you eat an unhealthy diet during times of high stress, the body doesn't have the proper nutrients to combat the negative effects of stress.

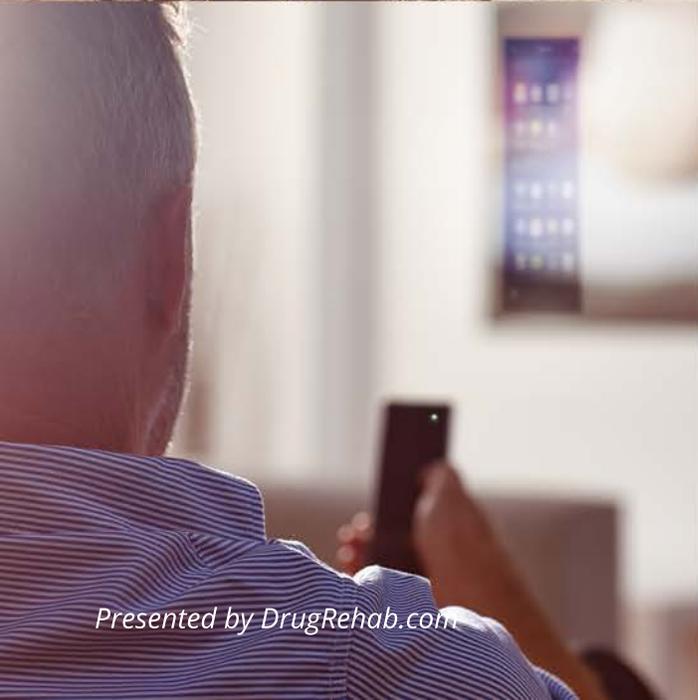


A well-balanced diet should include a balance of fruits, vegetables, grains, healthy proteins and low-fat dairy products. You don't have to follow complex diet plans to eat a healthy diet. But you should avoid consuming multiple highly processed or high-sugar items each day. Be sure to control your caffeine consumption to maintain a quality sleep schedule.

## **Limit Substitute Activities**

Distractions can be a great way to avoid stress. Watching TV, playing video games or diving into a book can help us relax. Spending time outside or exercising can provoke physical changes that reduce stress. But you have to know your limits.

Spending too much time on the couch can cause a plethora of health problems. The reverse is also true. Overexercising is linked to fatigue, decreased concentration, lower heart



rate and a variety of other ailments. Video games can be addictive and ruin relationships and careers. Most stress-relief techniques are helpful in moderation, but some can be harmful when used excessively.



## **Avoid Other Addictive Substances**

People in recovery have a tendency to replace one addiction with another. Marijuana, alcohol and tobacco are common substances that people turn to because they believe that they are less harmful than illicit drugs. But legality doesn't mean a substance is safe.

While there is a small amount of evidence that some strains of marijuana may help with certain medical conditions, there is also a plethora of evidence that shows marijuana is addictive and causes long-term health problems. Similarly, you should be wary of your alcohol consumption if you're in recovery from another type of substance use disorder. Alcohol, tobacco and marijuana can cause life problems similar to those caused by other illicit substances.

## How Will You Relieve Stress?

Think of the things that cause stress in your life.

### Common stressors include:

- Relationships with family, friends, co-workers or employers
- Traffic, weather or current events
- Traumatic experiences such as the death of a loved one, a car accident or the ending of a relationship

Most people experience elevated stress during times of transition, such as when they move, start a new job or return to school. Think of realistic, healthy ways you can relieve stress.

### 1 How will you relieve stress from friends?

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### 2 How will you relieve stress from family?

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**3 How will you relieve work-related stress?**

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**4 What will you do to prepare for periods of high stress, such as holidays or travels?**

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**5 How will you handle an unexpected traumatic event if one occurs?**

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**6 Who can you turn to when you feel overwhelmed with stress?**

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Stress relief techniques are more effective when you've tried them before. Create goals for practicing the techniques you listed above. Be sure to refer to the SMART guidelines for making effective goals.

For example, when your spouse is stressing you out, you can set a goal to ask for privacy and go to your room to practice deep breathing and muscle relaxation techniques. You may set a goal to take a 30 minute walk every day after work or to practice yoga in the morning before work. List some stress relief goals below.

**My Goals for Relieving Stress:**

**1 Goal:**

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**2 Goal:**

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**3 Goal:**

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**4 Goal:**

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**5 Goal:**

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## Stress Management Checklist

Refer to your goals for relieving stress. Every few days, think back on how many times you felt overwhelmed with stress. Each time you practiced one of your techniques to relieve stress, add a check mark next to the goal you accomplished.

Think about how each stress-relief technique made you feel. Did it help? Was it realistic? Did you try it? Answer each question below.

**1 Was each technique realistic?**

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**2 How effective was each technique?**

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**3 What was your favorite technique? Why?**

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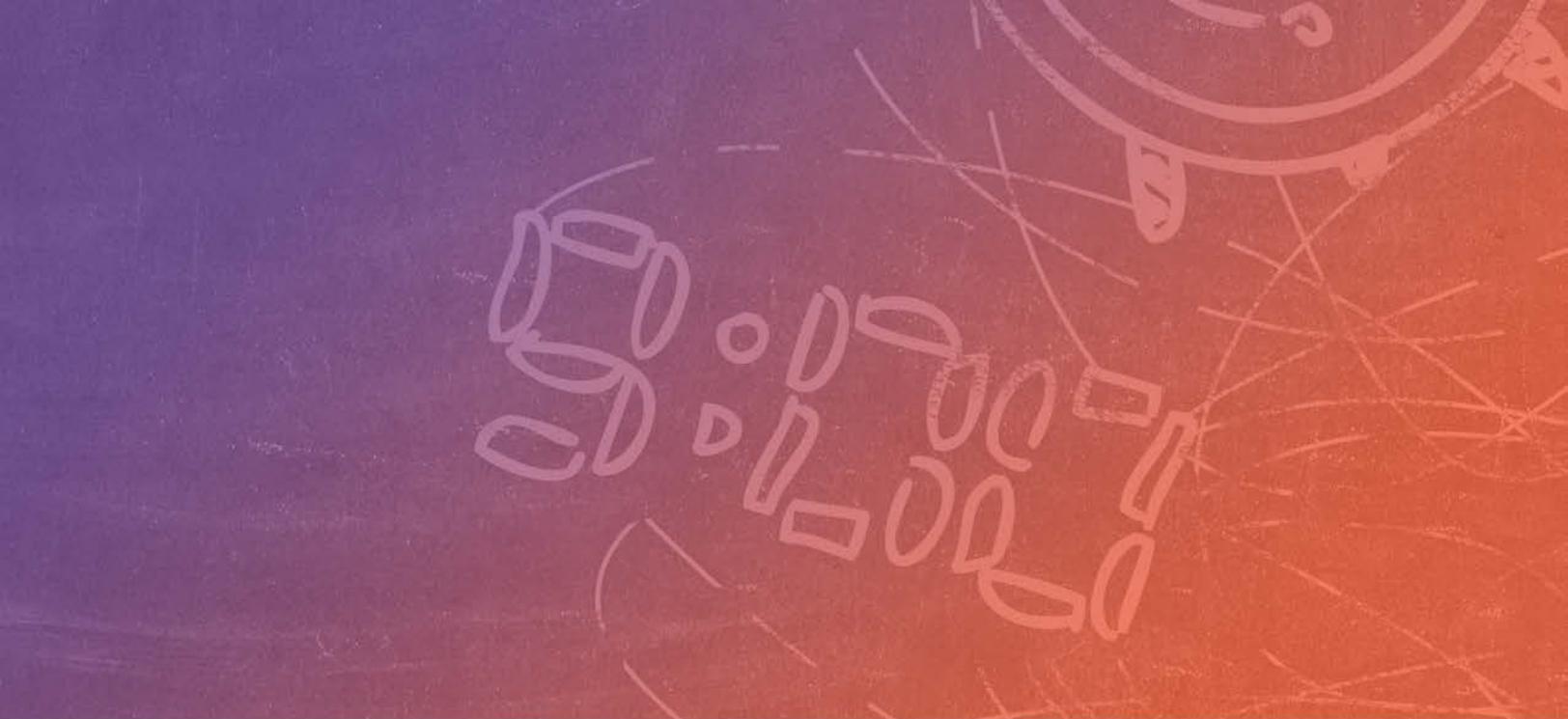
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**4 Which techniques did you avoid? Why?**

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Revise your goals with the techniques you were most likely to use and, if necessary, add new techniques to your goals. Repeat this process every three to five days until you've developed several reliable stress-relief techniques. You can lengthen the time between evaluations as you develop successful techniques.



# Time Management

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*Most of the time, stress can be avoided or relieved by managing your time efficiently. There is only so much time in a day, and we have a limited amount of energy to spend on tasks. Managing your time can make you feel more productive, more energetic and less stressed.*

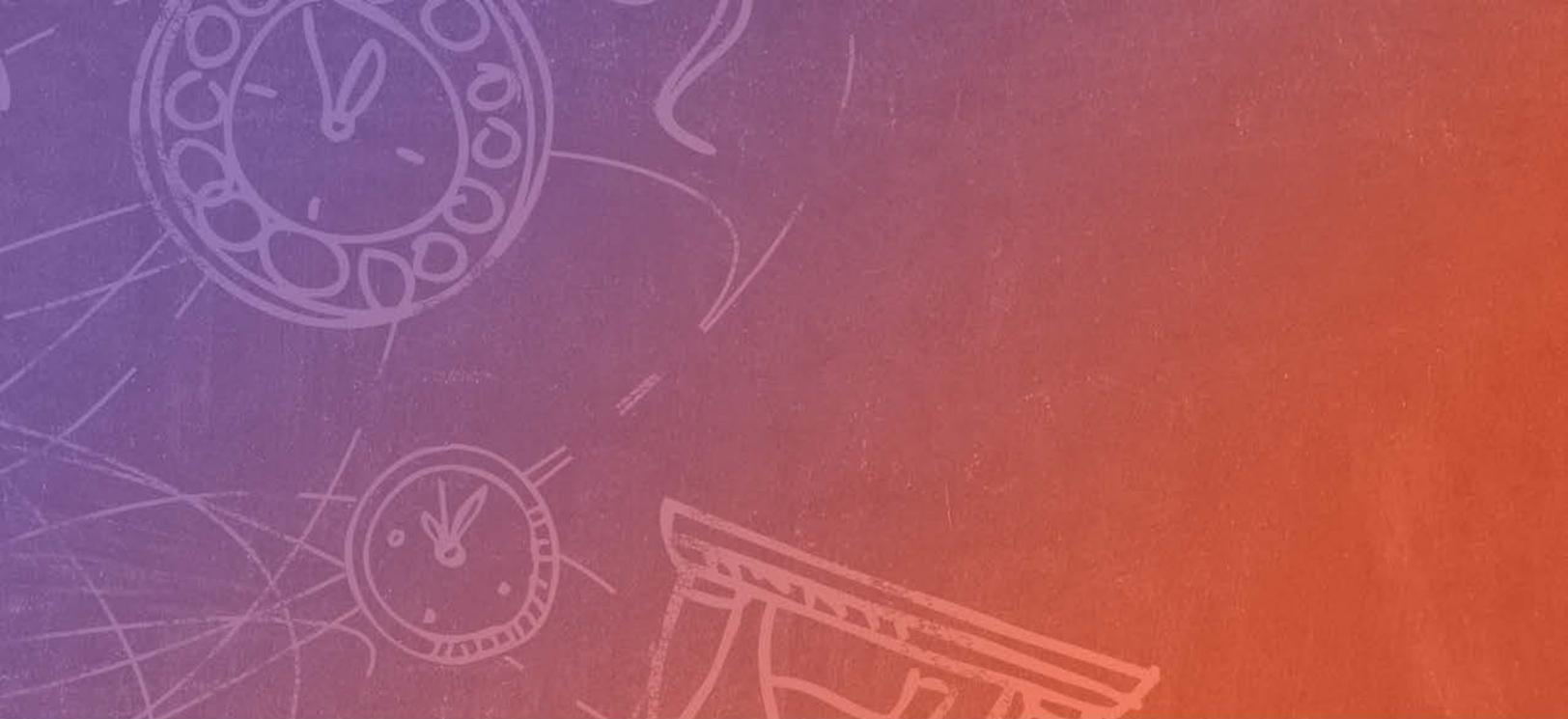
Different people have different techniques and tools that work for them. A friend may be able to utilize a detailed calendar and strict daily schedule, but you may be more comfortable with a simple to-do list. Find out what works for you.

## **Create Priorities**

Managing time starts with determining what's important. What are the most important things for you to accomplish today? What do you need to accomplish this week? Create a list of priorities and strive to accomplish the most important items before attending to unimportant or trivial tasks.

## **Write Them Down**

Writing your priorities frees your mind of having to remember what needs to be accomplished. Making a list lets you focus on the task at hand without worrying about forgetting something. Tools such as calendars and planners can help you keep track of things to do.



## **Make a Schedule**

Now that you have a list of written priorities, schedule your time each day. Leave gaps in your day in case a task takes longer to accomplish than anticipated. Make time to accomplish high priority items, and schedule free time and breaks throughout the day.

## **Avoid Distractions**

Get rid of things that waste time. If possible, keep your cellphone on silent while you're working. Unsubscribe from unnecessary mailing lists. Ask co-workers not to bother you when you're working, and turn off the TV, radio or other distractions. Removing distractions from your environment helps prevent you from procrastinating and avoiding work.

## **Focus on One Thing at a Time**

A lot of people think they're more efficient when they multitask. Working on two things at once creates the illusion that you're saving time. But when we do two things at once, we aren't paying enough attention to tasks to complete them efficiently. In the end, multitasking ends up wasting time.

## **Stay Busy**

When you manage your time efficiently, you'll stay busy without feeling overwhelmed. You'll have time to do things you enjoy, but you'll avoid having too much free time. Too much free time can lead to isolation and thinking about unhealthy ways to kill time.

## Evaluate Your Time Management Skills

It can be difficult to determine if we are managing time efficiently. At the end of a work week, do you ever look back and wonder how the days got away from you so fast?

Keeping a time log can help you determine where your time went. At the beginning of each hour, write down what you accomplished during the last hour. Note distractions. An example of a time log is below.

Monday	Things Accomplished	Distractions
5-6 a.m.		
6-7 a.m.		
7-8 a.m.		
8-9 a.m.		
9-10 a.m.		
10-11 a.m.		
11-12 p.m.		
12-1 p.m.		
1-2 p.m.		
2-3 p.m.		
3-4 p.m.		
4-5 p.m.		
5-6 p.m.		
6-7 p.m.		
7-8 p.m.		
8-9 p.m.		
9-10 p.m.		

**At the end of the day, review your log.**

- How could you have avoided distractions?
- Did you give yourself enough time to accomplish high priority tasks?
- Did you make enough time for fun activities?
- Did you have too much free time?

Think about your answers to the questions above to determine how you can use your time more efficiently.

# Handling Relapse

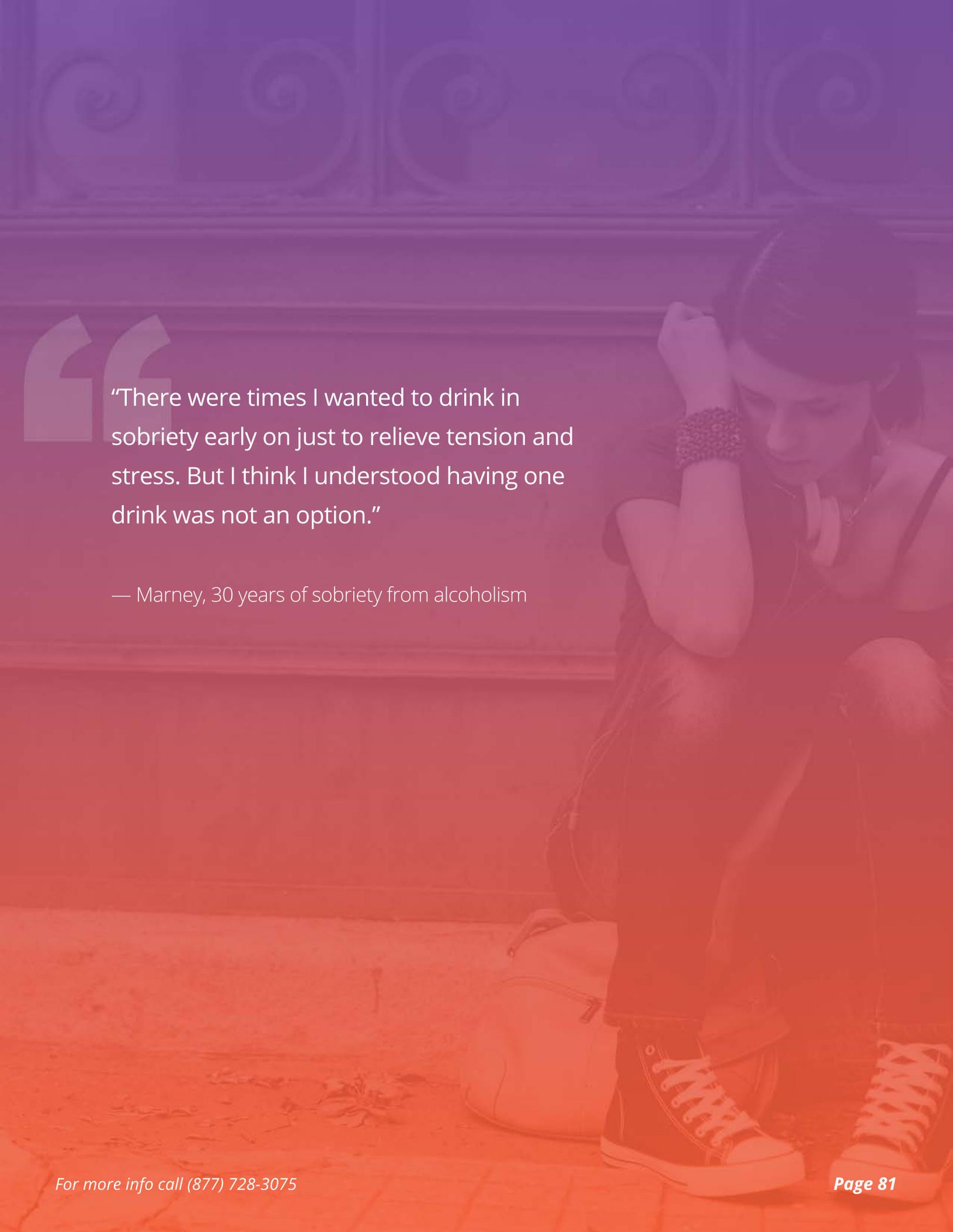
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*One of your long-term goals should be to avoid drinking alcohol or using drugs. When someone in recovery succumbs to a craving, it's called a slip. A slip is an isolated incident. It's a warning sign for relapse, but many people slip without relapsing.*

People in recovery often feel embarrassed or ashamed if they slip. But lying or hiding about a slip leads to secretive behavior and deception. It can lead to isolation, which is a warning sign for relapse.

If you slip, talk to your therapist, sponsor, support group or someone you trust. Determine why you slipped and brainstorm ways for avoiding a slip in the future. A slip doesn't mean you're destined for relapse, but it is a major risk factor.

Relapse occurs when someone becomes incapable of living a sober life. It's a return to the self-destructive, compulsive behavior that characterizes addiction. Relapse has distinctive warning signs.



“There were times I wanted to drink in sobriety early on just to relieve tension and stress. But I think I understood having one drink was not an option.”

— Marney, 30 years of sobriety from alcoholism

### **Risk factors for relapse include:**

- Exposure to alcohol or other drugs
- Exposure to trauma
- Isolation
- Boredom
- Prolonged sadness, anxiety or anger
- Romanticizing alcohol or drug use
- Avoiding therapy
- Avoiding support groups

Stress is the biggest risk factor for relapse. That's why learning to avoid, manage and relieve stress is paramount to recovery.

Slips and relapse are common parts of the recovery process, but they should be avoided if possible. Overdoses commonly occur when people return to heavy alcohol or drug use after long periods of abstinence. Relapse can cause job loss or health problems. It can also damage relationships because many people don't understand addiction. They think someone who relapses isn't trying hard enough.

Unfortunately, relapse into addiction is just as common as relapse into other chronic diseases such as diabetes or hypertension. If you relapse, it's important to return to treatment, support group meetings or some form of therapy. You'll learn from mistakes, recognize what caused the relapse and be better prepared for recovery in the future.

# Making an Emergency Relapse Prevention Plan

Relapse prevention plans come in multiple forms. Every goal, boundary and stress-relief technique that you've created or practiced is part of an overall relapse prevention plan. Those tools are the foundation of your sobriety journey.

But you also need an emergency plan when you're in crisis. An emergency plan helps when you're experiencing a craving, can't think straight and know you need help. It's your last resort plan for when all else fails. Start by reflecting on your past.

**1 What prevented you from stopping or led to a slip in the past? List specific reasons.**

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**2 What thoughts entered your head before you started drinking or using?**

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**3 What prevention techniques worked in the past?**

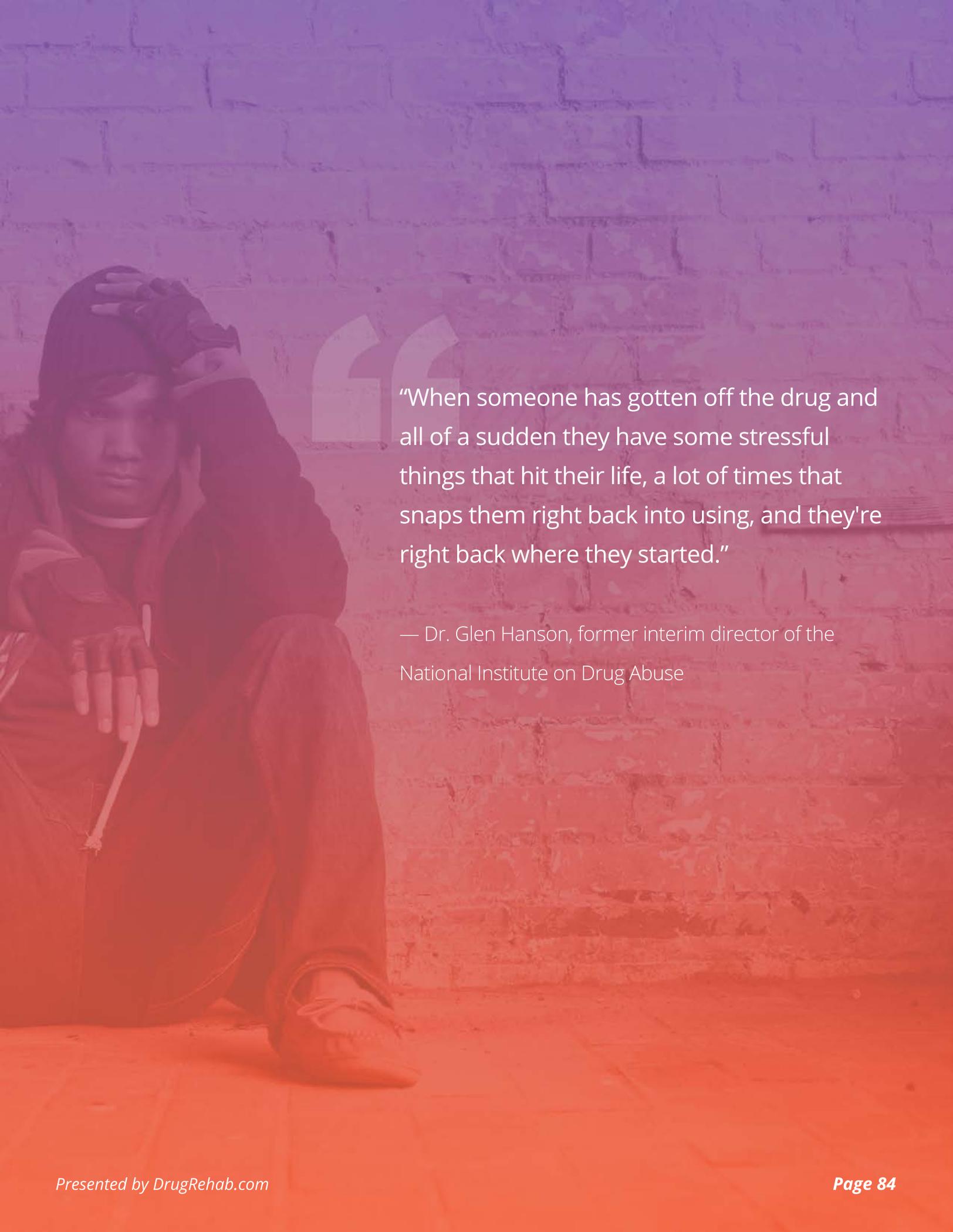
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**4 What techniques didn't work in the past?**

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“When someone has gotten off the drug and all of a sudden they have some stressful things that hit their life, a lot of times that snaps them right back into using, and they're right back where they started.”

— Dr. Glen Hanson, former interim director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse

For each cause, thought or craving that kept you from stopping or led to a slip, create a list of actionable steps to help you in the future.

**Cause, thought or craving:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1 What stress-relief techniques or coping strategies will you use?**

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**2 Where will you go?**

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**3 How will you get there?**

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**4 Who will you call? Be sure to list backup numbers.**

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**5 What emergency service will you turn to? Refer to the hotlines on page 92.**

---

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**6 Why will you remain sober? Write words that will inspire you.**

---

---

**Cause, thought or craving:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1 What stress-relief techniques or coping strategies will you use?**

---

---

**2 Where will you go?**

---

---

**3 How will you get there?**

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---

**4 Who will you call? Be sure to list backup numbers.**

---

---

**5 What emergency service will you turn to? Refer to the hotlines on page 92.**

---

---

**6 Why will you remain sober? Write words that will inspire you.**

---

---

**Cause, thought or craving:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1 What stress-relief techniques or coping strategies will you use?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2 Where will you go?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3 How will you get there?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**4 Who will you call? Be sure to list backup numbers.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**5 What emergency service will you turn to? Refer to the hotlines on page 92.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**6 Why will you remain sober? Write words that will inspire you.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cause, thought or craving:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1 What stress-relief techniques or coping strategies will you use?**

---

---

**2 Where will you go?**

---

---

**3 How will you get there?**

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---

**4 Who will you call? Be sure to list backup numbers.**

---

---

**5 What emergency service will you turn to? Refer to the hotlines on page 92.**

---

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**6 Why will you remain sober? Write words that will inspire you.**

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Your emergency plan may include a list of support group meetings to turn to, people who are authorized to help you receive treatment or shelters to stay in.



## Resources for Sobriety

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*Addiction often feels lonely, but it doesn't have to be. The recovery community in the United States is more active and vocal today than ever before. There are organizations in every community that want to connect you with the resources you need. There are people in your town that want to help you. All you have to do is ask.*

### Organizations in Your Community

You can find community-based prevention, intervention and treatment organizations in towns and cities across the country. Most community organizations advocate for drug and alcohol prevention, but many focus on helping people in recovery maintain sobriety.

Call your local hospital, public health or law enforcement agency and tell them you're looking for help maintaining sobriety. Admitting you need help can be scary, but doctors and hospitals must maintain confidentiality.

Many law enforcement agencies will direct you to resources if you are not actively using or trafficking illicit drugs. They'll be able to direct you to prescription drug drop-off locations and other government resources.

You might consider spending your time giving back to your community. Volunteering with a nonprofit or community-based prevention organization can help you find purpose in recovery, build a support system and hold yourself accountable.



## Support Groups

Social support is a key ingredient to recovery and happiness. Each support group is unique, and several groups specialize in helping people from specific backgrounds. It may take time to find the right support group for you. If you attend a support group meeting that doesn't seem like a good fit, go to another one. Keep attending meetings until you find the group that is best for you.

### Alcoholics Anonymous

Alcoholics Anonymous is the largest support group for people in recovery from addiction. There are no membership fees, but members must try to remain sober. They're also encouraged to participate in AA's 12-step program. The 12 steps include believing you are powerless over alcohol and believing in a higher power. There are hundreds of thousands of AA meetings every day in communities across the United States.

### Narcotics Anonymous

Narcotics Anonymous was built on a framework similar to AA. The only membership requirement is to abstain from illicit drugs and to follow the 12

steps, which are nearly identical to AA's. NA meetings aren't as prevalent as AA meetings, but most communities have multiple NA meetings each day.

### Al-Anon

Al-Anon is a support group for friends and family members affected by another person's alcoholism. At Al-Anon meetings, people share stories of how someone else's alcoholism has affected them, and members offer support. The meetings are designed to help friends and family cope with issues that often accompany alcoholism.

## **Back to Basics**

Back to Basics is a program for introducing 12-step programs to individuals seeking sobriety. The program is based on the original Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in the 1940s. It involves four one-hour sessions in which newcomers are introduced to the 12 steps by sponsors or meeting leaders who have already completed a 12-step program. The Back to Basics program is based on the 12-step program created through AA, but it can be used to aid a person in recovery from any type of substance use disorder.

## **SMART Recovery**

SMART Recovery is a secular, evidence-based alternative to 12-step programs such as AA and NA. SMART stands for Self-Management and Recovery Training. The organization hosts online message boards, chat rooms and online meetings. It also sponsors face-to-face meetings for people in recovery from a range of addictive behaviors. SMART teaches participants to maintain motivation, cope with urges, manage thoughts and live a balanced life.

## **Alcoholics Anonymous**

[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

## **Narcotics Anonymous**

[www.na.org](http://www.na.org)

## **Back to Basics**

[www.aabacktobasics.org](http://www.aabacktobasics.org)

## **Al-Anon**

[www.al-anon.org](http://www.al-anon.org)

## **SMART Recovery**

[www.smartrecovery.org](http://www.smartrecovery.org)

## **Numbers to Call**

When you don't know where to go or what to do to get the help you need, refer to this list of national hotlines. The national organizations can put you in touch with local resources to help you on your path to recovery or assist you during a crisis. All calls are confidential.

### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Helpline**

*1-800-662-HELP (4357)*

SAMHSA's National Helpline provides information on mental health issues and substance use disorders 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You can also call to receive a referral to a local mental health provider.

### **National Domestic Violence Hotline**

*1-800-799-SAFE (7233)*

The National Domestic Violence Hotline provides solutions for men, women and children who are victims of domestic violence. The hotline also helps friends and family members who are concerned about the safety of a loved one. It provides guidance and information on local resources.

## **Drug-Free Workplace Helpline**

*1-800-WORKPLACE (967-5752)*

SAMHSA's Drug-Free Workplace Helpline helps employers and union representatives develop policies, employee assistance programs, educational programs and training to promote a drug-free work environment.

## **Disaster Distress Helpline**

*1-800-985-5990*

SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline provides counseling and support for people who experience stress, anxiety and symptoms of depression after a natural or human-caused disaster.

## **The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids Helpline**

*1-855-DRUGFREE (378-4373)*

The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids offers a hotline for parents whose children are abusing alcohol or other drugs. Support specialists help parents develop a plan for preventing future substance abuse.

## **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

*1-800-273-TALK (8255)*

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline puts you in touch with a trained crisis worker who will listen to your needs and help you find local mental health services. The hotline is for anyone experiencing a crisis.

## **Veterans Crisis Line**

*1-800-273-8255 / TTY: 1-800-799-4889*

The Veterans Crisis Line helps veterans, their friends and their family members who are in crisis. The service, provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, is available 24/7, 365 days a year.

## **National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Hope Line**

*1-800-NCA-CALL (622-2255)*

The NCADD Hope Line employs trained professionals who listen to your needs, help you determine the best course of action for you and refer you to relevant resources in your community.

# Reflect on What You've Accomplished

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Congratulations,

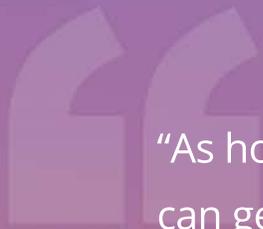
If you've completed this e-book as intended, you've read 93 pages and completed 18 worksheets, questionnaires and checklists. You've journaled about your experiences, reflected on your life, developed recovery strategies and practiced coping techniques. You've recognized mistakes, and you've learned from them.

Take a moment and reflect on everything you've accomplished.

This e-book is designed to be a living document. Continue to create new goals, record coping skills and remind yourself of stress-relief strategies. Every so often, refer to the list of boundaries you set. Decide whether to keep them in place, change them or create new ones. Keep track of your goals, create new ones and reward yourself for accomplishing big ones.

If you have a moment of distress or you experience a craving, find this book. Look at the reasons you became sober. Look at the goals you accomplished, the skills you learned and the prevention plan you made. Don't be afraid to reach out to your support system. There's no shame in asking for help at any point in sobriety.

Don't give up if you're still struggling. Find a therapist or sober living home if you need it. Find a support group near you. Reach out for help. Keep working. Keep fighting. Stay positive, motivated and hopeful.



“As hopeless as anyone feels, you can get sober. You can get better. Recovery is possible.”

— Joey Fiorello, 20 years of sobriety from alcohol and illicit drugs



# We Can Help You

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*This e-book is provided by Advanced Recovery Systems, an integrated behavioral health care management organization dedicated to treating addiction, eating disorders and other mental health disorders. We manage drug rehabilitation facilities, eating disorder treatment centers and sober living communities across the United States.*

ARS is dedicated to helping people affected by addiction maintain healthy lives after they finish treatment. We provide comprehensive aftercare plans, referrals to support groups and access to free online information to help you on your path to recovery.

## DrugRehab.com

DrugRehab.com is an online resource provided by ARS. Through DrugRehab.com, you have access to relevant tools and resources for overcoming substance use disorders. You'll find information covering all aspects of addiction, evidence-based treatment options and proven recovery strategies.

The guides on DrugRehab.com cover important topics such as how parents can recognize teen drug abuse, how alcohol and other drugs affect pregnancy and what to do if you witness an overdose. The news section covers the latest trends, medical advances and legislation involving addiction.

The website also provides information for finding support group meetings and treatment options in numerous communities.

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