



PREVENTING ALCOHOLISM RELAPSE

Alcoholism is a chronic, progressive disease, with specific physical, psychological, and behavioral symptoms. Relapse is frequently part of the disease. Like diabetes, and other similar chronic diseases, alcoholism can be treated, but not cured.

An effective recovery program involves more than abstinence from the substance. It requires learning how to live effectively without drinking and involves a change in *thinking*. This change in thinking can be critical to preventing relapse.

There is often a chain of events that leads to relapse long before an alcoholic picks up a drink. It can start with subtle changes in a person's commitment to recovery. These changes are progressive warning signs that ultimately result in drinking. The alcoholic may stop going to 12-step recovery meetings or aftercare group, and stop calling his or her sponsor or counselor. He or she might return to old drinking locations and acquaintances. Eventually, the alcoholic will find himself or herself in a stressful situation that provokes strong feelings. Distanced from the tools that would help the alcoholic deal with those feelings without drinking, relapse may occur.

The following steps are one approach to preventing relapse:

- 1) Make a contract with yourself about your commitment to sobriety, noting the losses or consequences that would occur if you relapse (for example, "I will lose my job" or "custody of my children would be affected").
- 2) Identify the actions significant others should take in case of relapse.
- 3) Use your own words to identify events that led you to relapse in the past or would do so in the future ("hanging out with the old crowd").
- 4) Map out the relapse progression – then script out the event again, inserting specific behaviors that would lead you AWAY from relapse ("if I go to the company party, I'll go to an AA meeting ahead of time, plan to only stay ninety minutes, bring my cell phone and the number of my sponsor, or stay close to a significant other who supports my sobriety").
- 5) Identify and commit to a personal recovery plan that includes daily habits which build growth and resilience in recovery – for example, 12-step meetings, exercise, counseling, and a spiritual component like meditation.

The OAAP sponsors relapse prevention programs for recovering alcoholics and addicts. Participants learn about signs and symptoms of relapse, brain physiology, and thinking errors associated with relapse. The groups are facilitated by Grier Cundhill, MA CADC II. The cost is \$10 per session.

For more information about alcoholism and relapse prevention, contact OAAP program attorneys Meloney Crawford Chadwick or Michael Sweeney at 503-226-1057.