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RELAPSE WARNING SIGNS

Recovery is more than just not drinking or using. It is a holistic process. Relapse can begin when the process of recovery is stalled and old ways of thinking return. Behaviors that fuel those old beliefs also often return, building enough chaos in the addicted individual's life to make chemical use seem like a logical option.

The relapse process has identifiable patterns and can be interrupted before alcohol or drug use resumes. Observation and intervention by friends and associates are helpful. Often, the addicted individual does not even realize that he or she is headed for a relapse.

Below are some warning signs:

- Sensitivity to stress, disturbed sleep, difficulty concentrating or remembering things, volatile emotions (these may also be signs of post-acute withdrawal syndrome, or PAWS, which may occur in recovering individuals for six to 18 months after abstinence from their substance of abuse)
- Increased use of caffeine or nicotine (particularly if use of those substances had previously stopped)
- Skipping or stopping recovery support activities (group meetings, contact with sponsor or recovering friends)
- Isolation or denial, not talking about feelings or problems, or not acknowledging them
- Engaging in other compulsive behaviors, such as eating, shopping, gambling, exercising, working, or Internet use
- Avoidance or defensiveness when confronted ("Everything's fine—it's none of your business.")
- Depression, feelings of hopelessness
- Idealized thoughts about alcohol or drug use, minimizing consequences ("That drink looks good. I had some fun times getting high. My problem wasn't that bad. Using just once would be okay. I'd be able to control it this time.")

- Chemical use (even if a different substance) followed by all-or-nothing thinking ("I've already blown it, so why ask for help? It's too hard. I can't do recovery. What's the use?")

For more information on how to recognize and intervene in the relapse process, see *Staying Sober: A Guide for Relapse Prevention* by Terence T. Gorski and Merlene Miller.