

Relapse Prevention

Ken Montrose, MA, CADC
Greenbriar Treatment Center
6200 Brooktree Road, Suite 210
Wexford, PA 15090

kenneth.montrose@gatewayrehab.org

412.219.4188

“Individuals recovering from various forms of addiction frequently encounter relapses that have gained acceptance as an almost inevitable part of the recovery process.

“However, the normalization of relapses can reduce the urgency for providers, patients, and support individuals to prevent them from occurring.”

Guenzel N, McChargue D. Addiction Relapse Prevention. [Updated 2023 Jul 21]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2024 Jan-. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK551500/>

Why Did You Relapse



Do an Autopsy.

Starting from the moment you slipped, working backwards, what were the thoughts, feelings, events, and behavior that led up to your relapse.



Fear of Success

- The longer I'm sober the more painful relapse will.
- Sooner or later, might as well be sooner.
- People resent my success.
- The higher you climb, the more people want to pull you down.
- What if I get to the top of the mountain and there's nothing up there?
- What excuse will I use for bad behavior?

Brick Stacker or Bricklayer?

“You’re a brick stacker who thinks he’s a bricklayer,” I said. “You know how to stack bricks, but you don’t know how to build a wall.”

“It’s all about the mortar,” I said. “Mortar is the people, places, and things of recovery that bind us all together.

“Bricks have to be laid in a pattern. That pattern is the routine we follow one day at a time to build a wall between us and relapse.

“You know what a brick weighs,” I said. “You know how long it is and how wide. What keeps you here is that instead of building a wall, you’d rather impress people with your knowledge of bricks.”

He walked away muttering something about me being an arrogant brick.

“Testing. Testing. One, Two, Three drinks later. . .”

Returning to People, Places, and Things:

Boosts the power of triggers that may have been fading.

Gives one a false sense of accomplishment.

Reduces one’s fear of relapse.

Pavlov's Puppies

People, places, and/or things that engage your senses before, during, and after getting high can become triggers for relapse.

For Example:

- If you tied off with your seat belt before shooting up, your car may be a relapse trigger.
- If you started most of your binges on payday, payday is now a relapse trigger.



Let the Ritual Begin

Why Do People Miss 'the life'? In some ways IV drug use is like sex:

Restraint – Heat – Penetration – Release

Which makes being around people using analogous to porn.

Why we don't take other people's inventories:

We might resent their progress and success.

Doing so can foster unrealistic expectations.

We can minimize our problems in comparison to someone we think is in worse shape.

Anybody know the slogan represented by these letters?

Don't C Y I T O P O



Spot Light

Every time we reach a milestone, we probably receive a little less attention.

We have to ask ourselves if part of relapsing was a bid for attention.

Be Careful Around Anniversaries

Anniversaries can be
steppingstones.

Anniversaries can be
stumbling blocks.



The Artful Dodger

How Not To Accept Responsibility and Recover

The Glass is Have Full

Not That Bad folks will argue things they still have prove they don't have a problem:

- Job
- Car
- Spouse
- House



On the Other Have...



Not My Fault people will argue they have issues that make relapse out of their control. They have:

- A Disease
- Chronic pain
- A chronic pain named _____
- Broken Heart
- Mental Illness
- Trauma

It Could Be Worse!

I ate a couple, but I'd never get stuff off the street.

I snorted a little, but I didn't smoke it.

I smoked it but I didn't use a needle.

I used a needle, but I didn't share.

I shared a needle with someone, but it was someone I knew well.

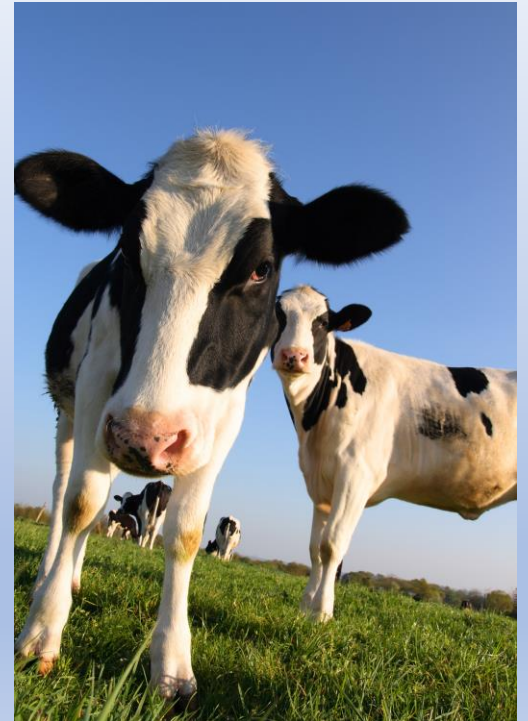
Worse is Just Around the Corner

- Help people see their downward spiral by doing a thorough history, paying close attention to whatever lines they said they'd never cross.
- Explain that some ledges are wider than others, but they tend to get narrower as we descend.
- People have an amazing ability to adapt. This is wonderful in difficult times, but a curse to people struggling with SUDs.

Worsers' cousin, Not Yet

Not Yets are the lines we draw saying if we cross them, we'll know the relapse was a big deal:

- I got drunk, but I didn't go hunting. No harm no foul.
- I went hunting drunk, but I didn't fire my gun.
- I fired my gun, but I didn't hit anything.
- I shot a cow, not a human, just a cow.





Gorski: Anger

Some people will argue their relapse wasn't their fault because they struggle with anger.

They will blame others for their anger, and therefore, their relapse.

"If she hadn't made me so angry, I wouldn't have gotten high!"

Not That ~~B~~MAD

I drank 'cause I was mad, but I coulda shot up!

I got high, but it took the edge off my anger before I did something really bad!

I drank 'cause I was mad, but I coulda shot someone!

I got mad, but I didn't get arrested.

Gorski: Stonewalling

Refuse to discuss your relapse, or put conditions on discussing it:

"I will gladly discuss my slip when you can prove what negative impact it had on anyone, myself included." (Not That Bad)

"My 'so called' friends got me drunk. Talk to them." (Not My Fault)

Legal
Beagle
Says:

“It’s OK if it’s
legal!”



I'll Switch to NA Beer

Someone has multiple motorcycle accidents. His doctor tells him he can't ride anymore. Instead of buying a car, he buys a motor scooter. He figures the little bike doesn't go fast enough to be a danger. Which do you think is most likely to happen?

- a) He'll happily make the transition from his 1200 cc bike to a 75cc scooter.
- b) The scooter won't replace the motorcycle, but he'll adjust.
- c) Riding the scooter will be extremely frustrating, making him want to ride a motorcycle even more.



Mind Fool Ness

Betrayed By My Own Brain

My Mind Is Out To Get Me

Sometimes our own minds betray us. Rather than see the obvious, we've relapsed, we focus on details and definitions:

- I'm not sure I can accept your definition of a slip. I like to think of it as *briefly interrupted sobriety*.
- What is a slip, but the start of a new recovery?
- Much like Schrödinger's cat, I believe I can be both sober and drunk at the same time.

“I drink, therefore I am.”

We use our intelligence to blame others or our disease for relapsing:

- One cannot be held responsible for one's proclivity to abuse substances any more than one can be blamed for their handedness.
- The line between connoisseur and drunkard is arbitrary and of little importance.
- I am surrounded by idiots. Drugs bring me down to their level.



Is that true?

- Relapse is part of recovery.
- It's not how many times you fall, it's how many times you get back up.
- That which doesn't kill me, makes me stronger.

Not Always!

Two Drink Minimum

Minimization is obviously a form of Not That Bad. We make molehills out of mountains, trying to convince ourselves and others our relapse was no big deal:

- It's more of a slip than a relapse.
- You call it a relapse. I call it being in the wrong place at the wrong time.
- That's why we have attorneys.





A Bit of Advice

For Client and Clinician

Environmental Impact Statement

Do You Need to Change
More
People Places and Things?

Some Applicable Slogans

- If you don't want to get hit by the train, stay off the tracks.
- Hang around the barber shop long enough and you'll get a haircut.
- You don't go to the brothel to hear the piano player.



Zombie Crossing

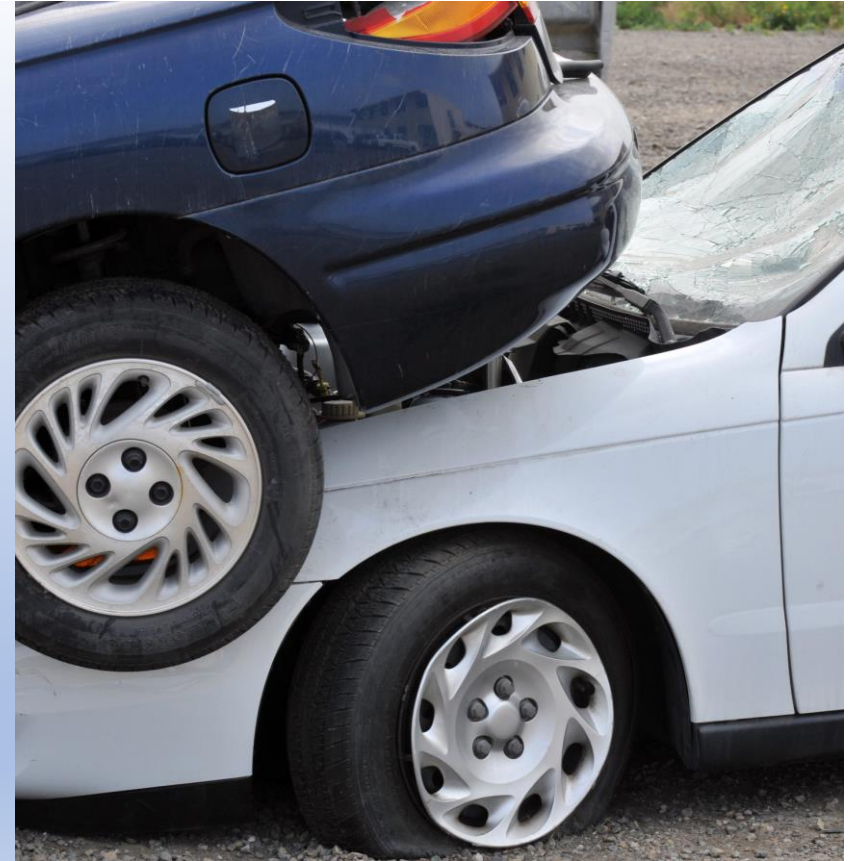
The relationship with one's addiction never really dies... Treat it like any other zombie.



Switching Drugs?

If you've wrecked five Fords, buying a Chevy is not the answer.

(It's the driver not the vehicle.)



Alcohol is a Gateway Drug

- Many people don't consider alcohol a drug.
- Others downplay the risks associated with alcohol because it wasn't their drug of choice.

BUT

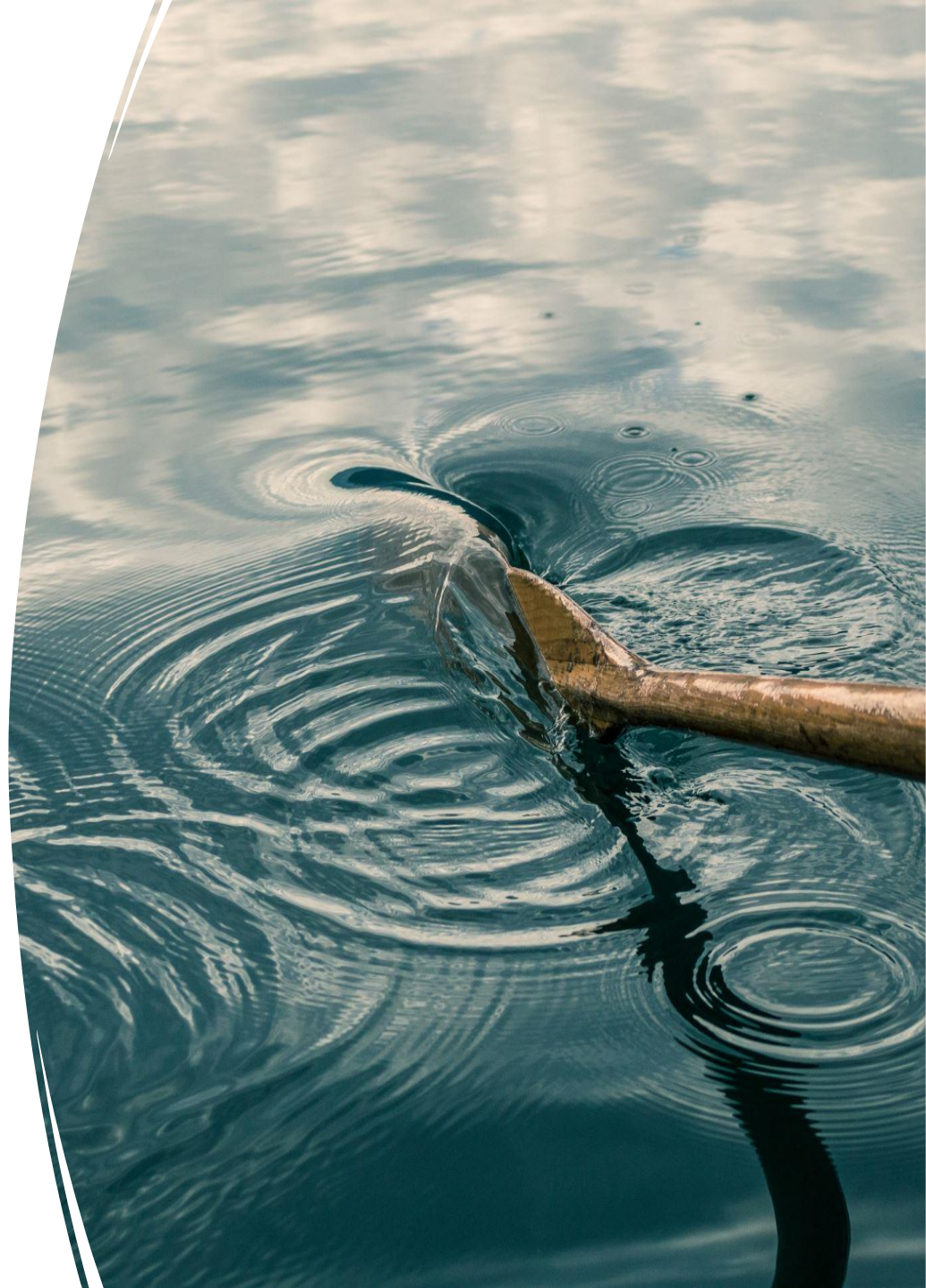
- Other drugs are often sold where alcohol is served.
- Alcohol is disinhibitory.
- People who've been addicted to one drug are susceptible to addiction to another.

Triggers can have a powerful effect:

- Ever felt relaxed as soon as you got your prescription filled?
- Had a physical reaction, e.g. stomach clenching, sweating, quickening heartbeat, when exposed to a trigger?
- Been unable stop thinking about a drink or other drug after encountering a trigger?

That's why it's best to avoid them!

Be Patient.
For some,
peace
is an acquired taste.



Have you met Epiphany?

It's not an epiphany if you discover something you already knew.

- Cocaine is addictive.
- Bad things happen when I drink.
- Addictions eat money.






Pathfinding vs. Going in Circles

Pathfinding involves taking calculated risks, in the hope of a reward, changing direction when things don't work out.

People going in circles make poor investments in time and money, achieve similar failures, and continue on the same path.

There is no problem so bad
a drink cannot make it
worse.





Sole Searching

What Did You Step In?

Puppet Master

Again we will ask you to take an honest look at yourself.

- Do you like playing the puppet master, using relapse to manipulate people?
- Do you like the way people walk on eggshells around your recovery?
- Is it fun to see how far you can push your enablers?



What Did You Like About Relapse?

- A return to the familiar
- An end to cravings
- Anticipation of using with a lowered tolerance
- Excitement
- The attention of an enabler

What would it take?

And how can you arrange it?



Phone/File Card

- Three people to call when you're craving, five reasons you got sober, three options other than relapse.
- Day Planner
- Ten Rewards/Catastrophes



Enabling/Enablers

- The person who catches you when you fall, isn't responsible for you falling.
- Expect enablers to consider you ungrateful when you break away from them.
- Having an enabler can be comforting, but at a cost.

Enabling is the Mirror Image of Addiction

- People who enable exchange short-term relief for long-term problems.
- Not enabling is initially painful but rewarding in the long run.

Breaking this Mirror is Actually Good Luck!



Re-Working the Steps

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable.

- Who was the 'we' of your recovery? Do you need to make changes?
- What from this relapse is further proof of your addiction?



Medications

Medications: Bad Advice?

“It says ‘prayer and meditation,’ not ‘prayer and medication.’”

“Try to remember that though God has wrought miracles among us, we should never belittle a good doctor or psychiatrist. Their services are indispensable in treating a newcomer and in following his case afterward.”

Alcoholics Anonymous (the “Big Book” p. 244)



And...

“It becomes clear that just as it is wrong to enable or support any alcoholic to become re-addicted to any drug, it’s equally wrong to deprive any alcoholic of any medication which can alleviate or control other disabling physical and/or emotional problems.”

The AA Member: Medications and Other Drugs



Where's my butterfly?

Do you have unrealistic expectations of antidepressants?

Antidepressants keep us from sinking to the bottom, but we still have to ride the waves.

