

Developing a Sober Lifestyle

When people decide to develop a sober lifestyle, it takes planning and practice. Sometimes there can be setbacks along the way, such as urges to use substances or relapses in substance use. Developing your own personal plan for a sober lifestyle is an important part of managing your mental illness and achieving your personal recovery goals. There are three important steps to achieving sobriety:

- Remember your reasons for not using substances.
- Develop a plan to prevent going back to using substances in “high risk” situations.
- Identify new ways of getting your needs met.

Tips for accomplishing each of these steps are provided below:

Identifying Personal Reasons For Not Using Substances

Whenever someone decides to cut down or stop using substances, it is important for them to identify their personal reasons for wanting a sober lifestyle, and to regularly remind themselves of these reasons. In what ways could sobriety help you achieve your personal recovery goals? Consider possible reasons such as:

- Better ability to manage mental illness (fewer relapses)
- Improved social relationships
- Improved ability to work or go to school
- Having your own apartment
- Being a better parent
- Fewer legal problems
- More money to spend on other things

Dealing With “High Risk” Situations

In order to be successful in stopping substance use, it is helpful to make plans about how to deal with situations in which one has used substances in the past. These situations, sometimes called *“high risk situations,”* often involve other people, but not always.

- Being offered substances by friends
- Being pressured to use substances by friends or acquaintances
- Running into a former drug connection
- Holidays
- Going to a party
- Having money in your pocket
- Feeling bad (such as feeling depressed, anxious or frustrated)
- Having nothing to do
- Spending too much time alone
- Remembering good times related to substance use

Avoiding these situations can reduce the risk of relapse. However, complete avoidance is not always possible. Effective strategies for dealing with “high risk” situations are critical to developing a successful sobriety plan. Specific high-risk situations are described below, along with some possible strategies to manage those situations.

- Social situations involving offers or pressures to use substances:
 - Decline in a firm voice tone
 - Don't make excuses for "no" (it invites debate)
 - Repeat the refusal if needed
 - Offer an alternative activity if it is a friend
 - Level with friends/relatives about the importance of your sobriety and ask them to respect it
 - Leave the situation if necessary

- Having cravings to use substances:
 - Distract yourself by doing something that focuses your attention elsewhere
 - Cheerlead with self-talk, "I can cope," etc.
 - Use relaxation techniques until cravings pass
 - Use prayer
 - Contact a friend

- Having money in your pocket:
 - Plan ways to keep most of your money in a safe place and at a distance from you
 - Problem-solve ways to avoid direct access to money

- When things aren't going well, such as experiencing depression, anxiety, hallucinations or sleep problems:
 - Depression
 - *Schedule pleasant activities
 - *Challenge negative thinking
 - *Exercise
 - *Use positive self-statements
 - Anxiety
 - *Use relaxation techniques
 - *Challenge thoughts that cause you to worry
 - *Gradually expose yourself to feared but safe situations

- Hallucinations
 - *Distract yourself with other activities
 - *Accept the voices or other hallucinations without giving them undue attention or control over your life
 - *Use relaxation to tolerate the distress
- Sleep problems
 - *Avoid caffeine use in the afternoon
 - *Avoid naps
 - *Go to bed at the same time each night
 - *Develop a pleasant nighttime routine (e.g. reading, watching TV)

Finding New Ways of Getting Your Needs Met

In order to develop a sober lifestyle, it is important to develop new ways of getting your needs met that do not involve using substances. Common reasons for using substances include:

- Socializing with others
- Feeling accepted by other people
- Feeling good
- Escaping boredom
- Dealing with bad feelings
- Help with sleeping
- Having something to do and look forward to

Developing new ways of getting your needs met is hard work. The Illness Management and Recovery program is aimed at helping you develop new strategies for meeting your needs, including social needs, coping with symptoms, and doing other interesting things with your time. Developing new ways of getting your needs met can take time and effort. However, the rewards of a sober lifestyle and the ability to achieve personal recovery goals make the effort worthwhile.