



Pincher Creek Women's Emergency Shelter Association Addictions Safety Plan

It is essential to understand that relapse is always possible, no matter how long a person has been sober or in recovery. Because of this, every person should have a safety plan for how they can avoid relapse. If relapse does occur, their safety plan will also suggest the next steps they should take so they can get back on track as quickly as possible.

Personalizing Your Safety Plan

Just as no two people experience addiction the same, no two people will have the same safety plan. Your safety plan must be comprised of several different components, all of which help you keep your recovery the highest priority in your life.

Warning Signs of Relapse

It is crucial for you to recognize that relapse is more than just drinking or using drugs again. Relapse can happen in three stages:

- **Emotional relapse** - During emotional relapse, individuals are not thinking about using. They remember their last relapse and they don't want to repeat it. But their emotions and behaviors are setting them up for relapse down the road. Because clients are not consciously thinking about using during this stage, denial is a big part of emotional relapse.

These are some of the signs of emotional relapse: 1) bottling up emotions; 2) isolating; 3) not going to meetings; 4) going to meetings but not sharing; 5) focusing on others (focusing on other people's problems or focusing on how other people affect them); and 6) poor eating and sleeping habits. The common denominator of emotional relapse is poor self-care, in which self-care has many different categories including emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical care.

- **Mental relapse** - In mental relapse, there is a war going on inside people's minds. Part of them wants to use, but part of them doesn't. As individuals go deeper into mental relapse, their cognitive resistance to relapse diminishes and their need for escape increases.

These are some of the signs of mental relapse: 1) craving for drugs or alcohol; 2) thinking about people, places, and things associated with past use; 3) minimizing consequences of past use or glamorizing past use; 4) bargaining; 5) lying; 6) thinking of schemes to better control using; 7) looking for relapse opportunities; and 8) planning a relapse.

- **Physical relapse** - Finally, physical relapse is when an individual starts using again. Most physical relapses are relapses of opportunity. They occur when the person has a window in which they feel they will not get caught. Part of relapse prevention involves rehearsing these situations and developing healthy exit strategies.



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When people don't understand relapse prevention, they think it involves saying no just before they are about to use. But that is the final and most difficult stage to stop, which is why people relapse. If an individual remains in mental relapse long enough without the necessary coping skills, clinical experience has shown they are more likely to turn to drugs or alcohol just to escape their turmoil.

Identifying Your Personal Triggers

Triggers are anything that can lead you to use drugs or alcohol again. List the people, places, and things that you think could threaten your sobriety and potentially lead you to relapse. Consider the places you have used in the past, the thoughts that could lead you to relapse, and how to respond to triggers when they show up unannounced.

List your personal triggers:

People: _____

Places: _____

Things: _____

Identifying and Managing Your Cravings

Cravings, like triggers, often lead to relapse. Cravings are physical or emotional feelings that can urge a person to use again. Create a list of all the distinct cravings you have experienced and recognize what coping skills you have at your disposal that you can use when you feel cravings.

These are some examples of coping skills: talk about it with your sponsor or with a friend in recovery, or distracting yourself by journaling, watching a comedy, listening to loud music, running, doing a crossword puzzle, cleaning house, working on a project, etc.

List at least 10 ways to cope with cravings:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____



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5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Utilizing and Recognizing Preventative Resources

Your safety plan should also include a list of prevention tools that have helped you get to where you are on your recovery journey. Examples might include:

- Calling a friend when you feel stressed
- Attending regular support group meetings
- Exercising
- Immersing yourself in nature
- Having weekly check-ins with a mentor, peer, or therapist

List your Preventative Resources:

Creating an Exit Plan

One of the most important factors of a safety plan is having an exit plan. An exit plan helps you know how to respond to situations that directly threaten your sobriety. For example, say that you were invited to a friend's house to have dinner. While you are there, dinner turns into a party. Instead of feeling obligated to stay and drink, you can utilize one of your predetermined exit plans. Examples might include:

- Making the excuse that you feel sick and need to head home
- Texting a friend to call you with an emergency you need to take care of



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Create your Exit Plan:

Your Safety Plan in Action

It is one thing to have a safety plan written on a piece of paper. It is an entirely different thing to come back to your safety plan regularly to update and alter it. You are constantly changing and growing, which means your unique recovery needs will also shift. You must always stay up to date with any new triggers or ways to stay involved with continuing treatment.

Remember that a crisis does not have to be life-threatening. It can be anything that threatens your recovery. After all, what is the worth of a safety plan if it is never used? The truth is everyone will need to access their safety plan at some point in their recovery. Your success depends on your determination to put your safety plan to use when your long-term recovery needs it most.

References

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