

Minimizing Temptations to Maximize Your Recovery

Objective: To minimize your risk of relapse by taking specific steps to get rid of objects and avoid people and situations that might trigger you to use.

You Should Know

Let's say you've decided to stop (or cut back on) using substances. Now it's time to take some steps to minimize your chances of relapse. Access to your substance of choice and the opportunity to use it are two key elements that can lead to a relapse or the temptation to relapse. Limiting access and opportunity is a smart, healthy choice, but it might not be easy. As with everything in your recovery, be sure to ask for help and support from people you trust to honor your decision.

Does This Sound Like You?

Liza, 20, has been using nonprescription Percocet since she was 17. Her parents have sent her to multiple treatment programs, but whenever she moves back home, she relapses. Upon her return from a wilderness program, Liza's parents were worried. They gave her an ultimatum: "Thirty days of clean drug tests or you'll have to find a place of your own." Liza knew she had stashed pills in different places around the house. She worried that if she found one she wouldn't be able to resist. She asked her parents to help her search the house to be sure all the pills were gone. They combed through closets and drawers, under the bed, under the mattress, and in clothes pockets and found some long-forgotten unused pills, which they threw out together. Liza had lots of mixed feelings, but she knew she was doing the best thing for herself.

How are you like Liza? How are you different?

Have you ever taken steps to limit your access and opportunity to use your substance of choice? How would you feel about doing what Liza did?

What to Do

In this exercise, you'll work on moving from the contemplation stage of change, discussed earlier, to the preparation and action stages. You'll take stock of your physical environment as well as your social network, think about your access to money, and make some tough choices about letting go of things and people who could interfere with your progress.

Taking Stock of Your Environment

First, schedule a specific time to go through your home and get rid of items that put you at risk of using. Commit to it! Ask a trusted person to witness your activity, if you wish.

Date _____

Time _____

Next, go through your house or apartment and dispose of any and all of the following substances or paraphernalia. Don't forget to toss that last little pill or nip or joint or stash that you've hidden. Setting a little something aside just in case is sometimes called "reserving the right to use," and it's a setup for failure.

- Alcohol
- Lighters
- Nonprescription pills
- Rolling papers
- Prescription pills you might abuse
- Bongs, pipes, etc.
- Marijuana
- Mirrors
- Other abusable drugs, such as cough medicine
- Ashtrays
- Medical marijuana card
- Needles, syringes, spoons, etc.

If you live with someone who has access to or uses substances that put you at risk for picking up (for example, prescription drugs), buy a lockbox and have them keep those items in a secret, locked place.

Limiting Access to Money

If you are at risk of picking up drugs or alcohol whenever you have some cash in your pocket, set up a system for yourself to limit access to money. Some people choose to get rid of their bank cards altogether or sign over their account to a loved one. Some arrange to have someone else give them an allowance and then keep track of any expenses together. “But I’m too old for that!” some might say, or “That makes me feel like a child again!” If you are putting your recovery first, tell yourself this: “I’m doing this because I want to have a happier life. It doesn’t matter what people think. I’m not reverting to childhood—in fact, I’m being smart. I’m acting like a mature, responsible adult by putting things into place to limit my chances of relapse.” Sound good? Go for it!

Taking Stock of Your Social Network

As you know, people in your social network can be triggers to using: for instance, family members, friends, and colleagues who just don’t get how serious your situation is and who might push you or urge you to use “just this once.” For your best chance at success, limit or, in some cases, cut off contact with these people.

You can do so in the following ways:

- Delete their numbers from your phone.
- Block them from texting or calling.
- Block them from social media.
- Tell them in person or by email that you do not want to have contact any longer.
- Say no to social events that might trigger you to use.

Add any other “housecleaning” items here that might be helpful in your recovery efforts:

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area of your recovery?
