

# Controlling Your Impulsive Stealing

## Objective

This worksheet will help you understand your impulsive stealing and identify ways to get help.

## You Should Know

Do you have a history of impulsively stealing things that you don't really need? People who do this may have a specific psychiatric disorder called *kleptomania*. The disorder is usually diagnosed after a pattern of impulsive stealing has been established over time. A proper psychological evaluation by a mental health professional is an important first step to interrupt the pattern, which can become addictive or compulsive over time.

Does this sound like you? In this worksheet, you will be asked a number of questions to determine whether you are suffering from kleptomania, or impulsive stealing. Some suggestions and treatment options follow.

## What to Do

Below is a list of common symptoms and features of kleptomania. Next to each item, indicate on a scale from 0 to 4 whether these symptoms and features apply to you, 0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = occasionally, 3 = frequently, 4 = always.

\_\_\_\_\_ Inability to resist powerful urges to steal items that you don't need.

\_\_\_\_\_ Feeling increased tension, anxiety, or arousal leading up to the theft.

\_\_\_\_\_ Episode(s) of stealing typically occur without planning and without collaborating with anyone else (not on a dare or a desire for revenge).

\_\_\_\_\_ Lack of money is not the issue. The items you steal have no particular value to you. It is the act of stealing that motivates you.

\_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes you hide the item and keep and/or keep a collection of stolen goods.

\_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes you secretly return the item to the person or the place.

\_\_\_\_\_ Stealing from public places such as supermarkets or stores.

\_\_\_\_\_ Stealing from friends or acquaintances at a party or event.

\_\_\_\_\_ Feeling pleasure, relief, or gratification while stealing.

\_\_\_\_\_ Feeling terrible guilt, remorse, self-loathing, shame, or fear of arrest after the theft.

\_\_\_\_\_ Recurrent strong urges and a repetition of the stealing cycle.

If you rate most of these items 2 or above, please seek professional help. Now, answer the following questions as you continue your assessment of your impulsive stealing. If you are already working with a mental health professional, your answers will help in your understanding of the problem.

1. How old were you when you first experienced a strong urge to steal? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How often do you experience the urge to steal? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Have you ever been caught or arrested for stealing? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

What happened as a result?

---

---

---

4. How would you describe your feelings before, during, and after you steal something?

---

---

---

---

5. What kinds of things do you steal? Are they things you need?

---

---

---

6. What is a typical situation in which you would be inclined to steal?

---

---

---

---

7. What do you do with the stolen items?

---

---

8. Are you aware of anything specific (a feeling, a situation, a person) that triggers your urge to steal?

---

---

9. What have been the consequences thus far of your stealing in your family life, social life, work or school life?

---

---

---

10. Have any of your close relatives had a problem with compulsive stealing or with other mental health conditions, such as depression or alcohol or drug abuse?

---

---

---

11. Do you use alcohol or recreational drugs? What and how often?

---

---

---

12. Have you been treated for any other mental health problems, such as eating disorders? If yes, what treatments were most effective?

---

---

---

13. Are you currently being treated for any medical conditions?

---

---

---

Here are some things you can do to help you confront your impulsive stealing. Put a check mark by the ones that you would most likely try.

\_\_\_\_\_ Talk to a psychiatrist or medical professional about taking antidepressant medication or mood stabilizers. Certain medications have been found to be helpful for people who exhibit impulsive or addictive behaviors.

\_\_\_\_\_ Attend AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) or another 12-step program meeting; AA is designed to help you address addictive behaviors using a self-help model. There may be specific 12-step meetings in your area for people who steal impulsively.

\_\_\_\_\_ Avoid people or situations that might trigger impulsive stealing, such as friends you know you can steal from or stores with low security.

\_\_\_\_\_ Make a list of people you could call or text if you have an urge to steal.

\_\_\_\_\_ Make a list of other activities you can engage in that bring you pleasure and a sense of purpose—hobbies, classes, sports, volunteering, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ Find other emotional outlets—spiritual groups, therapy groups, places where you can express your feelings safely.

#### **Four-Step Technique to Stop Your Impulsive Stealing**

Like with other addictive behaviors, there is not one simple solution to stopping your impulsive stealing. However, this four-step behavioral technique can help you to manage your impulses in the moment.

1. Say the word “stop.” When you first notice that you have an urge to steal something, practice saying this word to yourself. Take a breath and redirect your focus immediately.
2. Ask yourself, “What am I feeling? What am I thinking?”
3. Think ahead about the consequences of stealing.
4. Remind yourself that you are a good person and that you value yourself, your freedom, and that you respect others’ rights.

## Reflections on This Exercise

1. What is the biggest challenge you feel you must overcome to get help for your impulsive stealing?

---

---

---

2. Who or what would help you to overcome that challenge?

---

---

---

3. What are your feelings about asking for professional help with your impulsive stealing?

---

---

---

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?

---

---

---