

# Coping Skills

## Addictions

### Social Support

Few things are as powerful as having a supportive person in your corner. Just knowing that friends, family, or even a fellow group member or sponsor are pulling for you can make all the difference.

#### Daily Social Support

There's more to social support than having someone to call during moments of crisis. People who have strong relationships are more resilient when facing life's obstacles, and more likely to beat addiction. Make a point to strengthen your relationships, attend support groups, and build new friendships.

#### Crisis Social Support

When in crisis, it's helpful to have a person you can count on for support—someone who you can call, who will help to talk you through the situation. Make a list of people who you can contact during these situations, and how you can reach them.

### Diversions

Cravings are brutal. They grow and grow, gnawing at your willpower, demanding that you relapse. In the middle of a craving, it might feel as if there's no escape but to use. But then, if you resist, the craving starts to fade. Eventually, it disappears. Most cravings end within one hour of starting.

The goal of **diversions** is to buy yourself time during a craving. If you can distract yourself for just *one hour*, you will have a much better chance of avoiding relapse. Come up with a list of activities you genuinely enjoy that will keep you at a distance from your temptation.

#### Diversion Ideas

go for a walk	read a book	play a sport	listen to music
watch a movie	practice a hobby	go for a run	clean or organize
do yard work	draw or paint	do a craft	cook or bake
play a game	go for a bicycle ride	write or journal	take a long bath
play an instrument	call a friend	lift weights	go swimming
go hiking in nature	take photographs	play with a pet	rearrange a room

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### Building New Habits

Most addictions require a *lot* of time. Thinking about, acquiring, and indulging an addiction can fill most of a day. When you quit, one of your greatest new resources is time. However, if your newfound time isn't filled with healthy activities, it will pose a risk for falling back into old habits.

**Building new habits** is different than diversion because of the focus on long-term or permanent life changes. This isn't about riding out a craving—this is about building a better life for yourself.

#### Foster New Relationships

- Join a casual sports league.
- Attend a local meetup for one of your interests or hobbies.
- Get involved in your community by volunteering or supporting a cause you care about.

#### Develop New Professional Skills

- Return to school to pursue a subject you are interested in.
- Find a full-time job, or seek a new career that you enjoy.
- Build new skills on your own using free online resources, or practice your existing skills.

#### Refocus on Existing Relationships

- Build a routine around socializing with friends and family. For example, have Sunday dinners with family, and evening walks with a friend.
- Be proactive—don't wait for others to reach out to you.
- Say “yes” to every social invitation that will not put you at risk of relapse.

### Prevention

#### Avoid Triggers / Risky Situations

Don't wait until you're in a bad situation to figure out how to escape it. Instead, avoid those situations altogether. Create a list of the people, places, and things that will likely lead to relapse, and come up with a plan to avoid them in the future. Sometimes this is as simple as taking a different route home from work, and other times it might mean a significant lifestyle change.

#### Healthy Lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle will make you more resilient when faced with obstacles. Many unhealthy habits, such as insufficient sleep and exercise, have been closely linked to many forms of mental illness. Focus on creating a routine that accounts for the following aspects of a healthy lifestyle:

- Sleep
- Exercise
- Medical Compliance (e.g. taking medications as prescribed and attending appointments)
- Healthy Diet

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### Managing Emotions / Relaxation

Most addictions serve as an escape from uncomfortable emotions such as stress, anxiety, and anger. When the crutch of addiction is taken away, you may need to re-learn how to manage your emotions. If you don't learn how to relax, tension will build and build, until it leads to relapse. These techniques, when practiced regularly, will help you manage your emotions in a healthy way.

#### Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple technique that's excellent for managing emotions. Sit comfortably and place one hand on your abdomen. Breathe in deeply enough that your hand begins to rise and fall. Imagine you are trying to completely fill your lungs with air. Time the inhalation (4s), pause (4s), and exhalation (6s) during every breath. Practice for 3 to 5 minutes at a time.



#### Journaling

Writing about personal experiences gives your brain the opportunity to process information and organize it into manageable chunks. Some of the many benefits of journaling include improved mental wellbeing, and the reduction of uncomfortable emotions. As you journal, be sure to describe your feelings alongside the facts of your experiences.

Feel free to journal however you like. However, if you feel stuck, try these prompts:

- **Daily Log:** Jot a few notes about each day. Whatever comes to mind is fine.
- **Letter:** Write a letter to someone with whom you would like to tell something. Remember to describe your feelings. *Do not send the letter!*
- **Gratitude:** Describe three good things from your day, no matter how minor they seem.

#### Imagery

Your brain has the power to turn thoughts into real emotions, and physical responses. Think about it: Your mouth waters at the thought of your favorite food, and a happy memory can make you laugh. With the imagery technique, you will use this power to your advantage.

Take a moment to think of a relaxing location or situation. This could be a memory, or something entirely made up. Maybe you're on a warm beach, alone at the top of a mountain, or at dinner with close friends. Next, imagine this scene through each of your senses. Don't just think about each detail for a second and move on—really imagine them. What do you see? What sounds do you hear? What do you feel? What smells are around you?

Use imagery for at least 5 minutes whenever you need a quick escape.