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# Addiction Help Guide



A handbook of insight  
for addicts and alcoholics

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Thank you for downloading this eBook. It is going to take you all the way from someone who is still blindly using drugs and alcohol, with no thought of quitting....all the way to living a full life in creative recovery.

Let me briefly introduce myself. I author a website called the [Spiritual River](#) and I have a lot of different ideas about recovery. I am 33 years old and I got clean and sober over 8 and half years ago now. I also have since managed to quit smoking cigarettes and also start exercising on a regular basis. My life is a lot better these days.

I believe in an approach to recovery that I call the creative theory. It is a bit different from "traditional" recovery which is typically 12 step programs such as AA and NA. My ideas are not completely incompatible with 12 step recovery, but I would challenge anyone who uses those programs to start thinking about creative recovery and how they can start pushing themselves to grow personally, without the accountability of a group conscience or a sponsor.

If you like my ideas about recovery, then please share them with others, and feel free to distribute this eBook or put it up on any website. It is completely free, in every way.

These ideas of mine are broken down into 4 major sections:

- 1) The need for a solution.
- 2) The concept of creation.
- 3) Living the creative theory.
- 4) Helping others in recovery.

Let's jump right in and get started.....

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Take any group of 100 recovering drug addicts and alcoholics. Statistically, only five of them will make it the next 5 years without a relapse.

Part One

The Need for  
a Solution...

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## **Recovery Comes in 2 Stages: Early Recovery and Long Term Sobriety**

Recovery is best described in 2 separate stages: early recovery, and long term sobriety. Let's take a look at each.

Early recovery starts out a little bit before you even get clean and sober. You're in the process of making the decision to change your life. Then you actually go through with the decision and take real action. This launches you into a roller coaster of an emotional ride that we can only describe as being a wild, up and down ride. Early recovery is like that. Your emotions are all over the place, because you are finally feeling them again (seemingly for the first time), and you are basically in shock from simply being sober.

Many people will spend this first part of their early recovery in a treatment center, and that is a fairly good idea for a number of reasons. For one thing, you will definitely benefit from having a safe environment with which to take your first steps towards a life of sobriety, without being tempted to relapse right away. Second of all, treatment can be helpful because you will receive a lot of addiction help from all of the peer support that you will get while in rehab. You will also benefit from the counselors and therapists there who can help to educate you about recovery and help guide you towards a new way to live. Early recovery is all about absorbing new information, and so you need to have teachers who can guide you in this early stage.

### **Long term recovery**

Now contrast this early stage with long term recovery. In long term sobriety, you are no longer depending on your peer support group to keep you clean and sober like you were in the early stages. At this point you have probably learned quite a bit, you have a few years (or more) of clean time under your belt, and in fact you are probably actively helping other newcomers in recovery in some way. This being the case, what you have to do in order to stay clean at this point is not the same things that you were doing in early recovery.

The fact is that you have to change, grow, and progress as you grow personally in recovery. Anything less than this and you risk sliding back towards your old habits.

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The real fact of the matter is that complacency is your biggest obstacle in long term recovery, so you have to take deliberate action on a consistent basis in order to keep growing. This means you need to form healthy habits that utilize sound recovery strategies, such as caring for self, helping others, and pushing yourself to grow in new ways.

## **The Transition to Long Term Recovery**

What is the best long term strategy for recovery?

Some would say that spiritual growth and development is the ideal approach, and advocate pursuit of this growth through a 12 step program. Now generally this has the potential to bring good results but it is not necessarily the best solution for everyone. The reason for this is that addiction is not just a spiritual malady as it is described in some programs, but is actually a holistic disease that affects every part of a person. The solution, therefore, is holistic, not spiritual. It is much bigger than just a “spiritual” solution.

We need only look at the overall success rates in 12 step programs to see that the spiritual solution is not enough for most people. It works for some but the vast majority do not make the connection.

### **3 strategies**

These are the 3 strategies that can best guide you in recovery. They are fundamental in that anyone who is actively working a program of recovery is actually using them, whether they know it or not.

**1) Caring for self** - we have to put our health and our own welfare first. It needs to become a priority in recovery. This includes physical health, emotional balance, spirituality, and so on.

**2) Networking with others** - peer support is critical, especially in early recovery. Helping others in recovery is particularly powerful.

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**3) Holistic growth** - this is where the action is. Pushing yourself to grow in different ways is the best long-term prevention against relapse.

These 3 strategies are all-encompassing as well. They cover the full spectrum of your recovery and if you can apply these concepts in your life then you need not look outside of them for extra help. The challenge is in genuinely applying the strategies.

### **A typical relapse story**

Most people who relapse in traditional recovery do not even properly diagnose what happened. The typical response that you hear is “I stopped going to meetings.”

This is a misguided analysis and doesn't get to the heart of the problem. If someone has been sober for a while and they stop going to meetings and therefore relapse, the problem is not that they stopped going to meetings. The problem is that **they were still dependent on them** as a solution.

This is a critical distinction here so think about it for a moment. If all it takes for you to relapse is that you stop going to meetings, really—what kind of quality sobriety is that? Those who find themselves in this situation **have failed to make the transition from early recovery to long term sobriety**. In other words, they are still stuck in early recovery and that is why they relapsed due to a lack of meetings.

The best strategy for long term recovery is to **shift your focus from heavy networking in early recovery towards a strong emphasis on holistic growth** as you progress. If you stay stuck with a dependence on a “social solution” then you are much more vulnerable to relapse. Those who turn personal growth into the main pillar of their recovery are in a better position to achieve long term sobriety.

This is a strong clue to what your long term strategy should be. It's not that you need to stop going to meetings or stop networking, because those things can still be valuable to your recovery. But understand that when you have a

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few years or more in recovery, your primary strategy should be one of holistic growth. This is what will fight off complacency and pushing yourself to keep growing is what will keep you sober in the long run.

Some ideas for holistic growth:

- 1) Fitness, nutrition, eating healthier, diet and exercise. Focus on developing healthy habits. Eliminate the bad, i.e., quitting smoking.
- 2) Emotional balance. Eliminate chaos from your life. Seek serenity.
- 3) Spirituality. Meditate. Seek a higher power. Seek to help others.
- 4) Relationships. Focus on cultivating healthy ones. Eliminate the toxic.

These ideas are just the tip of the iceberg and you will find other ways to grow and challenge yourself. This is the key to long term sobriety.

## **Some Mistakes I Made in Early Recovery**

Everyone makes mistakes in early recovery. I made quite a few myself, but luckily I did not make so many that I relapsed. I was fortunate enough to stay clean and sober, while many of my peers ended up screwing up big time. I consider myself lucky for this, and blessed.

It might be helpful for other people if they know what kind of mistakes I made early on. If you can avoid these, your recovery will be stronger for it.

**Mistake #1** - I waited too long to start helping other addicts, and this is really the cornerstone of solid recovery. If you are reaching out to others in recovery on a regular basis, then it will be very hard for you to relapse. It is not likely that you will do so if you are involved with helping others.

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**Mistake #2** - I thought that the answers were *out there* and that I was on a spiritual quest for ultimate knowledge. This led me astray for quite a while and I thought that the whole point of recovery was to experience a spiritual conversion of some sort. This is actually not the case—the point of recovery is to start living a real life again, a meaningful life filled with passion and purpose. If you can manage that, this *is* a spiritual experience. But I was seeking something beyond this gift of freedom, when in fact it was right under my nose the whole time.

**Mistake #3** - I stayed stuck in the basics for too long. My sponsor was encouraging me to go back to college and finish my degree, and he also pushed me to get a job. I actually resisted both ideas at the time, even though I eventually came around and did both of those things. But I was hesitant to do so because I was sort of isolated in my little recovery world, and I wanted to just go to meetings every day and focus on my recovery. I can look back now and see that I was clearly holding myself back from exploring life out of fear, not focusing on my recovery. Recovery is life. Don't confuse recovery support strategies with your actual life (though there may be a lot of overlap in the early stages, which is fine).

**Mistake #4** - I thought that a program could allow me to recover from addiction, when in fact I had addicts relapsing all around me. I eventually figured out that recovery is an inside job....you have to find your own path or you are not going to make it. Traditional recovery programs can only take you so far.

## **What I Did Right in Early Recovery**

I have been clean and sober now for over 8 years, and that does not happen on accident for an addict like me. I am blessed to be clean for so long and I believe I was blessed to have had the opportunity to get clean. But early on in recovery I had the chance to make some critical decisions and I made a whole bunch of good ones. Had I not made these choices correctly I am quite sure that I would not have stayed clean and sober for as long as I have. What are these things that I managed to do right? Let's take a look:

**1) I choose to go to rehab** - not everyone chooses rehab, and many will stubbornly avoid the idea altogether, insisting that they can do it on their own. Most can't. We need help in order to recover. I was fortunate enough to give rehab another chance (I had already been twice before and failed to stay sober).

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**2) I followed up with proper aftercare** - this was where I had failed in the past. Treatment centers had advised for me to go to long term treatment and I refused. When that happened I ended up drinking and using drugs again. Finally, though, I became willing to take their advice and attend long term treatment. This was the best decision I ever made it and it set me up for success in recovery. I don't think I would be clean and sober today had I not gone to long term treatment to get addiction help.

At the time, long term treatment sounded like a death sentence. It was nothing of the sort. It was an awesome opportunity and I highly recommend it. I thought it would be like jail, and that I would lose my freedom if I checked into long term rehab. Instead, I gained back the whole world, and truly became free as they taught me a new way to live.

**3) I shifted from a dependence on group therapy towards a life of holistic growth** - what does that mean? It means that after I did about a year of 12 step meetings (and used them as my primary recovery strategy), I decided to start looking beyond that and exploring a new way to recover.

Instead of going to meetings every day and talking about my struggles in life, I shifted my focus to one of personal growth. I became more goal oriented and started challenging myself to achieve new things. I also focused on learning as a way to grow in recovery.

These 3 things all made a huge difference for me in recovery. I have seen many others fail who might have benefited from these ideas.....

## **Finding Your Own Unique Path in Recovery From Addiction**

It is important to find your own unique path in recovery. What does this mean?

It means that if you simply attempt to follow a recovery program without taking ownership of it and making it into your own then you are setting yourself up for failure. This means that you have to get active in the way you design your own life. If someone tells you to go to 12 step meetings and you simply follow what they tell you then there is

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no long term success in that. You might stay clean and sober for a while but unless you start taking deliberate action in order to push yourself towards growth in recovery then you are not going to stay clean.

Now understand that this can mean a number of things. For example, it might mean that you will make 12 step meetings a big part of your recovery and you might pursue the meetings and the fellowship that comes along with the meetings as an avenue of growth in your life. This is fine if this is your chosen path. I have one friend who has made this his mission in recovery and it is serving him quite well. He sponsors several people and still attends a meeting almost every single day, even after 8 years of sobriety. This is his path and he is living it to the best of his ability, trying to provide addiction help to others. But realize that he chose this path consciously after having had it suggested to him.

In other words, he did it as a suggestion at first, but over time he owned it as his own path of growth. He made it into his own deliberate path of recovery. There are other people who are attempting to work a program of recovery but they are not thinking for themselves or taking action in their lives based on passion or purpose for living. They are like robots who attend meetings and use it as a sick form of group therapy. They dump on meetings and complain and whine about their lives and use it as a sick tool to get some relief in their life. They do this just enough so that they do not end up relapsing. This is no way to work a recovery.

The alternative to this hum-drum existence is to find that in recovery which makes you passionate. Find your purpose. If you can't find it, then start by trying to help others in recovery. If you can do this consistently and make it into a habit then you will probably find your stride in recovery and good things will start happening for you.

## **Look Beyond Group Therapy as Your Total Solution**

Most of traditional recovery is made up of group therapy.

Now those who are heavily involved with the 12 step programs will declare that AA and NA meetings are not group therapy. They distinguish a difference between the meetings and group therapy, saying that in meetings, they

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“share their experience, strength, and hope with each other.” They claim that this makes a 12 step meeting vastly different from group therapy.

In reality, they are not so different. From a broad perspective, 12 step meetings are one kind of group therapy.

Now this is not to say that 12 step meetings are not helpful, or that you should abandon them completely. But for real addiction help in your life, you have to look beyond group therapy and find other means by which you can push yourself to grow as a person.

Consider the fact that many people who start attending 12 step meetings eventually relapse. In fact, if you really look at the numbers, the vast majority of those who attend 12 step meetings will relapse. Even the published numbers from AA's ten year census data shows that long term success rates cannot possibly be better than 5 percent. This is not said to discourage anyone, but merely to point out the limitations of group therapy as a recovery solution. A 12 step fellowship makes an excellent support system for early recovery, but doesn't necessarily provide the best motivation for long term, personal growth in recovery.

I know this from personal experience because I have seen so many people relapse while trying to stick to the 12 step program. I have seen others who have branched out from the strict dogma of 12 step wisdom and found success through other means in their lives. This is not to say that you need to quit going to meetings. What I am saying is that you might want to stop depending on meetings, because that is actually a weakness that is not necessary for you to hold on to in long term recovery.

The freedom that you get from defining your own creative life in recovery is awesome. It is not so much that you are free from 12 step programs, but that you are free to live your life how you have purposefully created it in recovery, regardless of whether or not that includes participation in the fellowship. Seriously, I am not knocking the 12 step programs here. They are powerful and helpful and you should use them and participate if that is your calling. Just realize that there are limitations involved with growing in those programs, especially when you are focusing on long term, holistic growth.

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To create your own life in recovery, look beyond the 12 step solution. Recovery is more than just spiritual. It is holistic.

## **Scary Success Rates in Recovery**

One thing I noticed after I had been clean and sober for a few months in recovery (and could finally start noticing things again!) was that everyone around me was relapsing. Well, not quite everyone, but darn near everyone. I mean it was ridiculous. I could not help but notice that just about everyone who comes into recovery relapses, and quite quickly at that.

Now if you have some close friends in recovery then you still get some hope when they manage to stay clean and sober, but unbelievably (to me anyway), some of them will relapse too! In fact, I was living in long term treatment for the first 20 months of my sobriety, and I could not believe how many people I saw who came into long term treatment with me but ended up relapsing. I would have thought that their chances were much better due to the overwhelming level of support they were getting. It seemed that this was not the case. This points to the idea that success in recovery is more about internal factors and personal motivation than it is about the level of support you have or the exact program you follow to try and stay clean.

So we are bound to hear about how the success rates in recovery are not so great. In fact, to most people, they are downright scary. What to do about it? Here are my suggestions:

**1) Let it intimidate you a bit** - some people would advise the opposite. But I was intimidated by the horrible success rates in early recovery, and here I am still clean and sober at 8 years plus. So I have to recommend a similar path. Give your addiction the respect it deserves and recognize that recovery is a monumental task.

**2) Let the task at hand inspire you** - now that you realize that staying clean and sober is no easy task, rise up to the challenge and use this knowledge to spur you on towards future growth. Understand that in order to make it in recovery, you are going to have to make drastic changes and make real progress in your life. This is exciting!

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**3) Do not use it as an excuse** - never use the numbers as an excuse to give up or to relapse. Many people do stay clean and sober for long periods of time, and there really are no excuses. If you want it bad enough then there is opportunity for you to find support in recovery.

**4) Let it drive you to action** - if you take daily action towards staying clean, you are going to find success in recovery. It is only after we get lazy with our recovery efforts that we become vulnerable to relapse. Let the lousy success rates inspire you to take action every single day. Remember that the only long term enemy in recovery is complacency. To overcome this we must take consistent action in our lives.

The success rates in recovery may be a bit daunting but people do recover and you can be one of them. Just use the negative statistics you hear and turn them into a positive by using the techniques listed above.

You can have recovery if you truly want it....very few people actually do want it though. It is yours for the taking and no lousy success rates have the power to take your sobriety away from you.

## **The Framework for Creative Living: Health, Networking, and Growth**

If we are living the creative life in recovery, what does that look like?

How can we set up our life so as to enhance our chances at staying clean and sober? What is the framework for the creative life in recovery?

### **Traditional recovery frameworks**

With traditional recovery, you might find a framework such as this:

- 1) Daily meetings
- 2) Sponsorship

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3) Stepwork / self discovery / inventory / journal writing / etc.

4) Recovery literature

Or you might find someone else who is using a different sort of framework:

1) One-on-one counseling or therapy sessions

2) Group therapy

3) Drug therapy or maintenance

4) Long term treatment

In each case, the person who is recovering uses a few main strategies as their recovery program. These strategies make up the framework of their recovery program, because it gives them a baseline of actions that they can engage in.

As we progress in recovery, our framework should shift towards something closer to this:

1) Helping others in recovery

2) Caring for our health - in all areas of our life (physical health, emotional balance, spiritually, etc.)

3) Seek personal growth

You will notice the framework gets a bit more broad at this point and that is fine. If you interview a group of people that all have at least 10 years in recovery, you will find a wide variety of recovery strategies. For example, one person might focus their program very heavily on meditation, while another might not meditate at all (but instead, uses daily exercise to accomplish much the same thing).

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Other examples include looking at the different ways that people give back and help others. Some people will be heavily involved in the 12 step fellowships and sponsorship, while others might have other ways of connecting with people in recovery.

The framework you use for recovery is a set of basic guidelines that can point you in the right direction. But we each have to find our own path and make it our own as we learn a new way to live.

## **Reducing Your Dependency on Early Recovery Strategies**

The idea is that we grow and progress in recovery.

If you truly are growing in your recovery, would it not be the case that your approach to living in recovery would change over time?

Think about the typical threat to the following to people in recovery:

**1) Person A has 1 week clean and sober.** *Biggest threat:* saying “screw it” and running out and relapsing immediately. Finding a massive resentment and letting it control them.

**2) Person B has 2 years clean and sober.** *Biggest threat:* becoming stuck in group therapy or meetings as their only means of a solution, so that they are no longer growing personally. They are no longer learning or pushing themselves to learn. Secretly, they think they have recovery “figured out.”

**3) Person C has 10 years clean and sober.** *Biggest threat:* becoming lazy and complacent in their routine. Not challenging themselves enough. Not reaching out to others enough.

Notice that there is a hierarchy of change here. Person C has moved beyond the problems of person B, who has moved beyond the problems of person A. In other words, our immediate threat in recovery is how to not use drugs and alcohol for a day at a time. But we progress and grow and this becomes a bit more automatic for us. Sure, it

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is still a threat, but in order to pick up and relapse at 10 years clean you would have to go through a process. That process involves complacency setting in and your lack of action to fight against it. So the threat *changes* as you go along. It evolves to match your level of recovery.

This is why you have to keep growing continuously. Your disease will always find a way to creep back into your life, regardless of what level of growth, learning, or spirituality you manage to attain. We are always vulnerable to that slide back into relapse. It is always a possibility. The question is: how will the threat manifest itself at each stage of our recovery?

Therefore it makes sense that the strategies and tactics we used at 2 weeks clean **will become less effective** as we grow and progress in recovery. We need to change and evolve if we are to make it in the long run. **Dependency on early recovery strategies becomes a liability** over time, not a strength.

It is **not** that you need to rid yourself of the 12 step recovery program or overcome your dependence on AA meetings so that you can be “greater than” or somehow superior to others. And it is **not** even that you need to reduce your meeting dependency so that you are stronger in your recovery. Instead, you do these things **so that you can live a life of freedom without having to live in constant fear of relapse** (because you missed one to many AA meetings or something).

Once you see that your sobriety is no longer dependent on making AA meetings all the time, you allow yourself the freedom to grow in recovery as you were really meant to—to start exploring life in a deep and profound way. To grow holistically instead of constantly staying stuck in the spiritual growth constantly touted at the meetings.

Someone once told me in a meeting that the solution was spiritual. Then *they proceeded to whine and moan about how they hate their life for the next ten minutes*. It was then that I realized that I could be spending my time differently—perhaps working with recovering addicts directly in some way, or finding other ways to progress in recovery. And so I started to change my life.

If early recovery strategies are holding you back, then trade them in for new strategies. Focus instead on:

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- 1) Working with other addicts and alcoholics
- 2) Pushing yourself to learn new things and grow in new ways
- 3) Caring for yourself and taking positive actions to further your own health and development as a person

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“....whether we are religious  
or atheist, all human beings  
are spiritual by nature, and  
spirituality is the cornerstone  
of our recovery.”

- Abraham Twerski

Part two

Creation

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## **A Recovery Program is Not the Solution - Action is the Solution**

Recovery from drugs and alcohol is all about results. If you stay clean and sober and you are living a fulfilling life then that is great. You have found your calling and whatever program (or lack thereof) that you are working seems to be the right fit for you.

In other words, if you are trying to recover from drug and alcohol addiction, the best thing to do is to do what works for you. This is essentially repeated in traditional recovery programs quite often ("Take what you need and leave the rest," etc.).

Instead of taking a hard line on exactly what needs to be done in order to recover, traditional wisdom says you should explore and find what works best. This is probably because:

- 1) The whole idea of recovery is really quite young and has not really been studied in a professional capacity for more than a hundred years or so.
- 2) We still do not have a complete understanding of why addiction happens or total knowledge of how it exists as a disease of the brain.
- 3) We see evidence of different addicts who are successfully recovering that employ completely different programs of recovery, where certain programs clearly do not work for certain individuals.

In other words, the whole substance abuse/recovery field is actually pretty young, and we still don't completely understand addiction and how it all works. We are still in the process of refining possible solutions, exploring new medications or therapies that can help with addiction, and so on.

Addiction and recovery is not a "solved problem." The jury is still out. If you want to recover for yourself, then you have a responsibility to actively seek your own path of success. The experts in this field cannot produce anything

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significantly higher than, say, a 20 percent success rate (that is a very generous estimate by the way) when it comes to getting people clean and sober.

So if someone introduces you to a recovery program--any program at all--you have to be realistic about it. Recognize that any program for recovery is really just a collection of suggestions. If a recovery program is going to work for you, do you think it is the actual suggestions of the program that produce the results, or do you think that the results rely more heavily on your personal actions?

Just how complicated is a program of recovery, really?

### **It's not what you do, it's how you do it**

Think about what a good recovery program really consists of. We could break it down like this:

- 1) Abstinence from chemicals
- 2) A design for living
- 3) Support and networking (Helping others)
- 4) Personal growth

Really, where is the mystery in that? Sure, it's a lot of stuff. And no, it's not necessarily easy to do. People fail at recovery over and over again. But my point is that there is no great mystery in the program itself. The results are in the action.

## **From Early Recovery to Long Term Sobriety - Making the Transition to Holistic Living**

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Lately my thoughts have focused more and more on the actual transition in recovery—that from early recovery to long term sobriety. There is a shift that occurs when the struggling addict in early recovery is no longer fighting to stay clean; they find a certain peace about themselves and things start clicking for them. Either that, or they relapse. But the idea of transition is real.

Recovery is split into short term and long term recovery. We do certain things in the beginning to stay clean. If we don't change our strategy eventually and make the transition to long term recovery, we relapse. We **have to change** in order to make it over the long haul.

We have to do certain things in early recovery to stay clean. These are different things for everyone, but the principles are the same: we need a strong support system, lots of structure, some need protection from the outside world (such as a treatment center). But these things will not keep you clean 5 years down the road or even 1 year down the road. Those who do not transition to long term, holistic living will inevitably slide back into their old behaviors.

### **The transition itself**

Nobody consciously knows when they are making this leap from short term to long term sobriety. It just happens. You can look back, of course, and see how you grew through the stage.

So how can we know what to do? How can we facilitate the transition? The answer to this is what the creative theory is all about. The answer lies in the 3 basic strategies:

- 1) Caring for self
- 2) Networking with others
- 3) Push for holistic growth

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In particular, the **push for holistic growth** is a critical part of the transition. Using myself as an example, I did not really believe (at the time) that I was “working on my recovery” when I went back to college, started exercising on a regular basis, and quit smoking cigarettes. At the time, I did not think that these things applied to my recovery at all. But looking back, I can see that these things were all part of my push for holistic growth. They were efforts to grow in different areas of my life.

I’m not so sure that you can plan this type of growth out specifically, however. What was important for me was to get past the mindset of “I’m just going to focus on my program and not get distracted with school or career or other things right now.” Most traditional recovery programs **do not encourage holistic growth** so if you focus on them then you’re going to be doing so at the exclusion of other growth opportunities.

I was so afraid of relapse in early recovery that I delayed making this “holistic transition” for several months. **I thought the secret to long term recovery was to keep doing what I did in my first 6 months of sobriety, over and over again for the rest of my life.** But growth involves change. We either move forward in recovery or we slide backwards.

So my suggestion is to look for holistic growth opportunities right from the start. Find ways to branch out and grow or learn outside of the boundaries of “traditional recovery.” This might include things such as fitness, nutrition, meditation, education, the arts, learning new skills, building new relationships, and so on.

The transition occurs when you **grow beyond the narrow focus of your early recovery efforts.**

### **Linear growth versus holistic growth**

When we are working a traditional program of recovery, we tend to have a limited field of vision in that we perceive all possible growth as being linear. Perhaps the 12 step model has helped perpetuate this idea because the 12 steps are obviously ordered and are in sequence.

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But in holistic living, **growth can be expansive and non-linear**. Regardless of what program you are working, most people don't grow at a steady pace in recovery. Most of us flounder around for a while in the beginning, trying to find our footing and just get through the cravings and urges of each day. Later on, when we have been making holistic growth efforts, our growth in recovery can be explosive.

In other words, sometimes we have to **trudge** through a tough time in recovery when we see **little** results from our efforts. The payoff comes eventually when all of our holistic growth efforts start paying off down the road at some point.

### **Complacency is the real enemy**

The only real enemy in long term recovery is complacency. After being clean and sober for a while, we no longer struggle with daily urges or even with more subtle threats to recovery such as resentments or self-pity. Instead, the real challenge in long term recovery is to **keep challenging ourselves to grow**.

Focus on the 3 basic strategies and keep pushing yourself to grow, and complacency will take care of itself.

## **What Got You Clean and Sober Will Not Keep You Clean and Sober**

When we are first starting out in recovery, there are a couple of high impact things that we can do in order to get started out on the right foot. These are action oriented things we can do, such as:

- 1) Go to treatment
- 2) Go to 12 step meetings every day
- 3) Call our sponsor or other recovering addicts
- 4) Study recovery literature or write out step work

And so on. These are the kinds of things that are generally suggested to newcomers in recovery. Why? Because they work. They help people to get clean.

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But what happens after a recovering addict has made it to 3 months clean, to 6 months clean, to 2 years clean....are they supposed to keep doing these same things, over and over again? Are we basically supposed to stay in “beginner mode?”

In my opinion this is not healthy. Now, there are some in recovery who will argue that we should “stick with the basics,” and that it is important for us to keep visiting these same recovery tactics, regardless of how long we have been clean and sober. I disagree with this based on my own personal experience, and also based on what I have observed in others.

The reason for this is because people seem to get stuck in early recovery. They follow the 12 step program and end up using the daily meetings as a form of group therapy (not how Bill W. intended it to be, mind you). Some of these people in recovery get stuck in the same patterns, go to the same meetings over and over again, and basically continue to exist in recovery without making much real growth in their life. This is not the ideal way to live in recovery. If you are just treading water, attempting to stay clean and sober, then what kind of recovery is that? Not a very good one, in my opinion.

Better is to challenge yourself to grow in your recovery and evolve as a spiritual being. What does this mean? It means that instead of dumping your issues and whining in a 12 step meeting every day, you should be spending your energy in more productive ways as you progress in recovery. One way to do this would be to offer addiction help to others in recovery. You might also seek to find new ways to grow outside of the boundaries of traditional recovery. For example, the 12 step program generally focuses on spiritual growth alone. This is a shortsighted viewpoint and to truly recover you need to heal your life in other ways as well, including physically, emotionally, socially, and so on.

To recap, creation is:

- 1) Caring for self
- 2) Networking with others

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3) The push for holistic growth

But of course these are just ideas. In order to recover, you have to live this thing...

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“Living the creative theory is all about action. Just talking about it is nothing. You have to *do* this stuff in order to recover....”

Part three

Living the  
creative theory

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## Recovery and Self Esteem

One of the biggest ideas in the creative theory is that by following the 3 strategies, an addict's self esteem will start to rise.

Why is this important?

Self esteem is critical for maintaining long term sobriety. It is a strong defense against the threat of relapse. The reason is simple: the more you **value** yourself, the less likely you are to jeopardize yourself.

Addicts and alcoholics have a tendency towards self-sabotage. We seem to be hard wired for self destruction. Getting over this tendency requires deliberate effort in recovery. That's where the 3 creative strategies come in. Each one of them boosts your self esteem in some way.

### Caring for self

Caring for your self is a product of self esteem, not necessarily the cause. However, it can still be used as a tool to generate healthy self esteem in recovery. How so?

By faking it. By **having faith in the process of recovery** and taking some action and just starting to take better care of yourself. By doing so you will start a positive feedback loop in which your self esteem will eventually rise.

How do we care for ourselves? In every way possible. Abstinence from chemicals is the baseline and we stop putting drugs and alcohol into our bodies. But we can start making better decisions in other areas of our lives - for example, by **seeking emotional balance**, or by abandoning an unhealthy relationship. As we continue to stay sober, we can seek health in other areas as well, such as through diet and nutrition.

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Our long term approach to caring for ourselves is *holistic*. At first we just want to get off the drugs. In the long run we consider other options towards better health. All part of the growth process. And this process continuously feeds a rise in our self esteem.

## **Personal growth**

Want to feel better about yourself? Accomplish something.

That is the basic idea behind the push for personal growth. There is probably a place out there for affirmations and the power that they have in recovery, but this approach is more objective and it's on the other end of the spectrum. The idea here is about tangible results. Set a goal for yourself and achieve it.

How do we pursue personal growth? Holistically, of course. That means we look at any and all areas of our life. Education, fitness, spirituality, relationships, and so on. Do not fall into the trap of only pursuing growth in one area of your life.

For example, most would do well to start exercising in early recovery, if they are not already in the habit of doing so. The benefits of it can be huge - something that most initially overlook.

The idea is to push yourself to grow. When we push ourselves, this generates real self esteem, because we are setting a goal that challenges us in some way. If we set easy goals that we would have accomplished anyway (such as "go to a meeting today") then this does not really boost our self esteem. We have to *push* ourselves in order to **build something real**.

Affirmations are powerful tools for some people but their ability to produce real self esteem is up for debate. When you push yourself to grow and eventually meet a goal, you increase the value of your "self," and thus real self esteem has been created.

## **Networking with others**

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When we build healthy relationships in recovery, we increase the value of our “self” because we feel good about the positive connections in our life.

In recovery, we help each other to stay clean and sober, especially in the beginning. That’s why networking is so important in early recovery. Others help us to stay clean and we benefit from that. In turn, we help others to stay clean and this benefits us as well because it reinforces our recovery.

Later on, as we progress in recovery, we find ways to reach out and help others - many times these “others” will be in recovery as well. This is a direct boost to our self esteem, because we inherently know the value of helping others to recover. In other words, we know it is helpful because someone once helped us.

So keep the 3 strategies in mind and understand that they all work together to boost self esteem. In all 3 cases, it is not so important that you understand them but **only that you start doing them**. This is because each strategy creates a positive feedback loop which gives rise to greater self esteem. In other words, when we feel better about ourselves, we tend to take better care of ourselves. When we feel good about meeting a goal, we tend to raise the bar for ourselves and pursue an even greater vision. Success breeds success.

## **The Creative Theory of Recovery - How Gratitude Plays a Key Role**

In the creative theory of recovery, gratitude is the mindset needed in order to oversee our progress and move us towards our goals.

In fact, gratitude is so powerful that it could practically ensure our successful recovery all by itself. But we combine this positive attitude and outlook with other processes to make for a truly remarkable recovery experience.

**What is gratitude?**

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Most people have this mixed up a bit. Say they have a car, a job, and a roof over their head. They might remark: “I’m grateful for my job and that I have a place to live!” Fair enough. But what if your house burned down and your company suddenly went out of business? Does that mean you would no longer be grateful?

**Gratitude needs to come from somewhere deeper than that.** It’s about more than just “stuff.” It is an appreciation for existence itself—including both the good and the bad experiences. When you’re grateful, you can see that even the “bad” times and the “bad” experiences benefit you in at least some small way, and that they are actually necessary.

Gratitude is an attitude. You can appreciate even the “bad” things in life if you are willing to find the “good” in them. Notice the quote marks: experiences aren’t really “bad” and “good”, we label them as such based on our preferences. If something happens, it simply *is*, and it is up to us to interpret it and give it meaning.

### **Gratitude and the creative theory of recovery**

So gratitude is a positive mindset that comes from deep within us and gives us an appreciation for all things. Think this helps in creating a new life for ourselves in recovery?

**You bet it does!** Having an “attitude of gratitude” is essential to the creative mindset. There are a few reasons for this:

**1) Gratitude helps you see more opportunities** - when you can appreciate the bad and the good, you’ll find more opportunities for creating powerful stuff in your life. With gratitude, “problems” become “challenges.” Gratitude changes how we see things, which eventually changes how we create things in our life.

**2) Gratitude enhances learning** - when you practice gratitude, you’re always looking for the silver lining in things. Regardless of what it is, you’ll start asking yourself: “What can I learn from this? How can this help me grow?” Everything becomes a learning opportunity due to a positive attitude.

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Think about it: without gratitude, having a negative attitude would **limit your learning ability**. Instead of looking for the lesson, with a negative attitude, you simply chalk everything up to “bad luck” then whine and complain about it. The creative mindset will seek to learn all it can and overcome a negative experience, making sure not to repeat it over and over again without taking away some sort of knowledge.

## **One Key to Creative Recovery is Building Layers of Success**

If you take a look at those who are successful in recovery, a clear trend will emerge: they are successful in several areas of their life. We might even say that “everything is coming together for them.” But how do we get to this point?

### **Recovery starts slow**

In the beginning, it’s all we can do just to stay clean and sober. Everything is an effort. Most of us have to use a brute force approach just to string together a few weeks of sobriety. But doing so can be the first step in a long string of victories for us.

People might say something to the newcomer like: “Just stick with it, things will get better.” This is not just hollow encouragement - things really do get better. As with most anything, there is a certain tipping point when you make it “out of the woods” and things start clicking for you. Someone with established sobriety can look back and realize this - that it was hard in the beginning but they made it through somehow because they stuck it out long enough.

Of course, success with sobriety is just the start. Physical abstinence becomes a platform on which to build the creative life. Greater things await for anyone who is actively engaged in creation.

### **Momentum**

There is a sense of momentum when walking the creative path. This is because we can build on previous successes.

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One example of this might be all of those in recovery who eventually give up smoking cigarettes. This is a progression of their recovery. It is a move towards healthier living, made possible only by their sobriety. If they were still drinking or using drugs, they would almost surely still be smoking as well.

I eventually chose this path for myself and doing so led me in another direction: exercise. I purposefully chose to start exercising to try and replace some of the dopamine that I was missing from the smoking. And so I eventually got into a very healthy routine of regular exercise, which I had never really done before in my life.

Again, this was only made possible by my previous success with quitting smoking. My habit of exercise is another layer of success that was built up on top of previous ones.

### **Layers of success**

This is how success is achieved in recovery - by building in layers. We can't necessarily achieve everything all at once but we can usually make progress in some way.

Your vision for the life you want to create might seem like a fantasy world but you can definitely achieve it if you start slowly and build one layer of it at a time. Sobriety is your foundation. Physical abstinence should be your number one priority. You can start building good things from there.

Success breeds success. It takes a brute force approach to make it through early recovery but after that you can start building on top of your previous efforts. This is how recovery snowballs and it's also why creative recovery is so powerful. You get better at creation with practice.

Celebrate your success in recovery and build on it.

## **Creative Living is Knowledge Applied - Continuous Learning Must Yield Continuous Action**

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Take two people for example: one person studies the Big Book of AA on a regular basis, striving to extract every last bit of knowledge from it like it is their only salvation. The other person reads quickly skims the book, but actually lives the principles in it every day.

Which person do you think has a more successful recovery?

Of course the person who actually **applies** the knowledge is the real winner here, not the Big Book scholar.

It's not that there is anything wrong with studying the Big Book or other recovery texts - just understand that doing so doesn't actually keep anyone sober or even lead to any sort of knowledge of how to go about living sober. At best, what you read about recovery can only guide you in a general direction. So much of your recovery is going to depend on your own action.

Basically, you have to find your own path.

### **Finding your path**

The reason you have to find your own path in recovery is because we are all so different. People talk about a program of recovery and they want for it to be very objective and spelled out in very specific terms that anyone can apply in the same way. It doesn't work this way.

Our lives and our personalities and our situations can be so different that we each have to take recovery principles and strategies and use what works. In fact, they have a saying around traditional recovery tables: "Take what works and leave the rest." Good advice, and this saying rings true because everyone who has found a successful life in recovery can look back at their progression and realize that they did just that: they discarded a whole bunch of advice that just didn't apply to them.

Traditional recovery is filled with suggestions, tactics, and strategies for how to stay clean and sober. It's sort of a mish-mash of recovery advice that just gets dumped on the newcomer as a big lump, and it's up to the newcomer to sort it all out. They can't possibly apply all of the advice because there is simply too much of it.

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So whether you want the task or not, you really have no choice but to find your own path in recovery. What you thought was a task of learning is really a task of doing. You must apply the new knowledge and decipher what works for you. This requires action. Once you start living the creative life in recovery you can start refining your strategy and discarding the stuff that doesn't seem to be helping you.

### **A lifetime of learning**

It's not so much about learning as it is about action. Or rather, you won't really be learning things on a deep level unless you get out there and apply the knowledge to see what actually works for you.

For example, consider the idea of "networking." This is one of the key strategies in recovery - that we need other people to help us on our journey. Traditional recovery might seem to suggest meetings as the networking solution. But there are other strategies that someone might follow in order to connect with others. For example:

- Attending weekend NA and AA conventions
- Forming friendships with others in recovery
- Attending group therapy on a regular basis
- Sponsoring several newcomers in recovery
- Working with recovering addicts in a professional setting
- Volunteering with others in recovery

The point here is that reading about these ideas does very little, but if someone was to try one of these methods and found that it really helped them in their recovery, then that is applied knowledge that is actually useful. They had to get out there and try something and see if it clicked for them or not. The learning came through the application; through doing. This is how we live in recovery and it's also how we can create a new life with purpose. Start trying new things and explore different options and strategies.

Traditional recovery attempts to confine learning into a very small box and that is not necessarily the best path for everyone to be on. Sometimes you have to find your own path in recovery and to do so you're going to have to

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create something through action. The creative theory is about applying knowledge. It's about action. Learn what you can as you go along and continuously refine your approach. Thus you become more effective in your life and in your recovery efforts.

## **What's Next? What to do After Achieving the Creative Life in Recovery**

If you have been living the creative theory of recovery and practicing the 3 strategies then eventually you will get to a place in your recovery where you have found some level of stability. Does this mean you are cured? Of course not, as the threat of relapse is always there, and the next drinking binge is always just one drink away.

But if you are living the creative theory then you will have some insurance against the threat of relapse. You may not be bullet-proof, but at least you will be fighting off complacency with plenty of growth and purposeful action in your life. As long as you make a habit out of the following strategies you will eventually transition into long term sobriety:

- 1) Focus on health and well being** - from a holistic standpoint. You care for yourself physically, as well as to strive for emotional balance, having healthy relationships, and so on. Your actions and decisions are guided towards healthier living.
- 2) Focus on networking and support** - It's the people that matter in recovery. If we connect with other recovering addicts on a daily basis then our own recovery will be that much stronger.
- 3) Focus on personal growth** - again, from a holistic standpoint. It is not enough to grow spiritually in the creative theory. We go beyond that and push ourselves to grow in many areas of our lives. This is essentially creation in action, when we push ourselves to grow and to meet a goal. This is the endorphin rush that can replace your addiction. Notice that the other 2 strategies are really just supporting frameworks for personal growth. This is where it's at. Push yourself to be a better person in recovery and never stop doing so.

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So let's say that you do these things and fall into a routine with them and thus transition into long term recovery....what next? Let's take a look at some possible answers:

1) The strategies themselves are **open ended**, they are not destinations that you can arrive at. Therefore, you never "arrive" in recovery, you never "graduate," there is no ultimate cure. This is consistent with traditional recovery programs as well. You can always push yourself to do more, to grow in a new direction, to learn something different, and so on. Personal growth has no limit. Therefore, "what's next" is always going to be "more growth."

2) Shift towards **purposeful creation** - what do I mean by "purposeful?" Well, all creation has purpose, but usually in early recovery we are focusing on ourselves. What I have discovered in living the creative theory is that the focus eventually shifts towards creating for the purpose of reaching others. In traditional recovery terms, this would mean that some people would start sponsoring newcomers, or they might volunteer to take a 12 step meeting into a jail or institution. The idea is to use creation to help others or to reach out to others in some way.

This is especially powerful as a long term strategy for creative recovery. **Make a habit out of helping others in recovery** and you will strengthen your own sobriety immeasurably.

But even after you've "arrived" at this point, there is always another level to pursue....never let complacency take hold and make you think you've got this thing beat! Always return to the 3 strategies and continue to push yourself to work on them.....

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“If we help one person to recover from addiction, who have we helped? All of the addicts that **they** will reach out to eventually....”

Part four

Helping others  
with addiction

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## **Do You Suspect Someone of Being a Closet Alcoholic?**

Do you have a friend or loved one who you think might be a closet alcoholic? Maybe you've noticed some suspicious behavior, or maybe they are just drinking more than usual in front of you, but still hiding their consumption from the rest of the world. At any rate, you have become suspicious for some reason, and you want to look into it further.

What signs are there that you can look for to confirm this?

- 1) For one thing, look for the obvious first: heavy drinking.** If the person is drinking large amounts of alcohol, and you are noticing it more and more frequently, then this is your biggest clue right there.
- 2) Calling in sick to work or avoiding normal obligations.** If the person is ducking their responsibilities more and more often, such as missing appointments or calling in sick to work on a regular basis, then this is another sign that they might be a closet alcoholic.
- 3) Ducking out early from commitments** - this is a sign that someone wants to or needs to go start drinking. If they just don't stick around like they used to, perhaps this is the reason for it? If they are hiding their drinking then they need to get away from people so they can isolate more and more often.
- 4) Isolation.** They are a closet drinker so they need to be alone as much as possible. So if you notice someone isolating a lot then this can be another sign.
- 5) Tendency to lie about their drinking** - if someone continues to lie to you about their drinking, then this is another strong indicator that there is a real problem there.

Basically, the closet drinker is in denial, and they are lying both to themselves and to the rest of the world. They generally believe that they do not have a real problem, because they have been able to basically keep it **MOSTLY** under control for so long. They have not really been "found out" and exposed as the full fledged alcoholic that they

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really are, so their denial is much stronger than it would be in many other drinkers. They are still trying to hold things together and prove to themselves and to the rest of the world that they are not really a true alcoholic. Well, this doesn't really fly if you know what to look for and you pick up on all the clues.

## **How to Help an Alcoholic**

Part of the problem in how to help an alcoholic has to do with denial. Alcoholism is one of the only diseases that makes us believe that we do not have a disease. Therefore it can be difficult to convince someone that their drinking is out of control.

It is one thing to wonder about this if we are considering strangers, but it is another thing entirely when the person in question is a close friend or family member. If we believe that they have a serious addiction to alcohol, is there a way that we can help them?

Is it possible to confront them and help them break through their denial? Let's take a look.

### **The price of confrontation**

Confrontation has a price, and it is usually resentment. People don't like it when we get in their face and suggest that they have serious problem with their drinking. In some cases—depending on how we handle it—the confrontation can seem to make things worse. The alcoholic in question might resent the “accusations” and draw further into isolation, only to fuel their anger with yet more drinking.

So confronting someone is a calculated risk. How can we know when the time is right to speak up?

One strategy is to wait for opportunities to do so. For example, if the person in question is just coming off a particularly nasty bender, or if they are just getting out of jail due to a drunk driving charge, they might be more receptive to the idea of change at these moments. Instead of trying to “kick them while they are down,” the idea is to offer help or encourage change when they are most receptive to it.

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If everything is going fairly smoothly in their life (for the moment) then they are not likely to entertain the idea of massive change (quitting drinking or asking for help with it).

So it might help to use a bit of timing when you try to approach someone like this.

### **But what if they are out of control?**

If they are reaching a breaking point in their addiction then you should probably just force the issue and confront them on it. This is especially true if you are genuinely concerned that they are an immediate threat to themselves or others.

If they are truly losing control then you need to do your part and try to help them or convince them to seek help, even in spite of the risk. They might take offense and resent you for it but if they are in real danger then you should probably confront them anyway.

### **What about a formal intervention?**

A formal intervention is where you organize all of the person's friends and family members and get them all together so that you can confront the alcoholic and try to convince them to go to treatment.

Now just like an informal confrontation, this is another calculated risk on your part. My opinion on the formal intervention is that it is generally not worth doing, even if you are desperate to see some change. This is because outcomes with formal interventions are usually pretty lousy and are almost entirely dependent on the alcoholic, not on the family. In other words, if someone is ready to make a change, then the formal intervention is not necessary.

And, if someone is not ready to change, then no intervention effort in the world is going to make any bit of difference. It really is dependent on the alcoholic, not on the efforts to change them or convince them of anything.

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Can you really help someone with alcohol addiction? The answer is essentially: “not really.” Yes you can offer help, and you can be supportive and you can make suggestions, but ultimately you cannot help the alcoholic in any sort of direct way.

Now this does not mean that you should not try to help them, nor does it mean that there is never a time and a place for a formal intervention. Just understand that there is no magic wand you can wave, and that at best you are probably planting a seed in their mind for future change.

Now obviously if you organized a large intervention, the ideal situation is if you convinced them to go to treatment and they agreed and then lived happily ever after and never drank again. What I am saying is that this is very remote outcome, and any path to lasting sobriety is bound to be a bit more complicated and involved than this.

So you can still organize an intervention if you think the person would respond well to this sort of thing, but understand that it is not a magic bullet and you should not pin all of your hopes on it.

### **So what can you do to help?**

There are still things that you can do to help, but they are probably not as direct as you would like. The problem is that the direct routes to helping are largely ineffective. What you can do is to change your own behavior so as not to enable the person or further their addiction. In other words, you can do your part and then leave the changing up to them. Here are some ways to change your own behavior so as to help the struggling alcoholic:

- 1) Do not enable them
- 2) Do not rescue them
- 3) Practice detachment
- 4) Set healthy limits

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## **Helping an Alcoholic Who is in a Treatment Center**

How can we best help an alcoholic who is in a treatment center?

So you finally convinced your friend or loved one to get some help and go to treatment. Now that they have finally taken the plunge and are in treatment, what can you do to help them? How should you behave in order to best support them?

**First, realize that nothing you say or do is going to *directly* affect a person's sobriety**

They're either going to make it or they're just not ready yet. You and your actions are not going to be the deciding factor in another person's sobriety. The decision to get sober is bigger than that. It takes a level of conviction such that outside circumstances will have little effect on the outcome.

So don't feel like you have to walk on eggshells or make everything just perfect for the recovering alcoholic who is in treatment. If it is truly the case that your actions can trigger relapse, then that person is not ready to get sober yet anyway. But in spite of this idea that you can not be responsible for their possible relapse, you can still be supportive and even helpful. The following are some ways you can do this.

**Participate in any friends and family programs that the treatment center might offer**

Most treatment centers offer a program for friends and family to attend, in order to learn more about addiction and alcoholism, how to have healthy behavior around the alcoholic, and just be able to show support for the recovering alcoholic. Such programs are usually group sessions in the treatment center for a few hours each week. If you want to show support and genuinely help the recovering alcoholic, consider attending this group.

If no such group is available at the treatment center, consider attending a local Al-Anon meeting instead. The message is going to be the same and you will be able to learn how you can best help the recovering alcoholic and be supportive without enabling them. Which brings us to our next point:

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### **Be supportive, but keep healthy boundaries**

It's important to keep healthy boundaries when dealing with the recovering alcoholic, otherwise you could enable them to relapse when you thought you were actually helping them. Maintain boundaries even while they are in treatment. Don't bend over backwards for them or allow them to manipulate you in any way. Do not "help" the person on their terms....only help them on your terms.

### **Encourage them to stay for the duration and cooperate**

A very large percentage of people in treatment centers never successfully complete their short stay there. For a variety of reasons, many people simply walk out halfway through, and many will go pick up a drink immediately. Others will sometimes sabotage their recovery by acting out and end up being discharged early from treatment.

These outcomes are nearly always bad in terms of sobriety. Finishing treatment does not guarantee success, but leaving early is almost always a recipe for disaster. Encourage the person to stay for the duration and to be open-minded with the ideas being presented to them.

### **Encourage them to follow through with any aftercare recommendations**

Most treatment centers will recommend some sort of follow-up plan for when the alcoholic leaves treatment. Depending on the situation, this plan might include group therapy, or meetings, or even long term treatment. Whatever the recommendation is, encourage the recovering alcoholic to follow through with it.

The therapists and counselors who work at the treatment center are giving their professional opinion about what would work best. This is similar to listening to a doctor who recommends that a diabetic take insulin or a cancer patient receive chemotherapy. Following the aftercare recommendations will greatly increase the chance for long term sobriety.

Almost no one ever regrets following an aftercare recommendation. But a lot of people do regret ignoring them. Use this information to your advantage and listen to what the experts recommend.

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**Thank you for reading and good luck with your recovery!**