

The Serenity Prayer and the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous*

1 We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

2 Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3 Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

4 Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5 Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6 Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7 Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8 Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

9 Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10 Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

11 Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12 Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of the steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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Five Common Challenges in Early Recovery



Everyone who attempts to stop using substances runs into situations that make it difficult to maintain abstinence. Listed below are five of the most common situations that are encountered during the first few weeks of treatment. Next to these problems are some suggested alternatives for handling these situations.

Challenges



Friends and associates

who use: You want to continue associations with old friends or friends who use.



Anger, irritability:

Small events can create feelings of anger that seem to preoccupy your thoughts and can lead to relapse.



Substances in the home:

You have decided to stop using, but others in your house may still be using.

New Approaches

- Try to make new friends at 12-Step or mutual-help meetings.
 - Participate in new activities or hobbies that will increase your chances of meeting abstinent people.
 - Plan activities with abstinent friends or family members.
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- Remind yourself that recovery involves a healing of brain chemistry. Strong, unpredictable emotions are a natural part of recovery.
 - Engage in exercise.
 - Talk to a counselor or a supportive friend.
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- Get rid of all drugs and alcohol.
 - Ask others to refrain from using and drinking at home.
 - If you continue to have a problem, think about moving out for a while.

Five Common Challenges in Early Recovery

Challenges

New Approaches



Boredom, loneliness:

Stopping substance use often means that activities you did for fun and the people with whom you did them must be avoided.

- Put new activities in your schedule.
- Go back to activities you enjoyed before your addiction took over.
- Develop new friends at 12-Step or mutual-help meetings.



Special occasions:

Parties, dinners, business meetings, and holidays without substance use can be difficult.

- Have a plan for answering questions about not using substances.
- Start your own abstinent celebrations and traditions.
- Have your own transportation to and from events.
- Leave if you get uncomfortable or start feeling deprived.

Are some of these issues likely to be problems for you in the next few weeks? Which ones?

How will you handle them?



Have you been able to stop using alcohol completely? At about 6 weeks into the recovery process, many people return to alcohol use. Has your addicted brain played with the idea? These are some of the most common arguments against stopping the use of alcohol and answers to the arguments.

I came here to stop using speed, not to stop drinking. Part of stopping methamphetamine use is stopping all substance use, including alcohol use.

I've had drinks and not used, so it doesn't make any difference. Drinking over time greatly increases the risk of relapse. A single drink does not necessarily cause relapse any more than a single cigarette causes lung cancer. However, with continued drinking, the risks of relapse greatly increase.

Drinking actually helps. When I have a craving, a drink calms me down, and the craving goes away. Alcohol interferes with the brain's chemical healing process. Continued alcohol use eventually intensifies cravings, even if one drink seems to reduce cravings.

I'm not an alcoholic, so why do I need to stop drinking? If you're not an alcoholic, you should have no problem stopping alcohol use. If you can't stop, maybe alcohol is more of a problem than you realize.

I'm never going to use drugs again, but I'm not sure I'll never drink again. Make a 6-month commitment to total abstinence. Give yourself the chance to make a decision about alcohol with a drug-free brain. If you reject alcohol abstinence because "forever" scares you, then you're justifying drinking now and risking relapse to substance use.

Has your addicted brain presented you with other justifications? If so, what are they?

How are you planning to handle alcohol use in the future?

Habitual substance use changes the way people think, how they feel, and how they behave. How do these changes affect the recovery process?

Thoughts

Thoughts happen in the rational part of the brain. They are like pictures on the TV screen of the mind. Thoughts can be controlled. As you become aware of your thoughts, you can learn to change channels in your brain. Learning to turn off thoughts of substance use is a very important part of the recovery process. It is not easy to become aware of your thinking and to learn to control the process. With practice it gets easier.

Emotions

Emotions are feelings. Happiness, sadness, anger, and fear are some basic emotions. Feelings are the mind's response to things that happen to you. Feelings cannot be controlled; they are neither good nor bad. It is important to be aware of your feelings. Talking to family members, friends, or a counselor can help you recognize how you feel. People normally feel a range of emotions. Drugs can change your emotions by changing the way your brain works. During recovery, emotions are often still mixed up. Sometimes you feel irritated for no reason or great even though nothing wonderful has happened. You cannot control or choose your feelings, but you can control what you do about them.

Behavior

What you do is behavior. Work is behavior. Play is behavior. Going to treatment is behavior, and substance use is behavior. Behavior can result from an emotion, from a thought, or from a combination of both. Repeated use of a substance changes your thoughts and pushes your emotions toward substance use. This powerful, automatic process has to be brought back under control for recovery to occur. Structuring time, attending 12-Step or mutual-help meetings, and engaging in new activities are all ways of regaining control. The goal in recovery is to learn to combine your thinking and feeling self and behave in ways that are best for you and your life.

Addictive Behavior

People who abuse substances often feel that their lives are out of control. Maintaining control becomes harder and harder the longer they have been abusing substances. People do desperate things to continue to appear normal. These desperate behaviors are called addictive behaviors—behaviors related to substance use. Sometimes these addictive behaviors occur only when people are using or moving toward using. Recognize when you begin to engage in these behaviors. That's when you know to start fighting extra hard to move away from relapse.

Which of these behaviors do you think are related to your drug or alcohol use?

- Lying**
- Stealing**
- Being irresponsible (for example, not meeting family or work commitments)**
- Being unreliable (for example, being late for appointments, breaking promises)**
- Being careless about health and grooming (for example, wearing "using" clothes, avoiding exercise, eating poorly, having a messy appearance)**
- Getting sloppy in housekeeping**
- Behaving impulsively (without thinking)**
- Behaving compulsively (for example, too much eating, working, sex)**
- Changing work habits (for example, working more, less, not at all, new job, change in hours)**
- Losing interest in things (for example, recreational activities, family life)**
- Isolating (staying by yourself much of the time)**
- Missing or being late for treatment**
- Using other drugs or alcohol**
- Stopping prescribed medication (for example, disulfiram, naltrexone)**