

## Relapse Intervention/Warning Signs

People in dual recovery learn to identify the *warning signs* that may lead to a lapse in their abstinence and take positive steps to stay sober. At the same time, they follow a practical plan that addresses their emotional and mental health challenges in a positive and constructive way. The quicker they learn to spot these signs and signals, the sooner they can take positive action for their own well-being and dual recovery.

Many factors can lead to a relapse or distressing experiences with our mental health. Distressing experiences can leave us more vulnerable to relapsing on substances. Substance use can lead to difficulty with taking care of our mental health. Alcohol and drugs can also change the effects of psychiatric medications with unpredictable results. Maintaining abstinence allows us the freedom to grow as individuals and manage our no-fault illnesses in the healthiest possible way.

In dual recovery, relapse is the act of taking that first drink or drug after being deliberately sober. It helps though to view relapse as a process that begins well in advanced of that act. People who have relapsed can usually point back to certain things that they thought and did long before they actually drank or used. They may have become complacent in their program of recovery in some way or refused to ask for help when they needed it. Each person's relapse factors are unique to them and their personal plan for recovery.

Relapse is usually caused by a combination of factors. Some possible factors and warning signs might be:

- Stopping medications on one's own or against the advice of medical professionals
- Hanging around old drinking haunts and drug using friends; slippery places
- Isolating, not attending meetings, not using the telephone for support
- Keeping alcohol, drugs, and paraphernalia around the house for any reason
- Obsessive thinking about using drugs or drinking
- Not following ones treatment plan; quitting therapy, skipping doctors' appointments, etc.
- Feeling overconfident, that you no longer need support
- Relationship difficulties; ongoing serious conflicts, a spouse who still uses
- Setting unrealistic goals, perfectionism, being too hard on ourselves
- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns, personal hygiene, or energy levels
- Feeling overwhelmed, confused, stressed out
- Constant boredom, irritability, lack of routine and structure in life
- Sudden changes in our mental health
- Dwelling on resentments and past hurts, anger, unresolved conflicts
- Avoidance; refusing to deal with personal issues and other problems of daily living
- Engaging in obsessive behaviors; workaholism, gambling, sexual excess, acting out, etc.
- Major life changes; loss, grief, trauma, painful emotions, winning the lottery
- Ignoring relapse warning signs

Almost everyone in recovery has times when compelling thoughts of drinking or using drugs

resurface. In early recovery, drinking or drugging dreams are not uncommon. It helps to remind ourselves that the reality of drinking and using has caused many problems in our lives. That no matter how bad things get, the benefits of staying abstinent will far outweigh any short term relief that might be found in drugs or alcohol. Recovery takes time. Eventually the cravings, relapse dreams, and uncertainties of early recovery fade. When we are committed to dual recovery we slowly but surely develop a new confidence in our new way of life without drugs and alcohol.

Staying sober and taking care of one's own mental health constructively is an ongoing process. Abstinence and dealing positively with a dual diagnosis go hand in hand. DRA members build a personal inventory of recovery tools that help them meet these goals by staying involved in the process of dual recovery. An individual is in dual recovery when they are actively following a program that focuses on the recovery needs for both their challenges with substance use and their mental health. People in dual recovery make sure to use some of their recovery tools each and every day. Their personal recovery tool kit serves as the best protection against a relapse.

By identifying things that put us at risk for relapse and using the various recovery tools on an ongoing basis, we try to prevent a relapse before it happens. We can periodically review our relapse prevention plans with our doctors, treatment professionals and sponsors and modify them as needed.

By becoming familiar with what upsets us and our warning signs, utilizing the various recovery tools, and having a practical plan of action, we greatly minimize the tendency to lapse back into our substance use. If and when lapses do happen, we do not judge or blame-- we are not bad people. We seek progress, not perfection. We simply learn what we can from the situation and move on with our program of dual recovery. Sharing our relapse experience with our sponsor, group, and helping professionals is an important way to figure out what went wrong. Our experience may also help others in recovery.

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## Relapse Action Plan

No matter how hard you work a program of dual recovery, there's always a chance that you will return to substance use and/or have distressing experiences with your mental health. Having a plan of action thought out and written down ahead of time to help cope with these situations can be extremely beneficial. Below are several example forms that may help you identify resources and create your own action plans. It's good to be prepared for emergencies ahead of time.

Unexpected cravings happen to just about every person recovering from substance use. They can be brought up by something seen on TV or in a magazine, a smell or sound that you might associate with drinking or using, a particular feeling or mood, and sometimes they just seem to come out of nowhere. Sometimes they can be so powerful that you almost feel the taste in your mouth or swear you smell marijuana. Nine times out of ten these sudden urges hit when we 'are' in a position to act on them. No one is around--no one is watching. It is very important to have a plan for these times. In the first months of recovery our most natural inclination will probably be to satisfy our craving; will power and good intentions are not always enough. We need to take an alternative course of action. To sit and wrestle with the cravings is an unbearable situation for a person in recovery. Instead, we have learned that immediately calling another recovering person is *very* helpful. Getting yourself to a meeting or recovery club can be a lifesaver. Other times, going for a walk or vigorous exercise does the trick. We can reach out to our supports for assistance and strength. Over time these cravings diminish in intensity, however, people who have achieved long-term abstinence have learned to always take them seriously.

### Action plan for when cravings arise

Five people I can call the minute I get a craving or urge to drink.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Five things I can do to get my mind off of using or drinking.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Though lapses in our abstinence aren't desired, all need not be lost if and when they occur. While it's painful, we can learn from our experiences in hopes to not repeat them. It is best to get right back into recovery and regain our abstinence as soon as possible.-If we are prepared for the possibility of a lapse ahead of time, it is more likely that we can keep it from becoming a full blown relapse.

Action plan if I relapse

These are some warning signs and relapse factors to watch out for:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

If I should relapse I need to tell these people:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

I need to do these things to make sure it doesn't happen again:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

At times, distressing experiences with our mental health can impact our ability to make sound choices for recovery. This can happen despite our best efforts and all the progress we've made in dual recovery. Sometimes our job is just to weather the storm in the most constructive way we can, keeping in mind that these are no-fault illnesses. Some members have found that having a plan of action in place before challenges arise can be a great comfort and powerful recovery tool.

They discuss a plan of action ahead of time with professional helpers, their sponsor, family, and friends. Such a plan may make the difference between a manageable challenge and a challenge that disrupts life.

If my mental health becomes difficult to cope with

These are some preceding warning signs:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

If I should experience this, I need to tell these people:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

I need to do these things to cope:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

If I have a psychiatric emergency:

I would like to see Doctor \_\_\_\_\_

I authorize \_\_\_\_\_ to take care of

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

# Substance Use Resources

## Help Finding Resources

### **Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline**

1-800-327-5050

<https://helplinema.org/>

A statewide helpline for people looking for treatment and support for substance misuse and addiction.

### **COMPASS Helpline at NAMI Massachusetts**

1-800-370-9085

<https://namimass.org/nami-mass-compass-helpline/>

A statewide helpline for people looking for mental health treatment and support.

### **Addiction & Mental Health Recovery Peer Support Resource Guide**

(from the Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership)

<https://www.masspartnership.com/pdf/PeerSupportResourceGuide.pdf>

## Support Groups for Family Members and Other Supporters

### **Adult Children of Alcoholics - Massachusetts Intergroup**

<https://www.acamassintergroup.org/>

A recovery-based fellowship for adult children of people who misused alcohol.

### **Allies in Recovery**

<https://alliesinrecovery.net/>

An online platform offering information, coaching, and support for family members of people who misuse substances.

### **Families Anonymous**

<https://www.familiesanonymous.org/>

A recovery-based fellowship for family members and friends of people who misuse substances or deal with addictions.

### **Gam-Anon**

<https://www.gam-anon.org/>

A recovery-based fellowship for family members and friends of people who engage in problem gambling.

### **Learn to Cope**

<https://www.learn2cope.org/>

A support network that offers education, resources, and support for family members and friends of people who misuse opiates or other drugs.

### **Massachusetts Al-Anon & Alateen**

<https://ma-al-anon-alateen.org/>

A recovery-based fellowship for family members and friends of people who misuse alcohol.

### **Nar-Anon**

<https://www.nar-anon.org/>

A recovery-based fellowship for family members and friends of people who misuse narcotics.

## **Support Groups for People Dealing with Substance Misuse, Addiction, or who are in Recovery**

### **Dual Recovery Anonymous**

<https://www.massclubs.org/dual-recovery-meetings>

A recovery-based fellowships for people who misuse substances, deal with addiction, or are in recovery who also have a mental health condition or symptoms.

### **In The Rooms**

<https://www.intherooms.com/>

Daily online support groups for people who misuse substances, deal with addiction, or are in recovery.

### **LifeRing Secular Recovery**

<https://www.lifering.org/>

A secular practice for people who misuse substances, deal with addiction, or are in recovery.

### **Recovery Dharma Online**

<https://recoverydharma.online/>

A Buddhism-based practice for people who misuse substances, deal with addiction, or are in recovery.

### **Reddit Recovery**

<https://www.reddit.com/r/REDDITORSINRECOVERY/>

A subreddit for people who misuse substances, deal with addiction, or are in recovery.

### **Refuge Recovery**

<https://refugerecovery.org/>

A Buddhism-based practice for people who misuse substances, deal with addiction, or are in recovery.

### **SMART Recovery**

<https://www.smartrecovery.org/>

A mutual support community for people who misuse substances, deal with addiction, or are in recovery.

### **WeConnect**

<https://www.weconnectrecovery.com/free-online-support-meetings>

Daily online support groups for people who misuse substances, deal with addiction, or are in recovery.

### **12-Step Fellowships**

Recovery-based fellowships for people who misuse substances, deal with addiction, or are in recovery.

- Alcoholics Anonymous - Cape Cod Intergroup  
<https://capecodaa.net/wordpress/>
- Alcoholics Anonymous - Central Massachusetts Intergroup  
<http://www.aaworcester.org/>



- Alcoholics Anonymous - Eastern Massachusetts Intergroup  
<https://aaboston.org/>
- Alcoholics Anonymous - Western Intergroup  
<https://westernmassaa.org/>
- Bettor's Anonymous  
<http://www.bettors-anonymous.org/>
- Crystal Meth Anonymous  
<https://www.crystalmeth.org/>
- Debtors Anonymous New England  
<https://sites.google.com/site/danewenglandorg/home>
- Emotions Anonymous  
<https://emotionsanonymous.org/>
- Marijuana Anonymous  
<http://www.marijuana-anonymous.org/>
- Massachusetts Area of Cocaine Anonymous  
<https://www.caofma.org/>
- New England Co-Dependents Anonymous Alliance  
<https://www.necoda.org/>
- New England Intergroup of Gamblers Anonymous  
<http://newenglandga.com/>
- New England Region of Narcotics Anonymous  
<https://nera.org/>
- Nicotine Anonymous  
<https://www.nicotine-anonymous.org/>
- Overeaters Anonymous  
<https://oa.org/>
- Sex & Love Addicts New England Intergroup  
<https://slaanei.org/>

## Wellness Planning Resources

### Wellness Recovery Action Plan

<https://mentalhealthrecovery.com/>

Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) is a wellness process that anyone can use to get well, stay well, and make their life the way they want it to be.

- **The Wellness Guide to Overcoming Isolation During COVID-19**  
<https://www.wrapandrecoverybooks.com/store/wellness-guide-for-isolation-during-covid-19-being-connected-staying-connected-and-choosing-connection--details.html>
- **Wellness During the COVID-19 Pandemic**  
<https://mentalhealthrecovery.com/info-center/wellness-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

### Madness & Oppression: Paths to Personal Transformation & Collective Liberation (a Mad Maps Guide)

<https://fireweedcollective.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/MadnessAndOppressionGuide.pdf>

Mad Maps are documents that we create for ourselves as reminders of what is important to us, our personal signs of struggle, and our strategies for self-determined well-being.