Common Problems and Issues in Recovery

**Resistance to Change**

Deep down, many of us find that there are many parts of ourselves and our addictive lifestyles we really don’t want to let go of. Here are some ways others have successfully tackled this problem:

- **“I want to want to”**: If we can’t honestly say we want to change something, at least we can often say we wished we wanted to change it. That’s a good start—give yourself credit for effort and keep working on it.

- **Accept the feelings, but control the actions**: Sometimes we can’t leave a character trait behind as long as we’re trying to get rid of it. We can control the action, and that may be all for a while. And that’s okay—but once we accept it with the hope that it will leave us one day but the view that we’re okay where we’re at for today, it often does start changing.

- **Find replacement activities**: Often it isn’t the chemical itself we crave, but something else that happened when we consumed it. Find new ways to get that something else. (Think about the class on Lifestyle Changes: Alternatives to Substance Abuse.) Figure out what the payoff was, and find another way to get it without such a high price tag.

- **Set small goals and reward yourself**: This is a good way to build new habits. It takes about three weeks of practice for most people to get a new habit formed; give yourself little rewards several times during that period for sticking to it. Give yourself time!

- **Hang around with people who are the way you want to be**: You’ll learn things from them, and some of their attitudes and habits may rub off on you.

**Anger, Fear, and Hopelessness/Depression**

One of the reasons people use and drink is to block negative emotions, and when people first quit it can seem as if they’re spinning out of control. To get through this phase, try some of these approaches:

- **Talk about the feelings**: With a trusted friend or at a good meeting, if you talk about it you’ll understand it better and feel more peaceful, and chances are someone else will say “me, too!” and add some insights that may help you even further.

- **Take care of yourself**: If you eat a healthy diet, get enough sleep, and get regular exercise in a way you enjoy, all of these emotions will diminish and be more manageable.

- **Give yourself at least one good laugh a day**: Hearty laughter changes your brain chemistry the same way as getting some hard exercise, like some prescription drugs—it releases natural antidepressants and painkillers, with no side effects. You might think about collecting some comedy videos or books, and turn to them when you’re having a bad day.

- **Look out for distorted thinking**: Think out loud and get feedback from a friend, or listen to yourself, and figure out what beliefs are behind your negative feelings. Often we are trying to live up to some ridiculous rules and expectations we haven’t really thought about. When we get them into consciousness and take a close look at them, a lot of negative feelings may go away.

- **Get some counseling**: See a therapist. He or she may be able to help you get past the negative feelings.

- **Give yourself some time**: Remember that this is a normal, but temporary, part of recovery, and it won’t last as long as it seems. You’ve been emotionally numb, and now things are coming back to life. Think
about what happens when your leg “goes to sleep,” then gets its circulation back—it feels crazy, but only for a short time.

Relationships with People
Some of these people (significant others, family, friends, supervisors, and coworkers) may be angry, hurt, and suspicious because of our past actions, or they may like us better sick and undermine our recovery, or they may just not understand and cause us problems for that reason. Often they are trying to decide whether to stay in relationships with us, and when they see us start changing it’s both hopeful and frightening for them. They may also have their own drug and alcohol problems, which make our recovery seem threatening to them. These are some time-tested solutions to these relationship problems:

• **Listen to them and let them vent:** Give them a chance to tell you how they feel about whatever may have happened between you and them. Don’t argue, explain, or defend yourself: just listen closely, then tell them what you believe you heard them say. They will either agree, disagree and correct you, or stay mad and keep blasting you. Keep listening and reflecting back what you hear, and they will run out of steam, usually sooner than you expect, and start noticing the changes in you.

• **Help them understand:** Explain to them what you are doing, as far as you feel safe trusting them with that information—but if they knew about your addiction, you might as well tell them about your recovery. Give them the chance to read some literature about what you are doing. Invite them to attend open meetings with you.

• **If they seem interested, encourage them—gently, in a non-pushy way—to get involved in their own recovery programs** such as Al-Anon, AlaTeen, CoDependents Anonymous, and so forth.

• **Make your amends, and give them time:** As you change, most people will eventually come around to seeing, accepting, and trusting the new you. Some may not, but that’s beyond your control.

• **Take care of yourself:** Don’t put yourself in situations where you are being used or abused, or where your recovery is being undermined. Take action to avoid, change, or leave those situations.

Work, Money, and Time Management Problems
These problems can seem overwhelming, especially when they are requiring you to make major changes in your habits. It can be very difficult to adjust, especially when your body is still getting used to being without the drug, your schedule may be busier than it’s ever been, and you’re trying to juggle work with meetings and other activities. Here are some ways to make this easier:

• **Make your routine consistent:** Give yourself a regular schedule—structure lowers your stress level by reducing the number of little decisions you have to make. If you always get up at the same time, you don’t have to decide when to get up; if you always go to the same meeting, you don’t have to decide what to do at that time; etc. Also, in a short time the new routine will become as strong a set of habits as the old one was.

• **Get help from others:** It helps to have other people both encouraging us and depending on us—get a workout partner, join a car pool, seek the advice of someone wise you trust, get others (sponsor and program friends) to help you by pointing it out to you if they see you straying from your plan and when they see you doing well at it.

• **Reward yourself for success:** Give yourself little rewards often as you score small victories. Mention them at meetings, take yourself for a walk, treat yourself to a movie and dinner if you can—and don’t wait to do it until you accomplish something great, do it after some of the baby steps you take. And as
always, give yourself some time to adjust.

- **Get organized:** Get and use a notebook-type organizer, a calendar, a filing system: schedule regular times for things like paying the bills, balancing the checkbook, and so on. Make yourself checklists for things you have to do. Set aside time at the beginning or end of the day to go over what you need to do or what you’ve done that day.

**Legal Problems**

It is best to tackle legal problems head on and get them over with (and we often have no choice, because they tackle us). As long as these are hanging over our heads, we have a hard time relaxing and being comfortable with ourselves, and our stress level stays higher than if they were dealt with. If you have legal problems, talk with your lawyer and do what you have to do to get them resolved and over and done with, if you can. Sometimes your willingness to face them and deal with your problems will make a strong favorable impression on people and show them you’re changing, too.

**Health Problems**

Hopefully once your system is drug-free these will clear up quickly. If not, go see a doctor and take care of yourself. If your physical health is not good, it will make the rest of your recovery more difficult. It’s important to eat a healthy diet and get enough rest and exercise, and it’s a good idea to have at least one good hard laugh every day if you can.

**CONCLUSION**

1. There are common problems, experienced by many people getting clean and sober, which can trigger relapses and cause other problems if not faced and dealt with.
2. Because so many people have faced the same problems, there are many solutions gained from the experience of recovering people over decades.