

## Appendix C

### The Relapse Process

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Relapse or a return to addictive or problem behaviors is seldom an isolated event. Usually, the process has been unfolding for quite some time with warning signs that either the addict has chosen to ignore, deny, or is unconsciously aware of. That is why a relapse plan and support system for implementing this plan is so crucial for relapse prevention.

Even though the plan may not prevent relapse in every instance, addicts, if willing, can learn invaluable lessons from their relapse process that will positively affect future recovery.

An individual can be in relapse well before actually engaging in the addictive behavior. Warning signs can include:

- **Attitude changes:** Negative attitude changes, such as no longer caring about recovery or giving up often are early relapse warning cues.
- **Changes in thinking:** Giving up recovery thinking, even temporarily, can be dangerous for the addicted person. Believing one is cured, healed, or deserving of a reward, especially if it's even remotely related to one's addiction, can signal a downhill slide. Addicts can get into grandiose thinking very easily and subject themselves to dangerous or self-defeating situations that undermine their newly formed recovery skills. Best advice: Don't go there!
- **Changes in behavior:** Returning to old places associated with addiction, being around individuals associated with addiction, changing attendance to recovery meetings or stopping therapy without solid justification, an increase in stress-related symptoms, i.e., increasing smoking, caffeine, food intake, restless sleep, can all be red flags indicating impending relapse vulnerability.
- **Changes in mood:** Strong emotional fluctuations such as depression, anxiety, anger, boredom, even excitement or euphoria can signal a relapse in process.

A change in one or more of these areas can signal a "relapse chain" in process. While any single change may be overlooked as not indicating anything other than a bad day, oftentimes a "chain of events" can be seen when the addict is forced to look deeper at any warning sign. Understanding this personal chain of events is crucial for the addict to eventually recover and stabilize with less relapse. Some questions that need to be posed are:

When did you relapse?

How did you react when you relapsed?

What were the warning signs that relapse was coming?

Attitude changes

Thinking changes

Behavior changes

Mood/emotional changes

How long did you engage in the relapse activity?

Who was with you during the relapse?

Where did your relapse occur?

What did you learn from your relapse experience?

How do you need to change or modify your written relapse plan to incorporate this new awareness into your relapse warning signs?

What will you do differently in the future when you see these relapse warning signs starting to occur?

### **Developing a Relapse Prevention Plan**

1. Make written note of relapse warning signs that your journey of awareness has identified as potential obstacles, potholes, snares, tangents, detours, temptations that distract you from your primary focus of recovery. Take into consideration:

- your personal relapse experiences
- the relapse experiences and warning signs of other addicts
- information/books on relapse and recovery

2. Develop a personal *written* Relapse Prevention Plan that outlines your personal relapse warning signs and several provisions for coping with each warning sign.

3. Discuss your written Relapse Prevention Plan with another person, either a sponsor, friend, or family member. Reality test your plan with them to make sure it is sound and practical for your personal needs.

4. Implement your action plan. **Talk is cheap.** This may be the most difficult step to undertake. Oftentimes addicts, as well as human beings without addictions, can formulate beautiful written plans, but fail to follow through with them. Discuss with your sponsor all of the reasons why you may fail to follow through on this plan *before* you implement it. Many people do not actually want to change. Doing what is familiar, though treacherous and self-sabotaging, is easier than change. Know this from the beginning, so that when it gets hard, you don't fall victim to asking, "Why is this happening when I'm trying so hard." It will be hard. It's a given.

"We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Rom. 5:3-4).

## Sample Scenario

Terry and Sue Sullivan have been attending your church for six years. Both of them have been Christians for about seventeen years, having been saved as teenagers at a youth rally. They have been married for fifteen years. They have two adopted children, a girl thirteen years old and a boy ten. Terry is a software salesman who frequently travels out of town to call on corporate customers.

Terry has a large expense account, and does most of his out-of-town socializing with customers in upscale bars and restaurants. He is a social drinker who never has more than two drinks in any social situation. A customer from the midwest took Terry to a Western bar known as "Hooters," where he was introduced to topless waitresses and looser sexual attitudes than he was accustomed to in his hometown of Gresham, Oregon.

Sue has always felt they enjoyed a healthy sexual relationship, but lately she has become increasingly anxious and suspicious of Terry's behavior. Since meeting with this customer at Hooters, Terry has become increasingly preoccupied with sex, and has begun asking her to participate in more sexually "adventurous" acts than they had engaged in previously. He seems to be online more often, but quickly switches screens when she walks into the den where he is working.

After their daughter found a "Penthouse" magazine under the seat of Terry's company car, Sue confronted him. Terry denies having any sexual affairs with other women, but does let it slip that he has looked at "Penthouse" off and on since he was a teenager.

Terry and Sue come to you for guidance. What addictions, if any, may be present, and what would a Relapse Prevention Plan look like for Terry?

## Sample Relapse Prevention Plan for Terry

Kathy Rodriguez, Psy.D.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree that I have a serious sexual addiction. I know that without the supernatural help of God and the Holy Spirit, together with my own commitment to responsible accountability to a sound relapse prevention plan, I will remain in bondage to this addiction. I also understand that my sustained recovery will take more than just my desire to get better. I know there are specific behavioral, mood/emotional, thinking, or attitude indicators that can alert me to when I am slipping toward relapse. I have identified these factors below. I have identified a sponsor who is at least two years ahead of me in recovery, and will contact my sponsor at least once per week to review my relapse prevention efforts. I will also attend weekly accountability meetings with For Men Only at East Hill Church, and agree to let the leader of my group know immediately if anything that goes on within a group meeting triggers relapse thinking within me. To ignore these triggers and indicators puts me at risk to relapse.

Here are some suggested elements of a relapse plan in the four critical areas of Terry's life:

### Behavioral

I commit to staying out of topless bars, restaurant bars, and other drinking establishments where alcoholic beverages are sold because I recognize that alcohol lowers my inhibitions, and my thinking and attitude are vulnerable to slipping into old behaviors.

If clients request me to go to these establishments, I will decline even if it means losing their business.

If I relapse in this area, I will talk about it with my sponsor within 48 hours.

If I relapse in this area, I will seek a job transfer that does not require out-of-town travel.

I agree to entertain clients, even when I'm out of town, in upscale hotel restaurants only.

I will not buy pornographic magazines, nor will I look at them.

I will stay out of sexual or pornographic websites on the Internet.

I will destroy all magazines or downloaded pictures or media of a pornographic nature.

If I relapse with any computer related pornographic activity, I will cancel the Internet.

I will not view any R-rated or X-rated movies.

I will destroy any old telephone numbers of previous female contacts.

I agree to abstain from asking my wife for out-of-the-ordinary sexual acts or favors.

I further agree to give my wife control of our sexual relationship so that she initiates our sexual encounters rather than me

I will apologize and ask my daughter's forgiveness for having pornography.

I agree to talk with my sponsor and my accountability group within 48 hours of struggling with *any* of the behaviors mentioned above.

I agree to attend weekly Marriage Enrichment meetings with my wife.

I further agree to reading books with my wife twice a week on how we can enhance our intimacy.

I will take my wife out once a week for a "date," either sharing a fun activity or just talking about us and how we're doing.

I will take my wife out of town for a weekend away without our children two times within the next six months.

I will be *totally* honest with my wife and others. There will be **no** secret areas of present behavior.

### **Mood/Emotional**

I will keep a journal and make **daily** entries concerning my feelings and moods.

I agree to contact my sponsor and/or accountability group if I experience feelings of depression, loneliness, vulnerability, invincibility, despair, abandonment, rejection, self-deprivation, or low self esteem for more than 48 hours.

I will listen to the feedback of others in my accountability group and use their relapse experiences to change or modify my own written relapse plan.

I will accept and take into consideration feedback I receive from my sponsor or accountability group and use it to change my old thinking patterns.

### **Thinking**

I will self-monitor my thoughts, and if I discover preoccupations with sexual fantasy, I agree to discuss these with my sponsor that same day.

I agree to challenge my thinking to bring it more in line with how God sees me.

I will read *Pure Desire* and *Telling Yourself the Truth* and discuss them with my sponsor.

I will attend the Shame/Grace class at East Hill once I have ten months of recovery without relapse.

### **Attitude**

I will guard my heart and my mind by spending time with God and in His Word daily.

I will write out daily applications to the scripture passages I am reading.

I will focus on the provision, gifts, and blessing God has given me instead of distracting myself with what others have.

If I begin to feel invulnerable, invincible or cured, I will talk to my sponsor about my changing attitude the same day I become aware of it.

I will heed others' feedback about attitude change they see in me, and make changes accordingly.

I will pray daily with my wife for my family's well-being.

I will review this Relapse Plan at least once a week, adding any new trigger areas as I become aware of them.

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SIGNATURE & DATE

## Appendix B

### A Covenant To Contend

#### The Courageous Fight For Healthy Sexuality

There is a battle going on within me. As much as it pains me to admit it, the battlefield is my sexuality. I realize that my very life depends on the outcome of this battle, and not my life only, but also the lives of those I love and care for. I now choose to participate in the battle for Godly character and integrity, not only for my soul but also for my family, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, and, above all else, my God.

I am beginning to understand I cannot win this battle myself. I am coming to see the wisdom of the scripture, "we are members one of another." Therefore, I surrender to His wisdom, turn to the leadership of the church, and submit myself to the process of renewing my mind.

#### **Things I Can Do:**

- Attend small group weekly.
- Write out my definition of sexual purity and share with my small group.
- Pay close attention to: what I look at; what I listen to; what I set my mind on.
- Take responsibility for my thoughts and actions.
- Verbally describe my feelings.
- Make contact with a group member(s) between small groups meetings.

#### **I Can Accept That:**

- Healing is a miraculous process over time.
- Healing requires feeling the pain and learning from it.
- I am a day or hour away from the same old habit.
- A lapse does not stop the healing process and will have consequences.
- I have become skilled at lying to others and myself.
- I do not live in isolation; my choices affect others.
- My secrecy keeps me in bondage to sin.

#### **I Will Commit To:**

- A willingness to change – and following through.
- **Total confidentiality!** I discuss only *my* experiences outside the group.
- Rigorous honesty with God, my small group and myself.
- Building my knowledge base (books, tapes, videos, seminars).
- Reading scripture and praying.
- A biblical standard of sexual purity in my life.
- A goal of 90 consecutive days of sexual purity.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

And witnessed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Note: This page may be photocopied as needed.