

Addiction and Recovery: Plan Your Vacation, Not Your Relapse

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

When you face the loss of your usual structure during vacations or business trips, thoughts of relapse can resurface, even in stable, long-term recovery. These thoughts can include ideas like:

- No one will know if I drink.
- It's nobody's business but my own.
- This is a one-time-only event.
- It won't hurt anybody.
- I work hard; I deserve it.
- No one can blame me if I accidentally take an alcoholic beverage someone gives me.

These justifications rest on misconceptions about addiction and recovery, which can be dangerous. They assume:

Control Over Use: The belief that you can stop after one drink or use is flawed. Addiction involves a loss of control. The illusion of control is a common form of distorted thinking in addiction, and pursuing that illusion leads to continued use despite negative consequences.

Short-Term Relapse: The notion that a short-term relapse won't re-establish the addiction cycle is unrealistic. A single slip can trigger cravings, increasing the likelihood of continued use and sustained relapse. Negative consequences may not be immediate but can accumulate, making it hard to return to recovery.

Secrecy: The idea that "no one will know" is a form of addictive thinking. Even if you manage to hide it, you will know, and carrying this secret undermines the honesty and openness vital to recovery.

Personal Recovery: Believing that your recovery is nobody's business but your own ignores the support network of loved ones, friends, colleagues, and others invested in your recovery. Their support is crucial, and your recovery affects them too.

Reward for Use: Thinking that using substances is a reward for good behavior is backward. Recovery is the reward for hard work in healthily managing your emotions and life. Substance use as a reward is a negative consequence of not appropriately monitoring your recovery thinking and management.

Excuses: Blaming others or making excuses for relapse is a temporary fix. You are responsible for your recovery and the choices you make. Family and loved ones can often see through excuses, understanding the difference between your words and actions.

To combat relapse thinking, remind yourself of the truths about addiction and recovery whenever these justifications arise. When planning a vacation or business trip, have a great time while remembering that you can enjoy yourself sober. Maintaining recovery is crucial, even in situations

Instead of allowing your mind to wander and entertain thoughts about how you can get away with old non-recovery behavior, use this time to extend your skills and strengthen your most important relationships, such as with your spouse. One effective way to do this is using "The Honey Jar," a couples communication exercise. This collection of carefully constructed sentence stems can help foster conversation, positive feelings, connection, and devoted attention to your partner. By redirecting your energy towards building a stronger, healthier relationship, you can use your vacation for relaxation and as an opportunity to grow personally and relationally.

with reduced structure and accountability. Consider attending meetings while away to support your recovery journey.

Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2010 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary concepts and language, clarity and accuracy.

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