

## **The Tools of Recovery**

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Recovery is action-based. It's an **active** process of changing one's old ideas, attitudes, and behaviors. Although it's possible to gain insight through talking to your psychotherapist, it's also possible to gain insight through taking action. These insights often have longer-lasting effects as they are grounded in personal experience. In recovery, action comes in the form of **tools**. These tools help gain sobriety and deepen recovery. Below is a list of tools to help aid you in your recovery.

### **Using the Phone**

Because addiction (all sin for that matter) thrives in isolation, it is essential to learn how to use the phone. Get numbers and call them. There's a recovery saying "Dial them, don't file them." That means use the numbers you get. You don't have to worry about having a long conversation. The point is to connect with other people by sharing a little bit about your current experience and listening to them do the same. Pain shared is pain lessened. By staying connected, we gain invaluable perspective on our lives and mitigate the possibility of relapse.

### **Gratitude List**

A gratitude list is the perfect antidote to feelings of self-pity and other negative feeling states. Take out a piece of paper and write about what you have to be grateful for in your life. There are two types of gratitude lists. In one you describe general aspects of your life that you are grateful for such as being alive, having your health, or having a job. You can use this tool at any time during the day. The other type of gratitude list generally happens at night and involves reflecting on the moments of your day that you appreciated—moments in which you learned something or were moved by. We are all experts at focusing on what's wrong. Gratitude lists help achieve a more balanced perspective on life.

### **Making Meetings**

Meeting makers make it. Attendance at 12-Step Meetings is a proven way to combat ALL hurts, hangups and habits. 12-Step meetings provide a critical opportunity to begin to work on your intimacy skills and learn valuable recovery tools in the process. It is there where you will find people who are struggling with the same problem. It is there where you learn to come out of isolation and connect with others. It is there where you develop a *personal* understanding of the 12 Steps and how they can help you achieve lasting freedom.

### **Service**

There's an old recovery saying: "You can't keep what you have unless you give it away." We are often crippled by total self-centeredness. Service is an effective way of thinking less of oneself in the service of something greater. There are innumerable ways of doing service, whether it is helping to set up or tear down a meeting, taking a service commitment, or sponsoring another person in recovery. It is also an effective way of developing connections with others. Friendships that last a lifetime have been forged in the process of doing service.

## **Writing**

People caught up in destructive behaviors are impulsive. They act without putting much thought into the consequences of their actions. Writing, however, is a form of deliberate self-reflection. That's why it's absolutely crucial to develop a habit of writing. The Step writing process is an invaluable way of cutting to the core of who you are, what you want to discard, and who you want to be. Journaling is a way of organizing unclear thoughts and feelings so that one can develop more clarity about one's life. In general writing is an opportunity for you to sort through the confusion, get to know yourself on a deeper level, and live according to the values that are important to you.

## **Prayer**

Prayer is a way of staying in touch with your Higher Power. Prayer can take many forms such as writing, playing in nature, meditating, talking and listening to others, or simply asking for help from your Higher Power. The essence of prayer is communicating to someone or something other than you.

## **Exercise**

Regular exercise can help all of us replace old, destructive neural pathways with new constructive neural pathways that offer plenty of 'feel good' benefits. Exercise releases neurotransmitters such as endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine that create the foundation for better moods. Endorphins get their name from 'endogenous morphine'. Serotonin helps regulate your mood, sleep patterns, and sexual appetite. And dopamine plays a role in movement, emotional response, and ability to experience pleasure and pain.

## **HALT**

HALT stands for hungry, angry, lonely, tired. By the time many of us seek help for our problem, we have completely lost touch with our bodies' signals. As a result, life can suddenly seem pretty unmanageable. But sometimes, there's no complicated explanation necessary. Eat when you're hungry. Breathe when you feel angry. Talk to someone when you're lonely. And sleep when you're tired.

## **Three-second Rule**

The three-second rule is a way to curtail unwanted behavior. One way to think about it is in terms of awareness, acceptance, and action. In the first second, you become aware that you are considering an action. In the next second, you accept the fact that you have the disease of \_\_\_\_\_ and cannot engage in this type of behavior. In the third second, you take an action like looking away, checking a scripture card, or saying a prayer.

## **Bookending**

All sin flourishes in the absence of accountability. This is why bookending is such a critical tool in achieving and maintaining sobriety. Bookending involves contacting another person to inform them of an action you plan on taking and then calling that person afterward. The reason that it works so well is because you have made yourself accountable to someone else. Breaking promises made to oneself is easy. Breaking promises made to another person is more difficult.

## **Sponsorship**

Before recovery we have been operating without guidance for too long. Because of it, we have damaged ourselves and others. The purpose of a sponsor is to help guide us through the steps and provide guidance as they navigate early recovery and beyond. A sponsor is generally someone with a year or more of sobriety, has experience working the steps, and seems relatively happy. Having a sponsor requires a certain dose of humility or openness to being teachable—attributes that are indispensable to the recovery.

## **The Twelve Steps**

The heart and soul of Twelve Step programs is the Twelve Steps. The Steps were developed through the countless experiences of early members of A.A. struggling to get sober. They discovered that if the principles behind the steps were integrated into an alcoholic's life, he or she could put down drinking and find a new way to live. By going through The Steps in order with a Sponsor (usually through writing), we develop a conscious understanding of each Step and how it applies to us. We learn to integrate principles like honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, humility, and forgiveness into our daily lives. The Steps are cyclical, meaning they are never completed, only reworked. Each time The Steps are worked through, we gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and an enhanced perspective on life.

## **Slogans**

In the process of recovery none of us are overflowing with clear, rational thoughts. Slogans give us fresh ideas to hold onto and practice during the difficult challenges of getting and staying sober. Here are some examples: Act as If, Analysis is Paralysis, Don't Just Do Something—Sit There, HOW it Works= Honest, Open-mindedness, and Willingness, Easy Does It, First Things First, How Important is It?, 7 Days Without a Meeting Makes One Weak, Keep an Open Mind, Keep it Simple, Let Go and Let God, Listen and Learn, Live and Let Live, One Day at a Time, Progress, Not Perfection, This Too Shall Pass, Today I Won't Should All Over Myself, GOD= Good Orderly Direction,

## **Playing the Tape**

In the process of temptation we sometimes will romanticize how good acting out will feel, but fail to consider the harmful consequences that will occur as a result of our actions. We tell ourselves: "I just need a little relief" or "It will be different this time." *Playing the tape* means following your thinking, actions, and feelings all the way through. Don't just stop the tape on how good it's going to feel. Imagine and reflect on how you will feel afterward. Play the tape all the way through. What are the likely consequences? Will it really be any different this time? Who will get hurt? How does this actually help my situation? If you play the tape all the way through and are honest with yourself, you'll discover that there's no such thing as a free lunch. There are *always* consequences.