

PREVENTING RELAPSE TO RISKY BEHAVIOR: RECOVERY AS A JOURNEY

Skills to Be Learned

- **Creating a Road Map for the Journey of Recovery**
- **Learning Relapse Prevention Skills**
- **Identifying Early Warning Signs**
- **Understanding Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions**

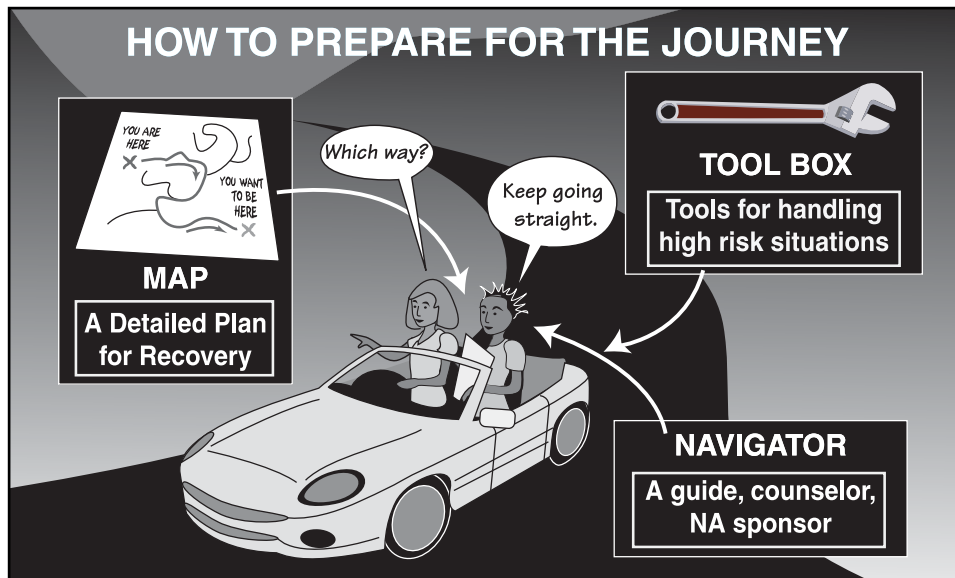
Recovery is a journey. You have taken the very first step in your journey of recovery by entering treatment and having the intention to live a healthy lifestyle. You may even believe that this is sufficient. It isn't. It is just the first step in a long series of steps.



When drug addicted individuals enter treatment, their goal seems very clear—abstinence—and the way to achieve this goal also seems clear. They often say: “I’ve just made up my mind that I’m not going to use again.” Indeed, the road to recovery is usually paved with very good intentions. Good intentions are certainly a place to start, but they are not sufficient to prepare you for what lies ahead along the road to recovery. This road may not be quite as straightforward and simple to travel as you first expected. In this chapter, we are going to describe some of the tools and skills you will need for your own personal journey of recovery.

Preparing for the Journey

Imagine you are planning a trip across the country by car. Let’s consider what you will need to do to prepare for the journey.



1) Map. Before setting out on a long journey you need to get a good road map, one that is up-to-date and easy to read. Have you seen the detailed maps that the automobile clubs will prepare for you if you tell them where you want to go? These maps provide pages of very detailed instructions with the journey broken down into small manageable segments. They also show the location of rest stops, and provide emergency tips and telephone numbers. The purpose of these detailed maps is to make the journey safer and easier and to prevent you from getting lost or delayed.

Similarly, for a journey of recovery, you'll need to create a detailed map or plan for exactly how you will remain abstinent and healthy, otherwise you are likely to get sidetracked along the way. This map or plan should be very detailed, and broken down into small manageable segments. It should include step-by-step instructions for how to reach your destination. It should also include ways to keep you focused on your destination of recovery as well as ways to have fun along the way. You should also plan how you are going to manage stress, and what you are going to do in case of an emergency—which is any situation that places you at risk for relapse.

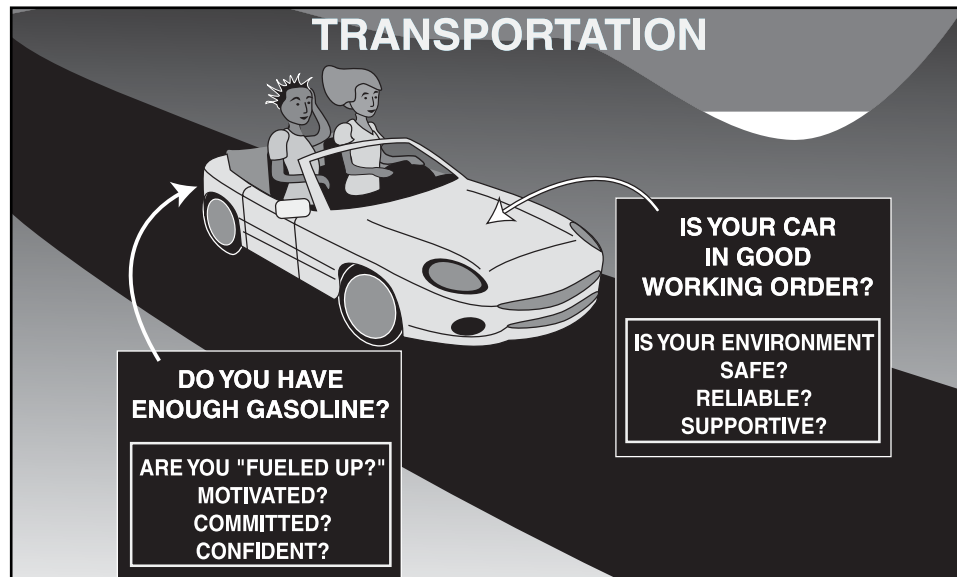
2) Toolbox. When preparing for a long trip, you also need to put together a toolbox containing an assortment of tools. When a car breaks down, different tools are needed for different problems. You can't fix a flat tire with a flashlight. A flashlight is certainly a good tool to have in your toolbox, but it is not the correct tool for repairing a flat tire. A good toolbox will include a variety of tools. You will also need to know how to use these tools in each situation.

Similarly, you'll need different tools and skills for coping with different situations that place you at risk for relapse along your journey of recovery. In one situation, you may need to know how to avoid a particular person who places you at risk. In another situation, you may need the communication skills to confront this person, and another time you may need the skill to calm and center yourself in the presence of this person. You will need to know what tool to use in a particular situation and you will need to have the skill to use that tool successfully.

3) Navigator. When you go on a long car journey, you may also want to invite someone to accompany you who can keep you company and help you navigate.

On your recovery journey, you will need to choose your navigator very carefully. Your navigator is your guide, and this person must be familiar with the recovery route, otherwise he or she is likely to lead you down the wrong path and you may never reach your destination. So choose your travel companions wisely.

4) Reliable transportation. When taking a trip, you also need a safe and reliable means of transportation.

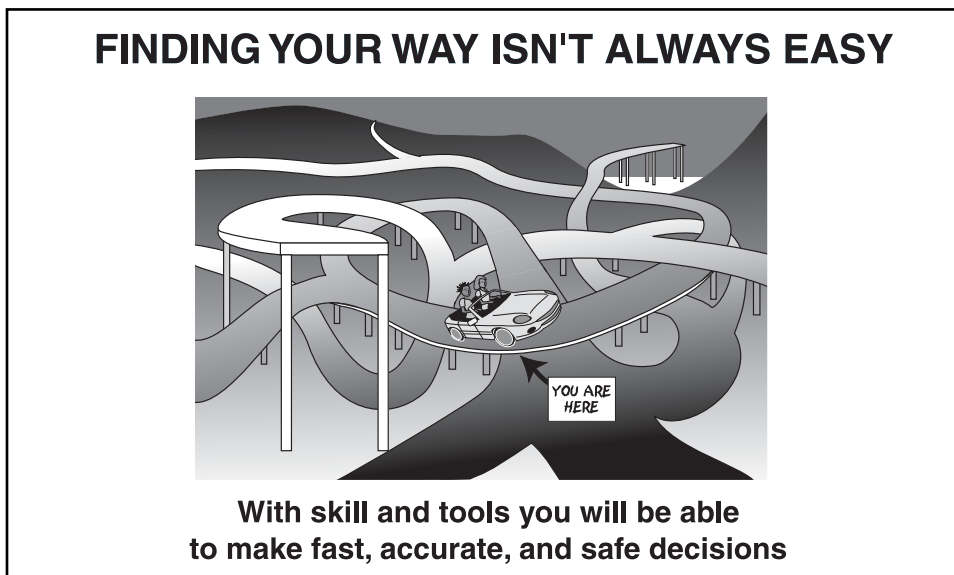


Is your transportation safe and reliable? Your transportation for your journey of recovery isn't a car, it's your environment. Your environment is what is all around you, such as a treatment program and the people in it, your home, your neighborhood, your friends and family. If your environment isn't safe, reliable, and supportive, it will be very difficult to reach your destination—abstinence and a new, healthier lifestyle. Some people who are

beginning their journey of recovery choose to be in a residential treatment environment because they need to feel isolated from their usual environment, which may have been harmful to their health. Other people choose to begin in an outpatient treatment setting, which means that they have to cope with many environments at once. For example, during the time that you are in a substance abuse treatment program, you are in an environment that is safe, reliable, and supportive of your recovery. However, every time you leave the program, you have to face many different environments, some of which may not be supportive of your recovery. This would be a bit like beginning a journey in a reliable and comfortable rental car, then having to hitchhike for a while through the desert without any water, then finding a bicycle to ride, then hopping on a freight train. You need to make sure that each and every form of transportation that you use to get you to your destination is safe, reliable, and supportive of your recovery. It isn't enough that you are safe and supported in treatment. You also need to create for yourself a safe, reliable, and supportive environment outside of your treatment program.

Is your fuel tank full? Even if you have a safe and reliable means of transportation, without fuel, you aren't going anywhere. You need to "gas up" before you leave and make sure you don't run out of gas along the road. The gas, or fuel, in your journey of recovery is your own motivation and commitment to changing your life together with the confidence that you can do it. Without this you won't get far in recovery.

So, are you now ready to begin the journey? You have your map, your toolbox, your navigator, and safe, reliable transportation, you're gassed up, and off you go. You've covered all your bases, and it's clear sailing from here, right? Wrong!

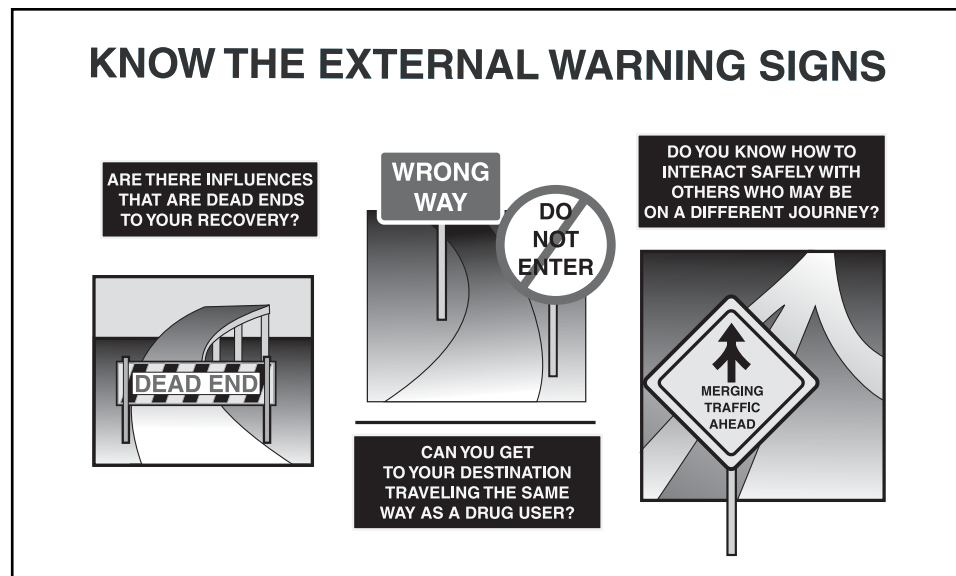


As you can see, the journey isn't quite that straightforward. You may be gassed up, your transportation or environment may be safe and reliable, but there is still the road itself to consider. The road to recovery may have twists and turns that were not shown on the map. You could get lost before you know it. So you will also need skills to help you make quick, accurate, and safe decisions that will keep you on the right road.

Let's consider some of the skills needed to begin the journey.

1. One set of skills is being able to identify where you went wrong so that you don't get lost again. This is very important. On your journey of recovery, if you don't learn by your mistakes, you are going to keep repeating them.
2. Another set of skills you'll need is being very well versed in the rules of the road and knowing the meaning of road signs and warnings. Knowing the rules of the road keeps you and other travelers safe. Knowing the meaning of road signs and warnings will help you to identify and navigate around situations that may place you in danger. Similarly, on your journey of recovery, you need to know how to keep yourself and others safe, and how to identify and cope with situations that can place you and others at risk. Many of these potentially high risk situations are not as clear as warning signs along a highway, but your life may depend upon being able to recognize them just the same.

External warning signs—some examples:



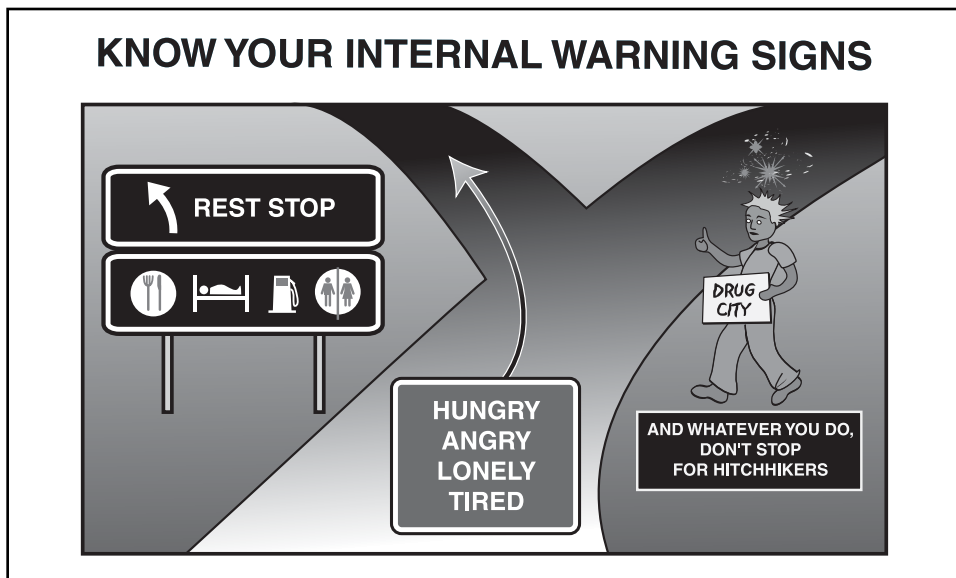
Dead End Ahead: When you are on a long journey, you need to be able to recognize the sign for dead-end roads. Just like roads, some people and some environments can be dead-ends along your journey of recovery. You need to be able to recognize whether the **people**, **places**, and **things** around you are really getting you where you want to go.

No Entry—One Way Only: Addiction is a one-way road to poor health and poor quality of life. So, if you think you can get to your destination of recovery by traveling through drug-dealing neighborhoods (or by continuing to act like an “addict”), prepare yourself for a major head-on collision.

Merging traffic ahead: In a treatment environment, you are traveling with others with a similar destination. However, each time you leave your treatment program, or any safe environment, you have to be prepared to meet and interact with people whose recovery goals may be different from your own. You need to know when this is likely to happen, and know how to cope with it skillfully, in a way that does not put you or others at risk.

Internal warnings:

Accidents can also occur due to the internal state of the driver.



Rest-stop ahead: If you are on the road and you get hungry or tired, you not only need to be able to recognize the signals from your body, you also need to be able to interpret road signs for rest-stops so that you can get whatever your body needs safely.

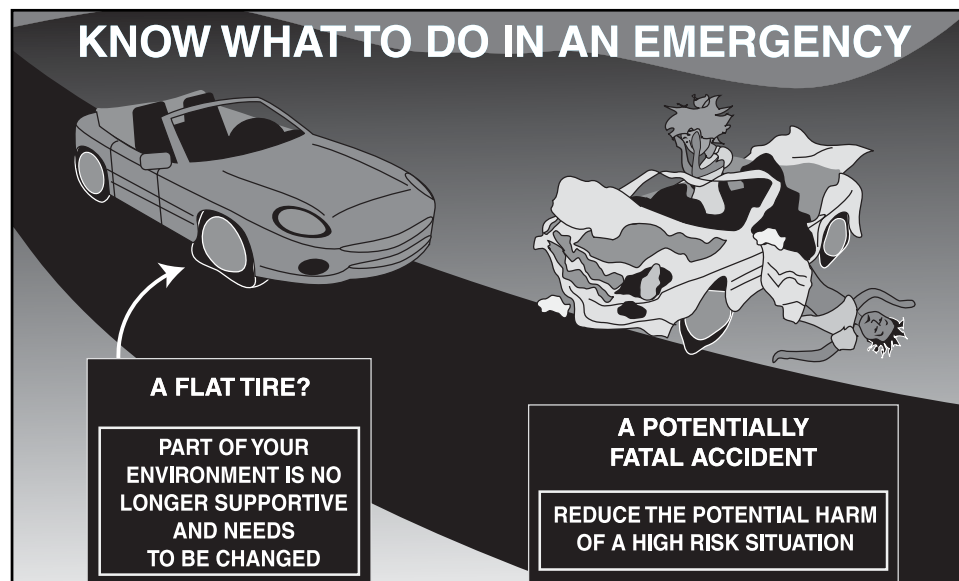
This is also true in recovery. Relapse is not only caused by things outside yourself, such as people, places, and things that tend to detour you, but also

by your own internal states, such as feeling depressed or anxious, or even feeling happy and wanting to celebrate. In fact, a high proportion of relapses occur in response to internal states, not external triggers. It is therefore essential that you know how to identify your own high risk internal states and how to recognize those activities that will allow you to meet your needs safely.

In NA meetings you are told to remember an important word—**HALT**. **HALT** stands for **H**ungry, **A**ngry, **L**onely, **T**ired. Each one of these is an internal warning sign for relapse that should make you **HALT**—or **stop** immediately and consider how you are going to respond to your body’s signals in a safe and healthy way. Each of these internal states can result in craving or urges to use drugs or to engage in other behaviors that place you or others at risk. For example, responding to your internal need for companionship by “picking up a hitchhiker” (that is, getting together with someone you don’t know) can be extremely risky. Knowing how you are going to handle these urges when they arise safely is essential for the success of your journey. We’ll talk more about how to handle urges and craving in other chapters. First, let’s talk about the kind of emergencies that can arise when you are on a long journey.

Handling Emergencies

Even with careful planning and preparation, you need to be ready if things go wrong. Having an emergency plan is essential in recovery.



1) Flat tire. You could have a flat tire even if your tires were in good shape before you hit the road. A temporary fix may get you to the next service sta-

tion, but you need to replace the tire if you are to reach your final destination. You'll need the right tool and skill to change or fix the tire. Similarly, a part of your environment may have seemed safe and reliable and was supportive of your recovery when you began your journey, but has now stopped being supportive. For example, a non-drug-using friend who was once a source of support to you may have started using drugs again. This means it is time for a change. You need a new source of support to replace the old one. Do you have the tools and skill to make this change? Can you think of anyone or anything in your environment that may be like a flat tire that needs changing?

2) Head-on collision. This can be potentially fatal, and you may not even be the driver at fault. It is therefore important to always wear your seat belt and to have with you a way of calling for help (such as a cell phone or flare). Although wearing your seatbelt and having a cell phone won't prevent the accident, it can **reduce the harm** of the accident by protecting you and by providing you with needed medical care. Similarly, along your journey of recovery you can reduce the harm of a slip by always using condoms and always using new or bleach-cleaned needles if you have sex or inject drugs. And don't forget it's never too late to call for help, and to place yourself in the care of someone who can help to reduce the harm still further. Your counselor or sponsor is like the paramedic who arrives first on the scene, and who can assess your needs and refer you for the appropriate care. So, have your counselor's and sponsor's telephone number with you at all times. Do you know how to reach your counselor or sponsor in case of an emergency?

Enjoying the Journey

So far we've talked a lot about being prepared for all the things that can go wrong on this journey of recovery. You know that you must be prepared and vigilant at all times and be able to tolerate delays, detours and setbacks. It may all feel overwhelming. Before you think this journey isn't worth the effort that is needed, consider viewing the journey as a series of smaller, more easily attained, destinations. Do you do this when you have to go on a very long car trip? For example, you just concentrate on the miles you need to cover until you stop for lunch? This is a good strategy. Just like NA says "one day at a time." You don't lose sight of your ultimate destination, but you are fully present in the current moment. It is so important to "enjoy the scenery"—enjoy the journey itself and don't think of it only as a means to an end. Let's consider some of the pleasures and benefits of the journey itself.



- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Medical | (e.g., better health, energy): |
| Financial | (e.g., more money) |
| Legal | (e.g., freedom from threat of imprisonment) |
| Employment | (e.g., better job) |
| Family/Social | (e.g., caring and trusting relationships) |
| Psychological | (e.g., more self-respect, less depression, anxiety) |
| Spiritual | (e.g., closer relationship with a higher power or your spiritual self). |

Can you think of other benefits?

Practice Exercise: **Developing a Personal Road Map for the Journey of Recovery**

Instructions:

You will now have the opportunity to create your own personal road map for recovery and harm reduction. Turn to the worksheet—"Personal Map for Journey of Recovery" located at the end of this chapter. Begin by identifying your own personal external warning signs (the people, places, and things that can put you at risk). Also write down what kinds of internal states are warning signs for you. For example, are you at risk when you are depressed, bored, lonely, or when you are at a party and celebrating, or when you are angry? Then think about what tools and skills you need to be able to respond to your warning signs without relapsing (do you need to develop better skills for communication, anger management, stress manage-

ment). Then think about who you could invite to accompany you on this journey—your navigator (or guide)—and write one or two names and telephone numbers in the space provided. Also think about your environment. Is there anything you need to change to make sure that your environment is safe, reliable, and supportive of your recovery. Finally, think about what you will do if you are in an accident—have a slip. In the space provided weigh the benefits of resuming your journey of recovery against the costs of relapse.

Review

Let's review what we've covered so far. We thought of recovery as a journey made up of a series of steps. Just like any long journey, you need to be well prepared before you begin. You need to be gassed up, or committed, to the journey. You need a map or plan; you need tools and skills; you need a trusted navigator who knows the road; and you need a safe, reliable, and supportive form of transportation or environment. We considered the importance of knowing the rules of the road and how to interpret signs (such as people, places, things, and emotions), that can warn you of specific risks to recovery that may be in your path. You also need to have a plan in case you have an accident—or “slip.” Remember by having an emergency plan you are not giving yourself permission to relapse, but you may be able to reduce the harm of a relapse. Finally, we considered ways to enjoy the journey itself—how to travel “one day at a time,” breaking up the journey into smaller, manageable segments, while still keeping your eye clearly on your destination. Now we are going to consider how the seemingly inconsequential decisions that you make on your journey can in fact have major consequences.

Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions

Some of the most ordinary, mundane choices that are made every day seem to have nothing at all to do with drug use or other high risk behavior such as sharing needles or having unsafe sex. Although they may not involve making a direct choice of whether to engage in a risky behavior, they may move you, one small step at a time, closer and closer to being confronted with that choice. Through a series of minor decisions you may gradually work your way closer to the point at which engaging in a risky behavior becomes very likely. These seemingly unimportant decisions, that may in fact steer you off the road to recovery, are called **Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions** or **SID** for short.

SID's Journey of Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions That Lead to His Relapse to Gambling, (story and map adapted and reprinted with permission from Marlatt & Gordon, *Relapse Prevention*, p. 47, Copyright 1985, The Guilford Press).

Sid was a compulsive gambler. He had been in treatment and had not gambled for 6 months, but then he relapsed. This is the story Sid told when his counselor asked him what he had been doing prior to the relapse.

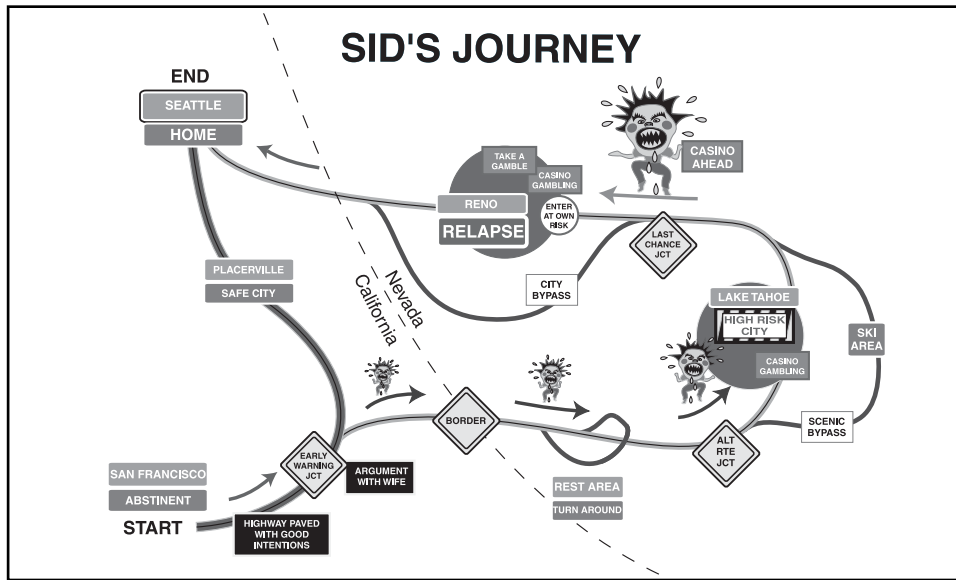
Sid and his wife live in Seattle. They decided to take a car trip to San Francisco and back. They had a great time in San Francisco together, and began their return trip to Seattle. As they drove, Sid began to feel restless. He and his wife got into an argument about their travel route: he claimed it would be worth the added time if they made a slight detour and took the scenic Lake Tahoe Parkway instead of going through Placerville, in order to see “the amazing blue waters of Lake Tahoe.” Since Sid was driving, he got his way, and they turned off the highway and got on the Lake Tahoe Parkway. Once they got on the Parkway, they came upon a rest area where his wife suggested they turn around. Again, Sid talked her into going further. They kept driving and soon came upon the Scenic Bypass road. Sid's wife asked him, “Don't you want to turn here for the Scenic drive?” Sid replied, “the Parkway is much more direct to Lake Tahoe.” Soon, billboard signs began appearing on the side of the road that advertised different places to gamble. Sid and his wife drove on. At Last Chance Junction, Sid's wife asked him “Isn't this the road to take us to Seattle?” Sid said “Yes, but I'm hungry from all this driving. Let's just go into the City of Reno and get a bite to eat first.”

When they arrived in town, Sid parked the car directly in front of one of the larger casinos. Needing money for the parking meter, he ventured into the casino to get change for a five dollar bill. He was given four quarters and four silver dollars. Since he only needed a quarter for the meter, he decided to try his luck by dropping a silver dollar into a nearby slot machine. That was all it took to trigger an episode of heavy gambling; it took his wife almost 3 days before she could drag him out of town and back on the road home. By that time, however, he had wagered away all of their remaining vacation money, and they had to make it home on their gas credit card alone. Sid's Reno binge was the start of a prolonged period of gambling, which continued for some months until he sought professional assistance.

When the counselor asked Sid why he relapsed, he said “I don't know...I just found myself in a casino in Reno gambling again.” Sid strongly denied any conscious plan to resume gambling. Yet he made a number of “seemingly irrelevant decisions” that led up to standing in front of a slot machine in Reno with a handful of change—an extremely high-risk situation for Sid.

Preventing Relapse to Risky Behavior

Sid's journey is depicted in the illustration below.



Each of Sid's seemingly irrelevant decisions seems to have brought him one step closer to the situation in which he ultimately relapsed.

1. Did Sid's relapse begin inside the casino in Reno when he put those coins in the slot machine?
2. Did Sid's relapse begin when Sid decided to go into the casino to get change for the parking meter?
3. Did Sid's relapse begin when he decided to park in front of a casino?
4. Did Sid's relapse begin at Last Chance Junction when Sid is hungry and decides to go to Reno to get something to eat?
5. Did Sid's relapse begin when he failed to recognize some external warning signs—the gambling billboards along the road?
6. Did Sid's relapse begin when Sid reached the scenic bypass but decided not to use it.
7. Did Sid's relapse begin at the rest area of the Lake Tahoe Parkway when he decided not to follow his wife's advice to turn around?
8. Did Sid's relapse begin when he decided to take a sightseeing detour rather than taking the direct route home?

9. Did Sid's relapse begin when he failed to recognize his internal warning signs long before he began gambling when he started feeling restless and argued with his wife?

The purpose of these questions is to point out that many “little” decisions that at the time seem irrelevant to relapse can bring you closer to the ultimate decision that could endanger your health or the health of others.

Every time you have to make a decision think of Sid. Think of every choice you have to make as having the potential to place you or others at risk. By **thinking ahead** about each possible option you have and where each of them may lead, you can anticipate dangers that may lie along the road to recovery.

When faced with a decision, choose a low-risk option, to avoid putting yourself in a risky situation. If you decide on a high risk option, you must also have a plan for how to protect yourself while in the high-risk situation.

By remembering Sid and his predicament, you will be better able to prevent getting into high-risk situations. It is usually much easier to decide to **avoid** a high-risk situation before you get too close to it than it is to resist temptation once you are in the midst of the it. For example, it would have been easier for Sid to decide not to take the Lake Tahoe Parkway than to decide not to gamble once he was in the casino in Reno.

Practice Exercise: Writing a SID Story

Instructions:

1. Turn to the “SID Storytelling Game Worksheet” located at the end of this chapter.
2. On the top of the Worksheet, write down an activity that you will be engaging in during the coming week. (Examples: Going to the store for cigarettes; going to a family reunion; depositing paycheck in the bank; going bowling.)
3. Then create a story about Sid who will be engaging in this activity. You can use the worksheet to help you come up with your story line. The story begins with Sid deciding to engage in the activity on the top of the sheet. Your task is to come up with various decisions along the way related to this task that could put Sid's recovery at risk and/or other people at risk. Because we want the story to have a happy ending, you should also include in the story how Sid dealt successfully with what happens—what tools and skills did he use.

When you have finished this exercise, consider how you can use this story of how Sid handled Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions to help you when you engage in this same activity during the coming week.

Quiz

1. The road to recovery:

- a. is a journey made of many steps or decisions
- b. is a single step or decision
- c. has no warning signs
- d. all of the above

2. How do you prepare for a journey of recovery?

- a. acquire the necessary tools and skills
- b. learn how to interpret early warning signs
- c. develop an emergency plan
- d. all of the above

3. Some internal warning signs to attend to on the road to recovery include:

- a. people, places, or things
- b. hungry, angry, lonely, tired
- c. bells, whistles, or horns
- d. all of the above

4. What does SID stand for (don't worry about your spelling):

S _____
I _____
D _____

5. Relapse doesn't just happen; it begins with a decision that at the time may seem to have had nothing to do with drug use or other risky behaviors.

- a. True
- b. False

Practice Exercise: Stress Management/Relaxation

We recommend that you conclude each chapter by doing a ten-minute relaxation exercise. Use this time to practice meditation or deep breathing, or to play an audiotaped relaxation or visualization technique. Dim the lights, get comfortable in your chair, uncross your legs, and sit quietly with your eyes closed. Remember that learning to relax is a skill that takes practice, so if you feel restless at first, just remind yourself that this is a ten-minute gift of quiet time that you give to yourself. With practice, you can use meditation and relaxation in many areas of your life. For example, relaxation is an important skill for you to have for your journey of recovery. Remember that Sid's relapse began when he began to get restless. If he had relaxed and centered himself at that point he may have been able to prevent his relapse. So use this time now to practice becoming centered, relaxed, and focused on your destination while enjoying your journey of recovery.

Personal Road Map for Journey of Recovery



Rules of the Road: *My personal warning signs that there may be a high risk situation ahead are as follows:*

External Warnings

Internal warnings

Tools and Skills I Need for My Journey of Recovery:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____

Navigators: *Guides I can trust for my journey of recovery are:*

- | | Name |
|----|-------|
| 1) | _____ |
| 2) | _____ |
| 3) | _____ |

- | | Telephone |
|----|-----------|
| 1) | _____ |
| 2) | _____ |
| 3) | _____ |

Ways I Can Make My Environment Safe, Reliable, and Supportive:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Emergency Procedure to Reduce Harm if I'm in a High Risk Situation:

1. In high risk sexual situations, I will always use condoms.
2. If injecting drugs, I will always use new or bleach-cleaned needle.
3. If I feel lost, in danger of doing something risky, or have already done something risky, I will call _____ for help.
_____ (Telephone No.)
4. While waiting for help to arrive, I will remind myself of the benefits of resuming my journey of recovery, and the negative consequences to myself and others of continuing to take this detour.

Personal benefits of recovery

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Negative consequences of detour

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

SID Storytelling Game Worksheet

Beginning:

Sid is an HIV-positive drug user working on his/her recovery. The story begins with Sid deciding to engage in a particular activity:

Once upon a time, there was a guy/gal named Sid, who was going to:

(Write here an activity that **you** will engage in during the coming week)

Middle:

The story unfolds with Sid having to make several decisions related to this activity that could potentially put his/her recovery at risk.

On his/her way to _____
(activity)

Sid decides to: _____ (write decisions below)

Seemingly irrelevant decisions. List some Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions that might jeopardize Sid's recovery while pursuing this activity:

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1) _____ | 6) _____ |
| 2) _____ | 7) _____ |
| 3) _____ | 8) _____ |
| 4) _____ | 9) _____ |
| 5) _____ | 10) _____ |

Ending:

The story should have a happy ending! The story ends with Sid successfully coping with the above situations and engaging in the activity without relapse.

Sid successfully copes with each of these situations by:

Tools and/or skills demonstrated by Sid. List tool, or skill, that Sid demonstrates in the story that helped him/her prevent or reduce harm to self or others.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1) _____ | 6) _____ |
| 2) _____ | 7) _____ |
| 3) _____ | 8) _____ |
| 4) _____ | 9) _____ |
| 5) _____ | 10) _____ |

