

# 7 LESSONS FOR OVERCOMING ADDICTION

## HOW TO BEAT ADDICTION ON YOUR OWN WITHOUT REHAB!

“

*Stanton Peele's is a revolutionary approach to the treatment of addictions. This should be of enormous help to people struggling with them.*

*Aaron T. Beck, M.D., Professor, Department of Psychiatry,  
University of Pennsylvania; creator of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*

LP Life Process  
Program

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# 1. Self Reflection

## Recovery is the Norm, Not the Exception

*People quit addictions on their own all the time; evidence for this is all around us.*

Of course, you've been told, as we all have, that this problem is a disease for which you must seek medical treatment or join a support group—something that you may not want to do.

You see and hear this message in many places—in school, in the media, from government organizations, and from treatment providers. So you may not even ask yourself whether it's accurate. But if you thought about it for a few minutes, you'd realize it just isn't so.

How many people do you know who quit cigarettes, the most common, and generally considered to be the [toughest addiction to quit?](#)

In the United States, tens of millions of people have quit smoking without treatment, which is about half of those who have ever smoked. The percentage of former heroin, cocaine, and alcohol habitués who have quit on their own is even higher.

**The idea of addiction as inevitably a lifetime burden is a myth.**

How do we know? Because the American government tells us so. In a [massive study](#) carried out by the government's [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#) (NIAAA) — in which 43,000 Americans were interviewed, only one in ten alcoholics entered AA or rehab. Yet three-quarters of people who were ever alcoholic had achieved stable recovery.

The bottom line: three-quarters of those in recovery have been able to fight and beat their addiction on their own. So it is important for you to know that the independent, self-motivated cure for addiction is possible. In this guide, we will show you how to beat addiction on your own and without rehab.

## What Is Addiction?

An addiction is a harmful attachment to a habit or behavior that provides rewarding experiences—experiences we continue to pursue despite their harmful effects, sometimes to the very depths of despair and self-destruction. It has three components:

- The person experiencing the addiction.
- That person's situation, including their physical, social and cultural environment.
- That person's instant or developmental circumstances— where the person is in their life.

The thing that distinguishes addiction from other constructive or rewarding habits is its negative consequences for physical health, relationships, careers, or other aspects of life. Still, addiction is a natural response that all people encounter in lesser or greater forms—one that varies with people's personal dispositions and beliefs, life situations and experiences, and opportunities and outlooks.

People turn to these experiences partly out of the appeal of the specific activity (whether drugs, eating, pornography, gambling, etc.), partly due to their personal needs and characters (including mental states like depression or anxiety), and partly due to the situations they face at the moment. And people tend to tolerate addictions because they lack access to attractive alternatives (more on this shortly).

Lastly, addictions aren't limited to ingestible substances like drugs and alcohol—people can form addictions to a range of relationships and involvements (like sex, love, eating, gambling, and technology— to name a few).

Let's take time now to emphasize one thing that enables people to overcome addiction—their belief that they are ultimately capable of doing so.

For instance, many non-addicted smokers welcome nicotine replacement therapy and frequently fail to quit. That's because in turning to the replacement drugs they were announcing, "I don't feel that I can really lick this thing." As a result, what is likely to happen the first time they face duress—especially if/when they cease taking the drug to replace their reliance on cigarettes?

They relapse!

The new recognition that compulsive sexuality, gambling, eating, electronic devices and entertainment, shopping are just as addictive as cocaine and heroin must not discourage you! This realization shouldn't deter you from appreciating your capacity to outgrow a reliance on alcohol, drugs, or *any* type of addiction.

Believing you are incapable of doing so and that you are powerless will certainly not help you in achieving your goal.

The Life Process Program stresses that addiction is more surmountable than you've been told. To turn your life—or help turn someone else's life—away from addiction, you should understand that addiction is changeable. People *frequently* escape addictive behaviors and beliefs as their life circumstances change and as they improve their outlooks and capabilities.

You have been using addiction as a way of dealing with life. You can accomplish the task of living in more healthful and sustainable ways.

## What it Takes to Beat Addiction

People with strong and clear values, and with the motivation to change, are poised to beat addictions (or to avoid addiction entirely).

Likewise, people with friends, intimate relationships, and families; people with stable home and community lives; people with jobs and work skills; people with education; people who are healthy—are well-positioned to avoid or overcome addictions.

You need to seek and gain these advantages that non-addicted people have. When you have such assets, you are helped in overcoming an addiction by focusing on what you have and what you may lose. Some therapies—which the Life Process Program makes use of—help you to gain these assets. When you don't have these things, you may need help to acquire them, which we will explain.

In addition, you are assisted in fighting addictions by things larger than yourself and beyond your own life. One of these things is the support of those around you and your community. Another is to have and to seek greater goals in life, to commit yourself to be good to other people and to make positive contributions to the world.


Finally, and most important, we want you to find this information accessible, encouraging, and empowering. It *increases* your personal strength.

**Self-empowerment is the most potent addiction antidote of all.**

This guide provides a road map to self-improvement. It is a tool that you can use to examine your own life, non-judgmentally, noting what you have and what you lack, in terms of the skills and resources you need to beat addiction.

## Addiction is not a disease

The following table summarizes ten assumptions that distinguish our approach from the Disease Model of Addiction:

Ten Assumptions that Distinguish the Life Process Program from the Disease Model	
	
Disease Model	Life Process Program
1. Addiction is inbred and biological	1. Addiction is a way of coping with yourself and your world
2. The solution is medical treatment and membership in spiritual groups such as A.A.	2. The solution requires self-awareness, new coping skills, and changing your environment
3. Addiction is all-or-nothing; you are or you aren't an addict	3. Addiction is a continuum; your behavior is more or less addicted
4. Addiction is permanent and you can relapse at any moment	4. Addiction can be outgrown
5. Addicts are "in denial" and must be forced to acknowledge they have a disease	5. You should identify problems and solutions in ways that work for you
6. The recovering addict/alcoholic is the expert on addiction	6. Those without an addiction problem are the best models
7. Addiction is a "primary" disease	7. Addiction stems from other life problems you have
8. Your main associates must be other recovering addicts	8. You should associate with a normal range of people
9. You must accept the disease philosophy to recover	9. Getting better is not a matter of believing a dogma
10. Surrendering to a higher power is the key to recovery	10. You must develop your own power to get better

**We do not regard addiction as a disease.** Thus, we do not recommend that you see a doctor or join a twelve-step group organized for one disease or another as a way of dealing with addiction.

These approaches, we believe, have already been shown to be less effective than others that are available. In fact, many addiction rehabilitation facilities—where these approaches are regularly practiced—do *[more harm than good](#)*.

Our approach for changing destructive habits, the Life Process Program, is instead rooted in common sense and people's actual experience.

This approach is more empowering—and therefore more effective—than conventional treatment or self-help methods.

Some people are beginning to question how accurate or helpful it is to think of addiction as a “disease.”

The disease model of addiction does more harm than good because it does not give people enough credit for their resilience and capacity to change.

It underestimates people’s ability to figure out what is good for them and to adapt to challenging environments. That is, it disempowers people. On the other hand, it fails to hold people accountable if and when they act irresponsibly while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or for excessive non-drug habits ranging from shopping to gambling.

The disease theory of addiction can even perpetuate addiction.

Our approach, in contrast, respects every person’s capacity to improve and to make positive choices, even in the case of the most compulsive behaviors. Instead of undermining your integrity, we give you credit for being a responsible adult capable of self-management.

The Life Process Program takes us far from the frightening assumption that a compulsive behavior is a disease that you will have to live with forever. Remember: millions of people have quit smoking (the toughest drug to quit) in the United States alone.



## 2. Values: Building on Your Values Foundation

Values play a critical role in addiction—and your values are the key to *beating* addiction. This is a matter of both considering what your values are and sometimes refocusing on dormant values—or developing new ones.

Your values are your beliefs that some things are right and good and others wrong and bad, that some things are more important than others, and that one way of doing things is better than another.

Values are usually deeply held—they come from your earliest learning and background. Values reflect what your parents taught you, what you learned in school and religious institutions, and what the social and cultural groups you belong to hold to be true and right.

### How Can Values Oppose Addiction?

To say that your values influence your desire and ability to fight addiction is to say that you act in line with what you believe in and what you care about. Such values can be [remarkably potent](#). For example, a woman once told Stanton,

**“I used to smoke, and sometimes I think of going back to it. However, now that I have small children, I would sooner cut my fingers off with a kitchen knife than start smoking again.”**

Even if this woman fell to temptation and smoked one cigarette, it is highly unlikely that she would relapse entirely. Observing this new sense of identity and resolve in new parents should make you think, quite sensibly, “This person couldn’t be addicted to drugs or alcohol; she cares too much about herself and her family.”

As a society, and as individuals, we need to grasp that there is no more important facilitator or antidote to addiction than our values. For example, people who value clear thinking will shy away from regular intoxication. Likewise, a responsible person highly concerned for his family’s well-being

would not allow himself to shop or gamble away his family's money. People who are focused on their health will be reluctant, or refuse, to drink excessively or to take unhealthy drugs.

## Identifying Your Values

To further assist you in identifying your core values, list the three worst losses you could suffer in life, such as:

- Your health
- Your family or life partner (or their approval)
- Your appearance
- Your relationship to God or sense of spirituality
- Your intelligence
- Your standing in the community
- Your self-respect
- Your job/profession/work skills
- Your friends
- Your ethical standards
- Something not mentioned above

Make a list of how your worst habit is affecting these three things. Now describe a way that you can keep focused on each of these values as leverage to change your addiction. Keep this writing handy—you can keep a folder—while you move on to the next chapter on motivation.

### 3. Motivation: Activating Your Desire to Quit



We discussed the importance of values in chapter 2. Now we'll focus on motivation, which derives from your values. We will discuss why motivation is so critical in overcoming addiction, and learn about the best methods for energizing you to change, even when dealing with the most severe addictions.

In order to appreciate the role of motivation, we will address some common treatment techniques that you have heard about that are not only unnecessary, but can actually do more harm than good.

In place of such unhelpful ideas, you will learn therapy techniques that have demonstrated a high level of effectiveness in combating addictions. These therapies offer significant pointers for self cure as well. They can help you focus on your own motivation to change and convert that into actionable steps—they can even help you motivate others.

## The Role of Motivation in Change

Wanting, seeking, and believing that you can change do not necessarily [translate into success](#). It is common for people to make several attempts before successfully quitting their addictions.

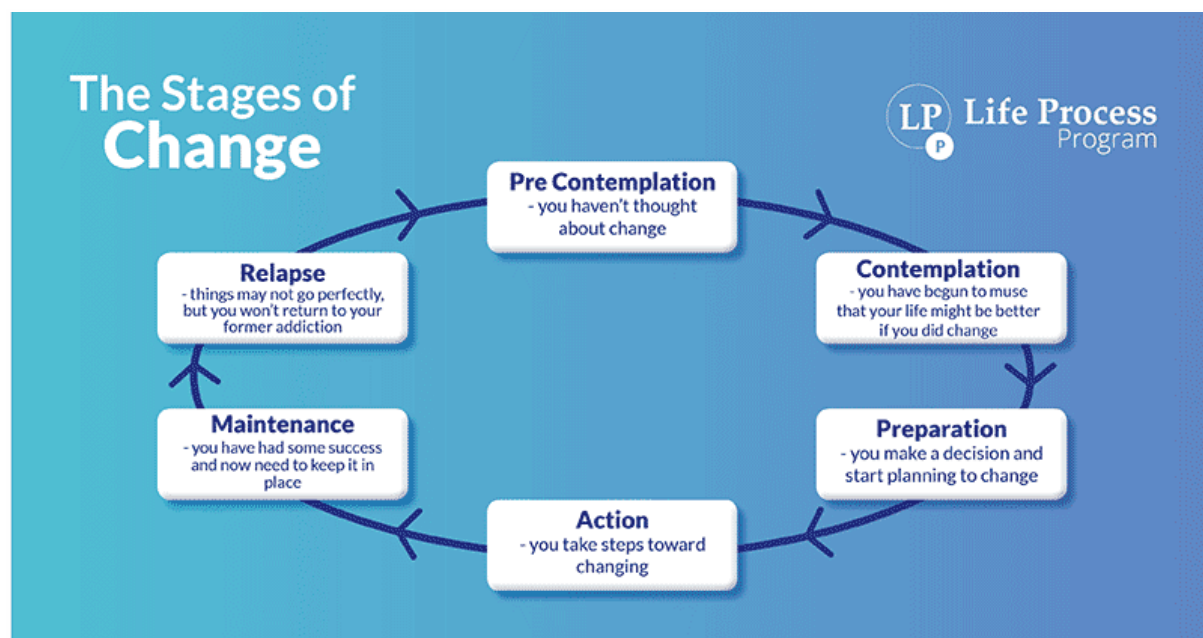
While setbacks can be discouraging, don't get down on yourself for your inability to instantly transform into the person that you want to become. Repeated failures are demoralizing, but they may also signify that you need to try something new, or something more manageable. d

*Persistence* is critical. Indeed, persistence is a sign that you really want to quit and will eventually succeed!

Addictions have roots in your lifestyle, outlook, and personality—beating them may take a concerted, complex effort. If you've tried to beat addiction previously, with no success, this may signal that you have simply not been in the right place in your life to change, and that you need to do more groundwork.

## Stages of Change

The motivation to change takes different forms, depending on where you are in your addiction cycle. Some people have to be introduced to the idea that they need to change. Others have spent a lifetime fighting to change. One widely used scheme for organizing the [stages of change](#) was devised by psychologists James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente:



## Stages of Change

1. Precontemplation—you haven't thought about changing
2. Contemplation—you have begun to muse that your life might be better if you did change
3. Preparation—you make a decision and start planning to change
4. Action—you take steps toward changing
5. Maintenance—you have had some success and now need to keep it in place

You have probably already decided you want to change, and are at least at stage 2 of the process.

But, actually, there is no guarantee that you personally will proceed through these stages in an orderly way. So do consider these stages, without feeling bound by them.

## 4. Rewards: Weighing the Costs and Benefits of Addiction

If motivation is the force that drives you to act, then [rewards](#) are what you gain from that activity. People quit their addictions when they begin to get more rewards for living without the addiction than they got from feeding the addiction. Put into economic terms, you give up your habit when you believe that its costs exceed its benefits.

### The Rewards of Addictions

Excessive alcohol consumption, eating, and sexual activity etc. provide you with feelings and sensations that you desire and need. Some of these essential feelings are a sense of being valued, of being a worthwhile person, or of being in control. It is critical for you, or anyone trying to help a person with an addictive problem, to understand the needs that the addiction fulfills. This understanding is necessary in order to root out the addiction.

However, addictions don't *really* provide people with positive experiences or benefits. Although *they provide short-term or illusory rewards*, addictions ultimately lead to negative feelings and life outcomes. In the long run, you are worse off as a result of your addictive behaviors.

It is these short-term and habitual rewards in your addiction to which you are attached. And people are simply not ready to give up these benefits until they find an alternative source of satisfaction. The task for you, in order to overcome any destructive habit, is first to get a handle on why you turn so regularly to the same sensation or experience—what you get from the addiction and the role it serves in your life. Examining what underlies the addiction will help you to get your automatic responses under control. Only then can you identify how you can find superior, non-addictive rewards to take the place of the addiction.

## The Rewards of Work and Family

Family and work responsibilities are two of the most powerful experiences human beings can have, and their rewards regularly outweigh the benefits provided by drugs, alcohol, and other addictions. While you may not be a genius at work, you probably limit your addiction because of your professional obligations. Odds are that you already take steps to make sure that your addiction doesn't interfere with your livelihood.

Perhaps it worries you that you sometimes daydream about gambling, or going out for a smoke or a drink. But that you don't is what the fight against addiction is all about. This resistance to your impulses demonstrates that you already have the means to control your habit under the right circumstances. The next step is turning that control into normal self-reflexive behavior—tipping the scale *against* addiction.

## Tipping the Scale of Addiction

It is important to recognize the way in which we often substitute the rewards of alcohol and drug use and other addictions for the rewards we lack in our everyday lives. When you think about the benefits that you receive from the addiction, think of a weighing scale, with the reasons for using on one side. Now let's focus on the other side of that scale. What are the costs, the negatives, of your addiction?

In tipping the scale, we need to keep in mind the different stages of addictive behavior change. Some people benefit from help seeing that they should quit their addiction, or that their habit is an addiction in the first place. Sometimes simply considering this idea of a scale, with its enumeration of all the negative effects of the habit, helps people gain the insight that change is necessary.

We've already established that you want (or someone you love / care about wants) to change. The issue that you face is how to establish new behaviors and how to maintain them over the course of your non-addicted life. In order to do so, it will be helpful to keep this scale of costs and benefits in mind. It will motivate you to change, and it will keep the change in place in the years to come.

## **Procrastination**

Many of us are waiting for just the right moment to change, when the costs of the addiction are so great that change is unavoidable. We can imagine the perfect situation for kicking the addiction; we're just not there yet.

## **Traumatic Event**

Maybe you are waiting to change until you have a heart attack, you develop diabetes, you go bankrupt, or your spouse leaves you. You figure that this will resolve all your hesitance or ambivalence. Once one of these things happens, then you will know that you have to change. Perhaps you have seen how famous people use catastrophic situations as reasons to fight addictions, and you want to follow in their footsteps.

But there are serious drawbacks to waiting until you are on the operating table to decide to change. Sometimes you die. Sometimes an ailment is irreversible. Or in terms of substance misuse, you can permanently damage your health, lose your family, or even end up in jail! But you don't have to wait to "hit bottom" to change.

Instead of waiting for something awful to happen to tip your cost-benefit scale, it is more useful to visualize these negative outcomes before they occur. In this way, you can use controlled fear to modify your current behavior.

## **Replacing Rewards**

When you examine the rewards reaped through your addiction, you will often discover that they are weak and/or illusory. That means that you should seek out healthier ways to get the same needs met. As you keep in mind the negative consequences of addictive rewards—the weight gain, the cost, the intoxication and hangovers, the recriminations and guilt—look for superior ways to gain each supposed benefit of your addiction.



For example, if you turn to alcohol, cigarettes, or food to help you relax, then you might try exercising, doing a guided meditation, or getting a massage. If you seek excitement and satisfaction through gambling, shopping, or drugs, think of rock climbing, starting a business, or volunteering at a charity.

Obviously, some gratifications provided by an addiction will be easier to replace than others. Filling an empty place because you don't feel loved or you don't have a purpose in life is going to require major life refocusing. At the other extreme, eating, drinking, or gambling because you are bored is a more straightforward problem to solve.

Think about the benefits of your addiction when it first began, and compare these to the benefits that you seek now.

- How have your rewards shifted?
- Have they become more or less pleasure-oriented?
- Do you engage in your addictive activity in order to seek positive sensations or in order to drown out negative ones?

Think now about how the costs have changed over time. For every benefit of your addiction that you list, find three alternative ways you can gain these feelings, satisfactions, or experiences.

## 5. Resources: Identifying Strengths and Weaknesses, Developing Skills to Fill the Gaps

Overcoming addiction requires you to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses and to address your weaknesses effectively. This involves two related sets of activities:

- First, you need to assess what resources you already have and what resources you currently lack.
- Then you need to develop the skills that will allow you to expand your resources. Moreover, these skills themselves are critical in overcoming addiction.

Not all people are created equal in terms of kicking addictions. You might think, “Sure, I could lose weight if I had a personal trainer and chef like Oprah and those Hollywood stars.” However, compared to someone else who can’t afford a health club membership, you may be in a relatively good position to get in shape.

Take someone working at a marginal job—say, a single mother who waitresses. What does *she* do during a break or following work in order to relax? Smoking seems like the cheapest, easiest relief she can turn to, while a better-off person might take an aerobics class.

Research shows that the more resources people have and develop, the more likely they are to recover from addiction. Resources are not limited to money. Here are key assets in fighting an addiction:



These personal assets are a better predictor of recovery than wealth. But how do you develop these resources if you don't already have them? And how do you use them to fight and beat addiction?

## Assessing Your Strengths and Resources

Look at your life and take inventory of your strengths. What are your greatest accomplishments in life? What are you good at? What do you enjoy doing? What do people like about you? What big changes have you made in your life? What resources do you have at your disposal? Some possible answers to these questions are:

- I quit smoking.
- I am good at home repairs.
- I am well organized.
- I am smart with money.
- People like my friendliness.
- People turn to me in crisis.
- I have always held a job.
- I have good relationships with my children.

Identifying existing resources can be energizing and inspiring. You, too, have strengths you should be proud of. If you are well organized, practical, or gifted at household repairs, then similar problem-solving abilities will work in other areas of your life. These abilities should inspire you with confidence and give you faith that you can accomplish more.

## **Developing the Essential Skills to Beat Addiction**

We can identify the skills that have been found to be most critical to the recovery process. These include social skills, which enable you to deal with people and life (communication, problem solving, and being alone); managing emotions, dealing with the emotional states that drive you to resort to addictions; and resisting urges, dealing with impulses to turn to cigarettes, food, shopping, or other harmful habitual responses when faced with stressful situations.

Even after people have been drug/alcohol/(other)-free for a time, they need to learn how to break the cycle that compels them to resort to their habit. The skills needed to interrupt this cascading series of events are collectively labeled relapse prevention.

## **Communication**

Communication is the building block of professional and personal relationships. In these and other arenas, you need to take in information and present information to others. You need to feel secure enough to listen to things that may be unpleasant, without shutting off or striking out at the messenger. When presenting information to others, you need to honestly convey concrete information, rather than to put the other person down or make yourself feel good.

## Problem Solving

If you don't feel up to meeting life's challenges, you may rely on drugs, food, or sex as a way to anesthetize yourself against anticipated failure.

In place of this defeatism, which contributes to the failures that you anticipate, you can learn methods of coping with problems. The essential ingredient in problem management is remaining calm and sensible. You must gain confidence that you will be able to deal reasonably with the problem.

This does not mean you can always reach a perfect resolution. It does not mean that the problem will disappear. It **does** mean that you feel capable of coming up with a reasonable response. This is inspiring rather than depressing—depression is the condition that results from believing you have no avenues open to you when a problem arises.

The first step in problem solving is to identify the problem—framing it in manageable terms, so that it does not seem overwhelming and frightening. Don't let self-criticism ("I always end up in this situation") or self-defeating thoughts ("I'm not strong enough to deal with this") demoralize you. Rather, focus your thinking in a positive direction. You may say to yourself, "The last time I got into this situation, I had no idea how to deal with it. Now I have experienced and dealt with it, and understand what to do. I know I can get through this successfully."

Making a problem manageable so that you can tackle it can mean breaking a larger problem into component parts. If you are leaving a relationship, for example, you have to see to your emotional well-being, find a place to live, seek social support, and arrange a number of other parts of your life. Thinking globally that your life as you know it is over is not a good starting point for tackling these issues.

With a good fix on your problem, you can begin to seek out needed information and evaluate possible options. After selecting an option, your goal is to commit yourself to the course of action while simultaneously being open to feedback about whether that course of action is workable and successful.

Finally, keep in mind your growing body of success at solving problems, a résumé that you will lengthen each time you apply this structured approach.

## **Independence and Being Alone**

Addiction is nearly always tied to relationship problems, to the absence of or search for intimacy and companionship. When people are alone, they turn to every type of compensatory excess: drugs, alcohol, shopping, eating, TV, gambling, and so on. In order to avoid being alone, they will tag along with any group that will accept them, even if they have to indulge in destructive behavior in order to assure membership in the group.

Thus, if you are seeking to curb an addiction, you need to learn how to spend time by yourself constructively, without desperation. This ability, in turn, requires several skills or resources. For example, in order to enjoy spending time alone, you must learn to calm yourself down, rather than look to other people to calm you. The skills to achieve calmness can be found through a number of approaches, such as yoga, meditation, and other relaxation or centering techniques. If you are not into developing techniques for being alone, then engage in ordinary positive activities such as walking, exercising, reading, selected television viewing (recognizing that using television as your main companion is itself addictive), hobbies, and writing letters or e-mails to real people in your life.

In addition to the skill of relaxing and centering yourself, you need certain resources, without which it is not possible to maintain an independent, self-respecting life. These independence-supporting resources include structure, interests, healthfulness, and contentment. As you develop these basic life resources, you will be better able to spend time alone and to select your company on a more positive basis.

Finally, seeing yourself as someone with a respectable and responsible life, one that you can look at with pride, is fundamental to your self-esteem. Your confidence that you have created a reasonable, positive life for yourself will strengthen you even as you seek further fulfillment and larger satisfactions in life.

## Dealing with Negative Emotions

Addictive behavior is often triggered by a negative event that leads to depression, anxiety, or anger. These negative events are bound to occur from time to time in any person's life, but they do not have to lead to harmful behavior. Your ability to deal with emotional upsets in a healthy, functional way is critical to eliminating addiction.

Psychologists have developed therapeutic techniques to deal with emotions such as anger, anxiety, and depression. These techniques (called [\*cognitive-behavioral therapy\*](#)) involve changing the way that you think about and react to an emotion-arousing occurrence.

This is the therapeutic approach we take at the Life Process Program, both in our self-led option and our coach-led program.

The first step is to identify predictable situations that create the negative emotions with which you must cope.

With an emotional reaction, reframing—changing how you think about an event—is critical. Reframing in this case means defusing your immediate emotional reaction by casting it in a different light. For example, when you are angered by the actions of a family member, you can keep in mind that you have responded emotionally before and gotten over it. You do this because you realize this person loves you and is not intentionally trying to hurt you. You might say to yourself, “It’s just his way of dealing with his stress—it has nothing to do with me.” By activating this thinking as soon as an emotion-arousing event occurs, you can sidestep your emotional upset and avoid lashing out.

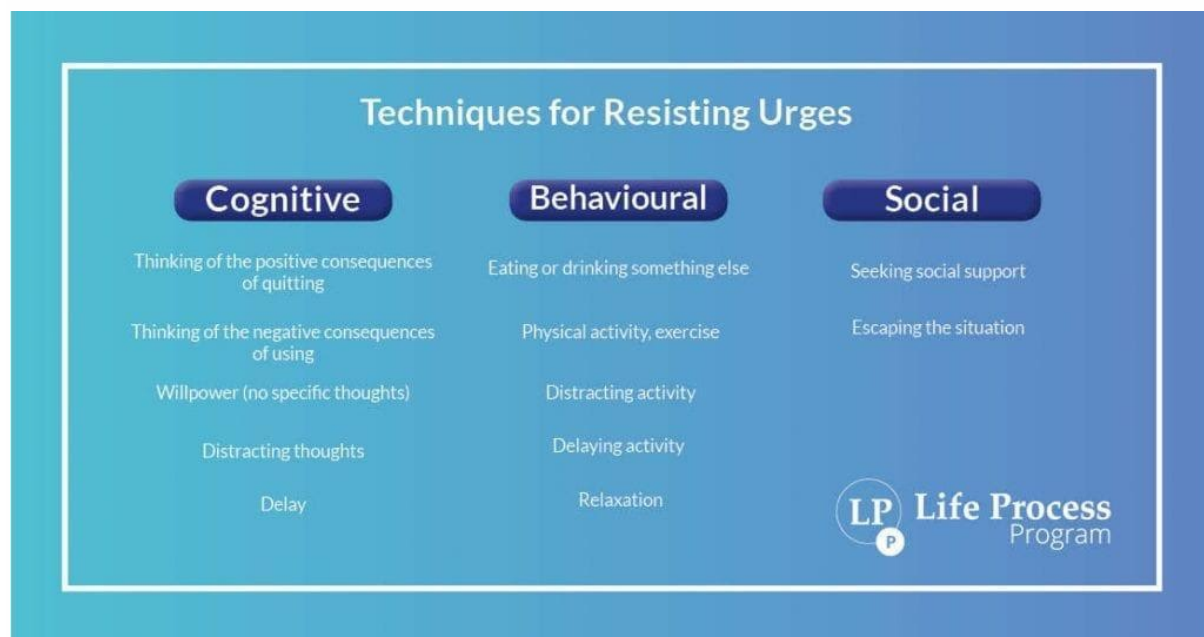
Once you have reframed the emotional event, you can then develop a new pattern for dealing with it.

Rather than expressing uncontrolled anger or turning on your heel and storming out, you can develop various ways to bide your time until your anger subsides and you are in a better place to respond. This may mean simply counting to ten, or else standing in place with a smile.

Changing your initial reactions as much as possible is followed by deeper changes in coping with your feelings and the things that set them off. Since these often involve people, such changes call into play your communication skills. That is, if a co-worker or family member regularly makes you feel bad with comments that you interpret as put-downs, take a moment with that person to describe how such comments make you feel, and ask the person please not to say those things.

## Resisting Urges

There are many different ways to resist addictive urges. In one study, psychologist Saul Shiffman studied the techniques to resist cravings for tobacco by people who had overcome nicotine addictions. He classified these techniques into three different approaches: cognitive, behavioral, and social. People utilizing each approach all managed to resist addictive urges, but each group did so in its own way.



For example, people with a cognitive approach think through the negative consequences of their addiction. They anticipate the positive benefits of quitting (as we described in the last module). They use techniques such as willpower, distracting thoughts, and delaying gratification to resist the addictive impulse.



Similarly, people with a behavioral approach resist the addictive impulse by eating or drinking something else. They also turn to relaxation techniques, physical activity, and distracting or delaying activities to shore up their resistance.

In the third category, people with a social approach turn to others for support and take themselves out of harmful settings in order to resist addiction.

Shiffman discovered that each of these techniques for resisting the urge to smoke was equally effective. In fact, the only technique that he found to be ineffective was self-punitive thinking. Getting down on yourself for things you did or did not do was simply no help. But any kind of can-do approach—be it cognitive, behavioral, or social—worked to shore up resistance. In other words, any technique that appeals to you can be effective, so long as the technique is empowering and not self-denigrating.

## **Breaking the Flow: Relapse Prevention**

Addiction, like many other problems in life, is often cumulative. That is, after an initial misstep, you become a victim of your own inertia. In an effort to recoup your losses, you repeat the behavior, but the more you resort to the addictive behavior, the more slippery the slope becomes. One clear example, of course, is gambling, where “throwing good money after bad” literally describes what you are doing. But the same is true for all addictions. Stopping the momentum toward addiction is a teachable skill called “relapse prevention.”

Although relapse is an issue you must address, remember that a slip is not an excuse to abandon all restraint. The alternative is to recognize you have the ability to immediately regain control after a slip: “I just mistakenly had a drink (or even several); I will resume my abstinence.” If you are a food addict (compulsive eater) and eat a whole bag of chips, you should not take this as a signal to go ahead and binge for the rest of the day, week, or month.

Your emotional and practical planning are the keys to avoiding these further steps to all-out binges. First, try not to get so down on yourself that further excess becomes your only refuge from self-loathing and despair. Second,

whenever you feel yourself sliding out of control, remember that you have a choice. If you wish to escape, then you can pull yourself out of the turbulence.

## 6. Support: Getting Help from Those Nearest You



**Human beings are social animals.**

Our peers and intimates have an enormous impact on our perspectives and our behavior. We learn much from our parents and the groups we grow up among; we act consistently with the people we associate with; we respond—in both positive and negative ways—to those we are intimate and live with. This is true about drugs and alcohol, eating and fitness, and other addictive behaviors as much as it is in any other area of our lives.

The process of learning from others is called “social learning,” or “social influence.” Its critical importance is one of the fundamental realities that contradict the disease view of addiction. That is, accepting the social sources of control and excess means that people’s biological reactions are not the root of addiction to alcohol, drugs, gambling, or food. And if social influence is the most powerful determinant of reactions to drugs and other addictive sensations or

experiences, then it can also be the most powerful tool for preventing or recovering from these addictions.

Social factors are the most potent determinants of addiction, but they can also be harnessed as a tool for recovery. The ways to do this include (1) finding people and groups to support your recovery, (2) working with the significant others in your life so that they become a supportive force to reduce the pressures that lead you to succumb to your addiction and thus enhance your chances for recovery, and (3) playing the same positive role for others as a friend, spouse, or participant in a group.

## **Creating Support Networks**

One option for locating the support you need to change your behavior is to form your own group among people you know with needs similar to yours. For example, many people exercise with friends. Groups of like-minded people bicycle and run together on weekends or walk with neighbors during the day. In this approach, while changing your behavior you associate with people you already know and like to spend time with—people whose goals and expectations are similar to your own.

With the advent of the Internet, many people find their support groups far and wide, as like-minded people or those with similar problems, no matter how rare, can be brought together over broad distances. For some common problems, such groups are ready-made. It is very reassuring to conceive of a large group of supportive people out there, even if you don't (never) actually meet with them.

## **Family as a Support Group**

In most cases you don't want to stop associating with your friends or family in order to change your behavior. However, the fact is that your family, friends, and business associates are often a big part of the reason why you were moved to

quit your addiction in the first place. Having those nearest to you disapprove of your behavior can cause difficulties in a relationship, but this opposition is also a hugely motivating force, one that can be harnessed for change.

Your loved ones are always around to remind you why you quit in the first place. Marriage and intimate relationships are so critical to the recovery process that the Community Reinforcement Approach creates a buddy system for those who don't have a spouse or other intimate. Since people often share problems with those close to them, a logical step may be to attempt to change together. For example, spouses often quit smoking, lose weight, reduce alcohol consumption, or work together to eliminate other addictions.

### **Those Closest to You Are Your Biggest Help, and Your Greatest Burden**

Your family can be one of your best support networks. After all, they are available to you twenty-four hours a day, they know you intimately, and they have an interest in your well-being. However, the same people who can help you overcome your addiction can also keep you on your addictive course. For example, sometimes a person's dissatisfaction with a spouse is the immediate stimulus to return to smoking, a night of drinking, or binging on pornography.

Maintaining a healthy relationship overall requires that you know how to negotiate with your partner. You need to be able to express your needs reasonably and to be forthcoming in fulfilling the other person's needs. If you give too much or too little, or feel perpetually used or ignored, you cannot comfortably relate to other people. This truism is especially evident in the area of addiction.

### **You Create Your Own World**

Earlier we discussed how critical group pressures are in eating, drug use, and attitudes toward alcohol. This has the slightly pessimistic impact of suggesting that you are doomed to suffer from whatever problems afflict your own social group. In other words, if American attitudes toward drugs and alcohol, or to food and relationships, are screwed up, how can you do any better on your own?

The best strategy is to create your own small culture of health and responsibility—at work, at home, or elsewhere. Every human being can succeed in modifying his or her own thinking, behavior, social reality, and life course. In order to succeed, you must select from and reshape your social environment to support the positive changes you want to make. These changes are in keeping with who you believe you are and who you want to be.

## 7. Maturity – Growing into Self-respect and Responsibility

ADDICTION is a search for immature gratifications. As a result, overcoming addiction requires growing up and assuming adult roles. In this process you learn to take responsibility not only for yourself and your own behavior, but also for other people in your life. One natural outgrowth of this mature outlook is that you may no longer see yourself as powerless or [\*label yourself an addict\*](#). You may no longer feel any need for the addiction, so it ceases to have any presence in your life.

The addiction field has an evocative term for this phenomenon—[\*maturing out\*](#). Many people once addicted to heroin or other so-called “hard drugs” often use this term. The typical reason former heroin habitues give for outgrowing their addiction is that they are tired of the lifestyle—being on the outside, being cut off from normal life, the constant hustling and evading the law, the absence of anything new or better stretching out before them.

Certainly, maturing out is not limited to heroin; it happens with all addictions, including alcohol, sex, and gambling. As you mature, you become dissatisfied with your limitations. You develop more connections to life, through marriage, parenthood, or career accomplishments. While undergoing these external developments, you simultaneously experience critical internal emotional changes. At the same time, your self-image and identity change.

### Positive Identity

To mature, you need to do more than simply get older—you also need to experience life and learn its lessons. At some point—actually, at various points—in your life, you decide who you are, that is, what your identity is.

Many in traditional addiction treatment feel that people must accept that they are lifelong addicts—that no changes they undergo or create for themselves will ever allow them to escape this identity.

In their view, it is dangerous—a matter of tempting fate—to say that you are fully recovered. LPP takes a different tack. We want you to know that there is no reason you can't change who you are, including your “addict” identity, with alcohol, drugs, or anything. It may take time, but carrying the baggage that you must always (or ever) think of yourself as an alcoholic or drug addict will only weigh down your recovery effort.

## **An Everyday Example of Maturing Out**

Nicotine is a more commonplace drug than heroin, yet it is as potent and as harmful as any other drug addiction. People usually get addicted to cigarettes in their teens and twenties. At this age they are anxious about their identities, eager to fit in, and do not yet detect any signs of physical problems due to smoking. As time proceeds and smokers take on families, jobs, and positions in the community, the forces fighting against the addiction add up and eventually outweigh the value and satisfaction of continuing the habit. Today, one of the primary reasons for quitting is that smokers face so much social pressure that they are in danger of becoming pariahs.

## **Emotional Maturity**

Maturity means turning away from a preoccupation with your own needs and becoming aware of the needs of the people around you. Along with abilities and assets that you gain with age, you also gain faith in yourself, patience with others, and self-awareness—a kind of overall equilibrium. This does not mean that you become perfect or that you shed the personal traits, both positive and negative, that distinguish you from others. But it often means that you are more



forgiving of yourself as well as of others. Maturity changes the way that we experience and react to different events in our lives

When you are able to control your reactions, or overreactions, you are less likely to need to resort to addictive remedies. In the first place, you experience fewer of the negative emotions, such as anxiety and depression, which impel addictions. In the second place, you feel more confident about being able to meet and overcome challenges. And third, even when you are not able to resolve an issue fully, you are more accepting of yourself and the situation. Age helps beat addiction in that it brings to light the fact that a lot of emotional turmoil, and the addiction that goes along with it, is unnecessary.

## How to Develop a Mature Perspective

You may be wondering how this is a help to you. Isn't maturity something that just happens to you? Not necessarily. By examining yourself and your life, you can mature out more quickly, more surely, and more completely. Understanding the nature of maturity and how it overcomes addiction can actually assist you in becoming more mature.

You can strive to develop the qualities that define maturity:

1. **Self-efficacy** developing the expectation, tools, and experience that you can accomplish necessary and worthwhile things ("I am able")
2. **Self-acceptance** as you both recognize the good you have done and also become more realistic and modest about yourself and your accomplishments ("My life is worthwhile even if I am not a TV star, rich, or a great scientist")
3. **Tolerance** for others' limitations, paralleling your self-acceptance ("People are who they are; you take the good with the bad")
4. **Responsibility** for your actions ("I am the source of my addiction and other behavior and of what I do about them")
5. **Obligation to others** ("Other people are counting on me")
6. **Faith** in continued existence since the world and you have both endured and will continue to do so ("I will survive this; life goes on")

## A New, Non-addict Identity

As you already know, some views of addiction assert that people cannot change their addict identities. However, it is also important to note that changing one's self-image is difficult for all types of people, not just former drug or alcohol addicts. For example, people's body images are very constant. Thus people who have been fat since childhood tend to see themselves as they have always been—even after they have lost the weight.

You may feel that you are still on sensitive ground with your addiction. You may decide to abstain from alcohol, to avoid any possibility of casual sexual contact, or to consciously avoid buffets. However, you need no longer think of yourself as an addicted person.

Leading a whole life, not calling attention to your addiction, and not visualizing your “addict” self in every situation are all parts of developing your new identity. There are benefits to believing that you are not an addict, and to presenting yourself to others in this way. Their acceptance of your non-addict self-image will bolster your new self-view, just as your conviction in your new identity will convince others of its veracity.

The themes of maturity, responsibility, and integrity—and how these both impact and result from your changing identity—lead to the themes explored in the next section. If you have become secure enough to look outward to other people and to expand the scope of your life—to be a more productive, healthier person, a better friend and parent, a better community member—then you are prepared to define larger goals for yourself.

You are also growing to become someone who works to create a better world for yourself and others.

## 8. Greater Goals: Pursuing and Accomplishing Things of Value

We began this guide with a discussion about values and the many ways in which they help people find their path out of addiction. We identified a variety of values—health, independence, self-control, religious faith—that strengthen people’s resolve to escape destructive behavior. I am now calling on you to function on a higher moral level by living according to values that have a positive impact on other people’s lives.

### Revisiting the Sources of Addiction

Addiction does not stand alone. It is not an isolated biological fact of your life. Who you are, where you are situated, what you believe, and what company you keep are fundamental factors in the addictive equation.

Trying to understand the eating disorders of college women without accounting for their anxious, encapsulated environments is a pointless exercise, just as it is impossible to comprehend drug addiction without understanding people’s lack of opportunity and hopelessness.

Obviously the environment is critical in addiction. But what is wrong with assuming that addiction is a disease that simply happens to people like yourself? For one thing, even in cases of severe addiction, it just isn’t true. Furthermore, throughout this program, we have seen that there are costs to thinking of yourself as powerless against your addiction.

The most successful strategy for tackling addiction is to see yourself as an active participant in the addiction and its solution. Your selection and pursuit of goals is among the best ways to make sure you avoid or beat addiction on our own.

## Your Personal Goals

Your goals in life are the directions you are pursuing. These goals are important advantages for overcoming addictions.

Giving up your addiction then becomes a necessary step on the road to getting where you wish to go.

*Of course, your goals have to mean something.*

After all, scoring drugs is a kind of goal, as is winning the lottery or driving a large car. But these are self-centered goals that simply feed your appetites.

The goals we mean are those that have larger value in the world and for the world—goals that represent accomplishments, benefits to others, and contributions to your community. When you enhance and improve your contributions to others, or your output, you will find it easier to curtail excessive intake.

This is about narrowing the gap between your ideal self and where you are now—including methods for getting from here to there. Whether “there” means giving up the addiction or building a stronger, more satisfying life structure (the two are, of course, inseparable).

These methods come from a number of sources. Behavior therapists have been developing them for years. Such methods are also used in business, where they are known as “management by objectives.” They involve these basic elements:

- *Setting goals.* You’ll do better if you have something to shoot for. Your goals must be realistic (something you can actually attain), and they must be meaningful to you (something you can really get behind).
- *Tracking your progress.* You need a way to see how well you are doing, to remind you of your goals and how much progress you have made toward them.
- *Maintaining your progress.* You need to keep your motivation at a steady level and to continue to advance more than you fall back.

- *Getting beyond the addiction.* Your motivations and actions must eventually focus on positive goals, things in life that have nothing to do with your addiction.

**The Life Process Program for goal achievement is defined by the following special features:**

- Developing rewards for the changed behavior from your everyday life routines.
- Minimizing the unnecessary costs of quitting.
- Combining the goal of quitting an addiction with the other goals you are trying to achieve in life.
- Seeking an end point to recovery, when you are no longer a recovering person but a recovered one.

## **Clearcut Goals**

People work better when they have something to shoot for—this is the point of goal-setting. You know what you need to do and whether you have done it. Goals should be specific—you need to know what is expected and whether you have met your objectives. This is why people are often most productive under a deadline, when they know they must have something completed by a certain date. Numbers are the best example of concrete goals (e.g. you will eat this quantity of calories etc). You must commit yourself to these goals and to assessing how well you have done in reaching them.

Goals aren't useful if you can't be sure whether or not you have achieved them.

Goals for beating addiction are often negative. For example, you will limit yourself to X number of drinks a day, or never drink before a certain hour or eat after 7:00 P.M.

But goals and numbers can be made positive—not only goals directly connected to the addiction (such as “I will sit down and eat three leisurely and well-designed meals a day”), but goals in all areas: “I will exercise three days a

week.” “I will send out ten job applications a week.” “I will write five pages of my novel a day.”

## **Realism**

Setting realistic achievable goals are important for attacking addiction. They are also important for achieving any goal—like love, or exercise, or career goals.

The important thing is maintaining the motivation to persist at each modest step up the ladder toward your ultimate goals.

In summary, the goals you need to conquer addiction should be:

- Clear cut, specific, concrete;
- Consistent with your values and other life goals;
- Flexible, able to be modified by experience;
- Realistic, moderate, continually upward.

## **Keeping Track of Your Progress**

How are you doing at meeting your goals? If you set concrete, measurable ones, you should be able to tell pretty easily. However, the mind is a tricky mechanism. It can make assessing progress toward a goal difficult if you;

(1) forget or change the goal, or

(2) misgauge how well you are doing at meeting the goal.

The best antidote to these problems is to write down your goal and your behavior in meeting it. If you have written down your goal along with everything you have done to fulfill it, you will have an unambiguous record of your progress.

Record-keeping is illuminating in many ways. People often find that simply recording everything they eat and drink in a given day gives them pause—without such a record, they often lose track of what they put into themselves. Usually people find this means that they have eaten, smoked, or drunk more than they realized, but sometimes it also brings positive surprises.

And, of course, you may select a Life Process Program coach to assist you in setting and tracking goals.

## **Rewarding Your Efforts**

Rewards work best when you don't need to go looking for them. Your change effort will be that much easier to the extent that the life you ordinarily live reinforces the behaviors you want. This is why a change of setting—or of your social group—may facilitate quitting gambling, drinking less, eating better, having sounder relationships, or implementing any policy of change you like.

## **Replacement Activities**

You can find new rewards in your new life. If you are losing weight or quitting smoking or undertaking practically any other behavior change, including gambling, exercising will support your effort to beat addiction.

Whenever possible, you should build such exercise or other replacement activities into your ordinary routines.

## **Planning for “High-risk” Situations**

Alternative activities are especially crucial for your weakest moments, those times when the misery of your condition is most likely to overcome you. You need to put in place contingency plans for the “high-risk” situations where you have always gone wrong in the past.

## **Dealing With Failure**

Rewards for success are great, but everyone must deal with failure. And failure is harder to handle than success. In fact, the evidence is not that those experiencing addiction have less success than non-addicted people, but that they overreact more to failure. Instead, you need a plan for reinstating your goals even at the moments you do worst at achieving them. To accomplish this, you have to recognize and plan for the possibility of failure.

You have to believe in your goals enough so that you will continue to shoot for them even when you aren't perfect. If you keep failing, you may need to create different goals or a different way of achieving them. But goals that work more often than not should not be discarded just because you sometimes fall short of them.

## **How Your Goals Fit into Your Life**

Goals are achieved by making small incremental steps toward final goals. This is as true of career and family goals—which take decades to develop fully—as it is of quitting addictions. Addicted individuals tend to have less experience at and less tolerance for sustained efforts that take long periods to accomplish.

Whether you have an addiction or not, you need to visualize your entire life in terms of the goals you are pursuing and the steps that are necessary to get there. Envision something you want to accomplish. Then imagine the steps to this goal—mini-goals that occur on the way to your ultimate destination.

In the following chart, we describe a set of progressive goals for a woman who wants to become a licensed psychotherapist. Think of the individual rungs you need to climb to move you toward your ultimate goals.





## The Integrated Life

A perfectly integrated life would be one in which your life provides all the necessary rewards and signposts for doing the right thing. Addiction of all sorts would be eliminated in your new life-style. The bad news is that nobody attains such a perfectly integrated life. The good news is that you can get close enough so that you no longer have to feel as though you are walking on eggs, making lists of what you can and cannot do and how well you did during the past day, week, or month.

It's a good thing this is the case, because if people were expected to make such lists forever, only one in a hundred people would ever permanently quit smoking, instead of the one in two who have actually licked the habit! People

get beyond the “list” stage to a place where the rewards of the new life-style are so well established as to make relapse a virtual impossibility.

There are certainly cases of people who have quit smoking or drinking for years, even decades, who suddenly return to their addictions. But these are rare. In other words, the best guarantee that you will eliminate an addiction is living a non-addicted life-style for a number of years. Then, even in the few cases where relapse does occur, your ability to resume your positive life-style is that much firmly established and easier to get back into.

The point is that you can let go of your addicted self-image. You can have enough practice and put enough life structures into place to make sure that relapse is unlikely, as unlikely as it is for a previously non-addicted person to develop your old addiction. This point is reached when you gain so much from the person you have become—enough success at your life goals, enough acceptance and praise from others, enough confidence in yourself—that to take the steps back toward addiction would be more difficult than to go forward without it.

## **You and the World**

We are human beings in a human world, and none of us leaves without making an impact, and without being deeply influenced by the world around us. The Life Process Program has addressed your personal needs, the needs of your family and your loved ones, and your concerns for addicted people you may know or deal with.

As such, it has armed you with tools to fight and beat addiction successfully. These tools are both time- and research-tested. But they work only to the extent that you employ them. Indeed, your commitment is the essential ingredient to activating any and all of these tools—values, motivation, rewards, resources, support, a mature identity, and higher goals. You can succeed with these, and even with other tools you develop for yourself. Count on it.