

## Early Coping Strategies

The first few weeks after cutting down or stopping substance use can be a difficult time. Some people compare their substance to a best friend or a lover, and can feel sadness and grief without it.

There are, however, some important things you can do right away to help prevent a relapse back to problem using behaviour. Try out as many of the following suggestions as you can! The more action you can take, the easier it will be to keep to your substance use goal during this early time in your recovery:

- Throw out alcohol, other drugs and paraphernalia. If this is difficult for you, let a supportive, non-using friend help you.
- Break off all contact with people who drink heavily or use other drugs, and with dealers. This can be done by clearly telling these people that you don't want any further contact with them. If you are concerned about your safety, discuss your plans with a professional. Do not put yourself at risk of being harmed.
- If you live in an area where there is a lot of drug activity (using and dealing drugs), explore whether you can stay with supportive friends or family members for a while. Consider moving to a more substance-free area and do not tell drinking buddies, friends who use other drugs, or dealers where you have moved.
- Change your telephone number. Throw out telephone numbers of dealers.
- Have cheques automatically deposited into your bank account. Throw out 24-hour cash cards. Have someone hold on to your money for you.
- Try a new drug-free activity.
- Give self-help groups a try. This means trying out a number of different types and locations of meetings so that you can make an informed decision about whether there is a self-help group that is right for you.
- Talk to supportive friends, family or health professionals about situations that are difficult for you.
- Tell supportive friends (those who will not encourage you to use alcohol or other drugs) that you are no longer using substances.

### PRACTICE EXERCISE

Now come up with your own plan to help you cope in early recovery.

1. What high-risk people do you need to avoid at this time?

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2. What high-risk places do you need to avoid at this time?

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3. What high-risk things (e.g., drug paraphernalia, bottles) do you need to throw out or avoid at this time?

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4. What are some safe activities that you can get involved in now?

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5. Where can you seek support, or who can give you support?

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