



Recognizing Relapse

When Best Intentions Fail

Most of us who try to change a behavioral habit get discouraged when a “slip” or relapse occurs. We tend to say to ourselves, “I just can’t do it,” or “I’m too old to change,” or “I’m just no good.” We feel guilt and anger at ourselves, despite our best efforts to alter a bad habit. Whether it’s an eating disorder, smoking, drinking, abusive behavior or some other disorder, addictive behaviors are difficult to change.

Confronting Our Bad Habits

In confronting a bad habit, you must recognize that a “slip” (a single episode of returning to an old habit) doesn’t have to equal a relapse (the complete return to an

old habit). Breaking an addictive habit means more than stopping a particular behavior. It means stopping relapse. Only 20 percent of the people who seriously try to change an addictive behavior “kick it” on their first try. Most people need to try several times. If you’re not successful at first, blaming yourself only reinforces the bad habit. Don’t scold yourself.

Tactics: Slip vs. Relapse

Recognize that “slips” are normal. Each is also an opportunity to learn. Make a note of when a slip occurs. Treat it as an emergency in which immediate corrective action is needed. Renew your commitment and review the actions which led to the slip. This will uncover patterns that you need to avoid. Make plans to move beyond the slip and reward

yourself for positive actions. Also, ask others for assistance in returning to full recovery. A key tactic for stopping addictive behaviors is to handle slips positively and to prevent them from developing into a full-blown relapse. A slip is only a human misstep, not a failure in your overall willpower or your entire character.

Be on Guard

Rehearse exactly how to handle situations which may cause you to slip and which place you in danger of a relapse. Try to interrupt the sequence of events and your response that lead up to the slip. The ability to handle such situations and the temptations they produce is your golden key toward habit control. Don’t give up.

