

**Identifying Problem Areas
To Guide Skill Development
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

One of the main things that I teach newly recovering alcoholics/addicts to do, is to identify the roles that chemicals play in their lives. This is especially important since the chemical has occupied so many crucial roles or functions and that removing it from a person's life leaves big, gaping holes in their behavioral repertoire. When you identify the roles previously played by the chemical, you then identify possible healthy alternatives to replace the roles with. Early on, it is usually simple things like meetings, prayer, meditation, exercise, calling people for help, etc. Its pretty difficult to learn sophisticated living skills when you are hanging on by your fingernails. A little later in recovery, we are still working on replacing the roles with healthy alternatives, but we are focusing more on developing more in-depth living skills, and working to solve the most pressing of problems.

Often, by the time that someone finds his way to recovery, he has focused so much on getting the next drug, using it, and getting over it, that they don't have a full grasp of the disarray that his life is truly in. The bills may be stacked up and unpaid. There may be impending court dates. Extended family members may not be speaking to him. He may be unemployed or underemployed. He may lack frustration tolerance, stress management, feelings expression skills, and inability to communicate and problem solve with others. The following problems list can help the recovering person begin to repair the damage caused in his life by addiction. To use this checklist, identify which problems you have, rank them from most pressing to least pressing, taking into account the items as short term and long term goals.

The Problems Checklist

Check the problems on this list that you have currently. Identify whether you look at these items as short term or long term goals. Rank the ones you identified in terms of most pressing to least pressing, (i.e. #1, #2, #3).

Check Rank

- ___ ___ Housing, or appropriate place to live
- ___ ___ Medical or dental problems or need for checkups
- ___ ___ Regaining custody of children or finding Appropriate childcare
- ___ ___ Legal and court problems
- ___ ___ Relationship issues
- ___ ___ Social network problems (i.e. drug using friends/acquaintances)
- ___ ___ Feeling management skills
- ___ ___ Education issues such as going back to school, GED, additional training, etc.
- ___ ___ Psychological issues like anxiety, depression, mental confusion, mood swings, etc.
- ___ ___ Lack of structure and time management skills

- ___ ___ Lack of stress management skills
- ___ ___ Impatience, lack of frustration tolerance, demand for immediate gratification
- ___ ___ Lack of self-esteem, self-confidence, or positive identity
- ___ ___ Shame and guilt about hurting family or need to make amends
- ___ ___ Poor communication skills and/or poor conflict management skills
- ___ ___ Other obsessive compulsive behaviors
- ___ ___ Alienation, not feeling like you fit in, loneliness, isolation
- ___ ___ Lack of motivation or Procrastination
- ___ ___ Reliable Transportation
- ___ ___ Financial concerns or unpaid bills
- ___ ___ Job training or employment

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