

Worksheet for Identifying the Roles That Alcohol/Drugs Played and Healthy Replacements for Them

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

One of the most important tasks of early recovery from alcohol and other drug addiction is learning to replace the chemical with health living skills. When you have taken the chemical out of your life, it leaves a big gaping hole, where something of substance was. Alcohol or other drugs have served many purposes over the course of addiction. They have played many roles. They had meaningful functions in your life. When the chemical is removed from your behavioral repertoire, how will you deal with stress, an annoying coworker, insomnia, and task overload? In addiction, the chemical has been used as a substitute for living skills. Early recovery is a time of learning new living skills--partly so that you will not feel compelled to return to the chemical when you feel overwhelmed by the demands of day to day living. To prevent relapse in recovery, you must find healthy alternatives for the chemical.

Most people do not start drinking or using other mood altering drugs to numb emotional or psychological pain. They started drinking or using to have fun, enhance a good time, be a part of a social group or gathering. Once you have consumed the chemical you learn quickly that mood/mind altering drugs do exactly that. You learn that these chemicals work to relax you, give you courage, help you concentrate or focus. They make you more articulate, a better dancer, a good conversationalist, more outgoing, or a better lover-or at least you think the chemicals do that. And they do work for the purposes that you are applying them, at least temporarily.

Eventually, when you become dependent on the chemical to deal with life, with its challenges and ups and downs, the drugs (including alcohol) seem to have a mind of their own. Use takes on a momentum of its own, and eventually it's the drugs controlling you, rather than you controlling how, when, where, how much, and the outcomes.

It is inaccurate and ineffective to believe that if you can find out "why" you used in the first place and continued to use despite negative consequences, that you will be cured, fixed, or struck sober. However, once you are abstinent from the chemical, in order to stay sober, you must identify the roles that the chemicals have played in your life. It is too simplistic to say that these roles are "why" you drank/used. It is more complicated than that. However, to prevent relapse, you must find new things to do with your stress, anxiety, feelings, etc. than drink or use drugs.

Alcoholics/addicts use the chemical for numbing feelings, relaxing, giving them more self-confidence, to reduce inhibitions, to escape from problems temporarily, to not think about nagging thoughts, to reduce anxiety, and to feel a part of a group. There are many other roles or functions of the chemical.

Recovering people must identify for themselves the roles that the chemical played in their lives. Then identify the possible healthy replacements for those roles. To assist you in this process, use the following worksheet format:

Worksheet For Identifying Healthy Replacements for Alcohol/Drugs

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Use separate paper and the following format to assist you in identifying the roles that the chemicals have played in your life and possible healthy alternatives to those chemicals. You may also use a Two Column Format, where the first column is entitled "Roles" and the second column is entitled "Healthy Alternatives". First identify a reason that you drank/used, or a role or function that the chemical played; then identify some things that you can do instead of drinking/using when the need for that role/purpose/function returns. An example of drinking for stress reduction being replaced by exercise, AA meetings, relaxation skills, etc. "stress"

Examples:

Role - Reduce Stress

Replacements - Physical Exercise, self-hypnosis, guided imagery, learning new problem solving skills, eliminating procrastination, practice better organization, practicing cognitive therapy

Role - Having fun/entertainment

Replacements - Develop social support system and friendship network of people who do not drink/use, develop hobbies, take salsa dance lessons, learn to play tennis, watch movies with friends,

Role - Deal with feelings

Replacements - Learn to identify, own, and express feelings appropriately, learn and practice assertiveness skills, write letters to people that you have feelings about (but don't mail them), use prayer, look for the part that you play in the resentment or the conflict, talk to sponsor or friend, remind yourself that feelings are normal, that everyone has them, and that you have a choice and a responsibility about what to do with them.

Role - Relax and go to sleep

Replacements - Use good sleep hygiene, get exercise earlier in the day, read Big Book in bed, use thought stopping techniques to cut out mind-racing, ruminating, or worry, make an ongoing gratitude list and rehearse it in your mind as you lie in bed, take warm bath/shower, listen to relaxation tapes.

The above are only a few examples of the roles that the chemicals may have played in your life. The examples of replacements are also just a sample. You might have the same replacements used for different role categories. For example, you might use exercise to deal with anxiety, stress, anger, boredom, fun, and sleep (among others). The point is to identify what you used the chemical for and to identify replacements that you will actually try and use. Make a list. Add to it as you think of new role categories and replacement options. Make sure that your replacement lists include social activities that bring you into frequent contact with other sober people. Post it by your door, in your vehicle, at your job-wherever you can see it when you most need to be reminded that there are alternatives in your life to the chemical.

2010, Worksheet for Identifying The Roles That Alcohol/Drugs Played and Healthy Replacements For Them
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The more techniques that you try, the more you use and practice them, the more likely you are to choose alternatives to the chemical, when you would have normally used the chemical in the past.

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Hubbard House Publishing, Stillwater, OK.

www.peggyferguson.com

www.stillwatermarriagecounselor.com



Understanding Cross Addiction To Prevent Relapse

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

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By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.
www.peggyferguson.com
www.stillwatermarriagecounselor.com