

**Addiction and Recovery**  
**Do You Really Have to Hit Bottom To Recover?**  
**By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

There is a generally misguided notion that you have to "hit bottom" to be able to get sober and stay sober. "Hitting bottom" is usually seen as the loss of the things that you value in your life. It is an individually defined event and the concept has probably hindered the recovery efforts of a lot of people or at least served as a rationalization for continued drinking.

For some people hitting bottom is embarrassing themselves in public-once. For another, it may be spending so much money on their drug of choice that they can't pay the bills. For some people getting a divorce is their bottom. For others, a DUI is the bottom. For others still it might be running over a grandchild's bicycle with the car. It could be the culminating event that gets your attention.

Denial keeps the disease active. The reality of the alcoholic's circumstances, the destructiveness of the drinking, the level of the negative consequences are distorted in such a way that the drinking can comfortably continue. It is difficult for the alcoholic to connect negative life events with their drinking. Problems in one's life are chalked up to anything BUT the drinking.

Conceptually, hitting bottom is the place where the alcoholic begins to see the extent of the destructiveness of the addiction on his/her life and becomes motivated to stop drinking. For many alcoholics, hitting bottom is that emotional space where you are able to admit that the problem is actually the drinking and that help is needed to stop the drinking. Hitting bottom also involves humility and willingness to accept help.

The notion that you have to lose everything in your life that matters to you, in order to get and stay sober, is inaccurate and damaging. In actuality, the more infrastructure that you still have left in your life, the more likely that you are to be successful with your sobriety efforts. If you still have your family, your job, an income, a home and people who love you and are still talking to you, you still have your infrastructure.

If you have lost the infrastructure of your life, there are more obstacles between you and your ultimate recovery. It's like trying to work your way up to ground level. It is hard enough to get clean and sober without having to figure out where you are going to sleep, find work, and grieve the losses of your relationships. Imagine trying to deal with the stress of having lost everything while trying to get and stay clean and sober. It would be more difficult. Fortunately hitting bottom can be a "moment of clarity" when you realize the extent of the problems caused by the drinking, and become willing to get the help you need to learn how to get and stay sober.