

## **Drinking/Using Dreams as A Normal Part of Recovery**

**By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

When you have a drinking or using dream, you may wake up not really knowing if it actually happened. Many people in early recovery find it disturbing and frightening when they experience a "using" dream. Drinking and using dreams are those dreams where the central theme or experience is about drinking or using. Common examples include being in a position to be tempted to drink or use other drugs, having the feeling or the sense that you did use, or experiencing yourself in the act of drinking and/or using, or successfully avoiding drinking or using.

These dreams can feel so real that, upon awakening, they can leave you confused about whether you had actually used. They can also set the a disturbing tone for your day. It can involve an unsettling feeling that creates or exacerbates anxiety, tension, or stress. You may even be embarrassed to tell others that you had a drinking or using dream.

These frightening dreams are a normal part of the healing process and do not mean that you are not working a good program of recovery. The more days, weeks, and months that you remain abstinent from alcohol and other mood altering drugs, the fewer the drinking or using dreams you will have.

Care should be taken after having a drinking or using dream to avoid any other cues or triggers, and to treat the dream as a cue or trigger in its own right. Drinking and/or using dreams that occur in later recovery after extended abstinence could possibly signal heightened vulnerability to relapse. One should maintain conscious awareness of any possible triggers and employ the necessary recovery skills.

It is, however, fairly common for recovering people to have drinking/using dreams around their recovery anniversaries, especially in the first few years. It is important to avoid shaming or blaming yourself if you experience drinking or using dreams. Although conscious awareness is called for, drinking/using dreams do not signal failure in recovery efforts.

As with any increase in triggers or cues, people in recovery should utilize good trigger management activities such as the ones listed below:

- step up meeting attendance
- maintain an appropriate scheduled routine
- increase use of appropriate living skills
- maintain close connections to recovery support people
- get physical exercise
- use good nutrition
- manage stress appropriately
- deal with feelings appropriately as they come up
- deliberately make good choices about the people, places, and things, that you spend time with

Drinking and/or using dreams do not have to create a problem for you. It is important to keep in mind that they are not your fault. They are indeed, a normal part of recovery, (especially early on). They can also serve as a signal to pay attention.

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