

**Addiction and Recovery:  
Plan Your Vacation, Not Your Relapse  
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When facing the loss of most of one's structure in situations like vacation or business trips, relapsive thinking can return, even in established, stable recovery. The relapse thoughts can include some of the below, but this is not an all inclusive lists. When planning a vacation or business trip that takes you out of your established routine and structure, listen to your own "self-talk". Pay close attention to those ideas that may place you in slippery places, around slippery people, or in slippery activities.

- No one will know if I drink.
- It's nobody's business but my own.
- This is a one-time only event
- It won't hurt anybody.
- I work hard; I deserve it.
- No one can blame me if I "mistakenly" take an alcoholic beverage someone gives me.

All of these relapse justifications assume things about addiction and recovery that are wrong. They make the following assumptions:

1. Once you take that first drink or drug, you can stop. You may believe that it has been a long enough time since you have used, that you can practice control this one time. This idea rests on a couple of notions that are inconsistent with the nature of addiction.
  - A) One notion is that control can be re-established or return through abstinence over time. One of the hallmarks of alcoholism or other drug addiction is loss of control. Once you are addicted you cannot regain control. You cannot go back to not being alcoholic or otherwise addicted. Alcoholics and addicts often believe they still have control long after they have lost it. This distorted thinking enables people to continue to drink or use despite the obvious negative consequences. Alcoholics and addicts typically "chase an illusion of control" for a very long time before the truth smacks them in the face. If your use was out of control in the past, it will be in the future. You cannot go back to controlled use (if you ever had it) and not being alcoholic/addicted.
  - B) Another mistaken notion is that the addiction cycle will not be re-established by a short term relapse. You may be out of control in this slip or you might not have obvious negative consequences from drinking "this one time". And some of the negative consequences of drinking or using may not be so obvious. An example is that a "slip" can trigger a return to cravings, which of course increases the probability of continued drinking and sustained relapse. One of the consequences of taking the first drink is that it may not be "this one time". Some people who relapse are not able to make it back to recovery.

2. The idea that “no one will know” is part of the addictive thinking that kept the disease active all those years. Remember when you made promises that you wouldn’t drink, found yourself unable to keep those promises, and believed that you could hide it from your loved one(s). Even if you could keep it a secret, you would know. You would be carrying around a secret about your addiction. You would return deception back to your recovery, after all the work you have done to dump those secrets, get honest, find your “true self” and to stay real in your new life.
3. The idea that your recovery is nobody’s business but your own is completely wrong. Think about the people who love you and their investment in your recovery. Recall how many hours they waited up for you, prayed for you, consulted with experts for you, and worried about you when your recovery was not going so smoothly. Recall the anguish, the tears, and the look of fear on their faces. Think about the people who have invested in you and believed in you—your friends, the people you work with, people in recovery, your extended family. Your recovery is everyone’s business who love you and who count on you.
4. The idea that drinking or use of drugs is a reward for good behavior is completely backward. Sobriety and recovery is the reward for hard work at resisting the urge to use, at replacing the chemical with healthy living skills, at managing your emotions, problems, and even celebrations in a new life-enhancing way. What you deserve for all your hard work is firmness in the ability to maintain your recovery, regardless of where you may go, even in the face of reduced external structure and less obvious accountability. Drinking or using “for reward” is actually a negative consequence of not appropriately managing your recovery.
5. Blame or excuses for relapse are stop-gap justifications. You are responsible for your own recovery. You have responsibility for the choices you make. Excuses for bad choices may temporarily get you off the hook with someone who is basing their decisions on your behavior, but ultimately those excuses will be revealed for what they are—excuses. Family members in recovery have been taught to ignore the words and observe the behavior in such circumstances. They should be able to tell the difference by now, between what you say and what you do and to base their choices on behavior.

One of the best ways to combat relapse thinking is to tell yourself the truth each time one of the justifications for relapse occurs. The list above is only an example of the kinds of things you can use to remind yourself of truths about addiction and recovery. When going on vacation or a business trip, have a great time, and remember that you have learned how to have fun sober. You deserve to come home with your recovery intact. You might even make it a point to go to some meetings while on your trip.