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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Hubbard House Publishing, Stillwater, OK.