

What to do When Your Child Relapses Just After Treatment

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When your young adult or adolescent child is displaying signs of relapse shortly after leaving the addiction treatment center, there are steps you can take to address the situation. The treatment team and your child probably developed a formal relapse prevention plan before discharge. You may have been involved in developing a behavioral contract in anticipation of your child coming back to the family home.

Either of these plans could have outlined parental expectations for maintaining recovery-oriented behavior in exchange for residing in the family home and other benefits. If no such agreement or plan was established before your child left treatment, there is still time to create one. A behavioral relapse prevention agreement isn't about punishment but rather establishing and upholding appropriate boundaries and structure to support the individual's recovery journey and facilitate a swift recovery if relapse occurs.

Parents who suspect their child has resumed substance use should consider conducting drug testing to confirm their suspicions and reduce denial or protestations of innocence. Home drug test kits for a variety of substances are available at local drug stores, or the parent can arrange for a urine drug screen at a hospital or health department. When confronting the individual about their substance use, having tangible test results makes it harder for them to refute the truth.

As a family member living in the family home, your child probably has access to various amenities such as the house, cars, television, and cell phone, which may serve as motivational factors. In the event of a positive drug test, you can establish a behavioral agreement outlining the

consequences of future relapse. Those amenities can and should be a part of the contract.

Tailoring it to your child's and family's specific needs would be best. It might include the following components:

In exchange for residing in the family home and receiving support, the individual with SUD agrees to abstain from all mood-altering substances, including alcohol (except for psychiatric medications prescribed by a psychiatrist.)

If a relapse occurs, the individual agrees to return to inpatient treatment, a halfway house, or another therapeutic setting pre-agreed upon by all parties. As a consequence of the relapse, the individual may lose privileges, such as access to the car, television, cell phone, etc., for a specified period or until observable behavioral changes indicating a return to recovery are demonstrated.

Additional supportive measures may be implemented to support recovery maintenance, such as attending a specified number of 12-step meetings per week, undergoing random drug tests, adhering to a curfew, participating in day treatment, or attending outpatient counseling. If relapse recurs, the individual may forfeit the privilege of residing in the family home.

Parents should establish their boundaries and be prepared to enforce them. If there's a firm boundary that the individual cannot reside in the family home while actively using substances, the agreement should clearly state it. All parties involved should sign, and date the agreement.

It's essential to understand that parents cannot abandon minors. If the child cannot continue residing in the family home due to ongoing substance use, alternative living arrangements, such as long-term inpatient treatment or a halfway house, should be arranged. Community mental health or substance abuse treatment centers often have resources and referrals for such programs.

Parents are encouraged to attend support groups like Al-Anon regularly and seek guidance from individuals who have experience with a child's substance use disorder. Family counseling with an addiction specialist can help navigate emotions and communication strategies while assisting everyone to improve their problem-solving skills.

Educating yourself about addiction and its impact on families is crucial. Remember that you're not to blame for your child's substance use disorder, and you cannot control or fix it for them. By learning about family dynamics in addiction and recovery, you can identify enabling behaviors and encourage healthy boundaries that promote the individual's recovery journey. **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2009 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.**



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