

# Recovery Beyond Relapse

Susan Peabody

We drink because we're depressed, and we're depressed because we drink. We use drugs because we're ashamed and we're ashamed because we use drugs. We chase after people because we're lonely and we're lonely because we chase after unavailable people. Then we relapse if we are lucky enough to have found our way to recovery. What's going on here? Why are we acting in such self-defeating ways?

The answer lies in our childhood. We were neglected or abused. We were abandoned or incested. We experienced some unfortunate incident in our family, and everyone got put on the back burner as the tragedy unfolded. For me, it was the death of my brother when I was 12. According to the experts on childhood trauma, this alters our brain permanently—not to mention our psyche and spirit—the parts of us who need love to thrive.

To avoid the constant cycle of relapse followed by a return to recovery, we have to deal with these underlying issues. We could seek professional help with someone who understands addiction, or we could seek out a “Wounded Healer.” This is someone who understands what we've been through because they have experienced the same thing themselves. They become our “Enlightened Witness,” as Alice Miller explains in her book *The Drama of the Gifted Child*. This “Wounded Healer” can be more compassionate and empathetic than non-addicts. Whomever you choose, make sure you can trust them and that they have their best interests at heart.

Ask him or her to participate in the following process: Let's use an alcoholic as our example and his Sponsor as our “Enlightened Witness.”

1. Admit that you have underlying issues: Announce this at a meeting or to your Sponsor.
2. Identify the underlying issues: If you do not remember your childhood look at photographs, talk to siblings, friends or your parents who knew you when you were a child. Meditate or analyze your dreams. The truth will come out if you want it to. Once I was willing to remember, I started having flashbacks.
3. Talk about what you remember.
4. Write in your journal about what happened.
5. *Feel* all of your emotions as they come up without drinking or using other unhealthy mood-altering experiences. Do not let shame stop you from feeling the pain.

6. Grieve what you went through. If you can't do this directly, imagine that your inner child was hurt, and do for him what you cannot do for yourself.

7. Get angry for awhile. This is an important step in the process. It is part of letting go. See Susan Anderson's book: *The Journey from Abandonment and Healing*.

8. Do not get lost in the anger. Move on and put this all into perspective. Were the people who hurt you abused or neglected? What about your grandparents? If you are a parent did you pass down the pain to your children to ease your own burden" I did . . .

9. After you put things into perspective, consider forgiving these people. To forgive means to let go of resentment. You do not have to like them, associate with them, or let them continue to hurt you.

10. Accept what happened to you. These were the cards you were dealt. Maybe something good came out of this. Maybe not. I became a teacher because of what happened to me. Acceptance is the answer to all things painful, as they like to say in Alcoholics Anonymous.

11. Move on. The past will come back to haunt you now and then because this is the way the brain works, but as time goes on the pain of the past will lessen and come up less often to disrupt your new life in recovery.

12. Take care of yourself. Do for yourself what your parents could not or would not do. When I discovered that my mother was mentally ill, and could not care for me, it took the sting out. I thought she neglected me on purpose. Her time in the mental hospital was kept from me. What John Bradshaw called a "toxic secret."

13. Be grateful for this process that is going to free you, change you, and bring you a brighter tomorrow.

14. Celebrate your victory and hard work.

15. Pass all of this on to the next poor soul looking for help.

16. Thank your Higher Power, if you have one, for recovery. It is a gift. Not everyone find recovery.

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