OVERCOMING DISCOURAGEMENT

The need for treatment can often leave one discouraged. Difficult situations, failures, and past disappointments tend to be the main reasons to seek help. Challenges from the recent past often affect the present moment and previously failed treatment programs and relapse can add to one's discouragement. It is important to understand the effects of discouragement, but also know, with assurance and confidence, hope can be built.

WRITING YOUR STORY

Hope is a necessary element to move forward in recovery. What situations and circumstances have caused you to feel discouraged and hopeless? Describe how drugs and alcohol led to increased discouragement and hopelessness.

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UNDERSTANDING HOPELESSNESS

Hope is a mindset and belief. Hopelessness is also a mindset and belief. Helplessness is a series of actions (or non-actions) directly related to a hopeless mindset. Hopelessness grows in many ways. It starts small but is easily nourished and grows quickly. By looking at feelings of hopelessness and the resulting helplessness in your life, they can be addressed, learned from, and as you move away from them, hope can develop.

Some circumstances and observations that add discouragement may include:

- Past mistakes
- Being made fun of or ridiculed
- Repeated reminders of my failures
- Surviving a severe trauma
- Starting things and not completing them
- Previous mental health hospitalizations
DEVELOPING HOPE - WORKSHEET 1

- Failed relationships
- Job loss or occupational difficulties
- Living in poverty
- Chronic mental illness
- Having faults pointed out repeatedly
- Rarely having affirmation or approval
- Believing lies I’ve been told
- Being criticized
- Having multiple addictions
- Being homeless
- Loved ones with very high expectations
- Past drug or alcohol relapses
- Having been abused physically, mentally, or sexually
- Being rejected or misunderstood
- Failing in other treatment programs
- Knowing I’ve broken promises

Give an example of a time you felt defeated, overwhelmed, and hopeless. How did those difficult experiences and feelings affect your mental health or drug or alcohol use?

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FEELING DISCOURAGED AND HOPELESS

Have difficult circumstances made you feel defeated and want to give up? Work through the following list and mark the statements that express your thoughts and discouraged feelings.

☐ I’ll never get a job          ☐ I’ll never get out of legal trouble
☐ I’ll never get my act together     ☐ I don’t have close friends
☐ I’ll always be depressed                         ☐ Life is overwhelming and just too hard
☐ My finances are ruined                        ☐ I can’t even raise my own children
☐ I’ll never meet the person of my dreams        ☐ I’m hopeless
☐ I can’t make anything of myself        ☐ I just can’t be happy again
☐ I’m not making any progress          ☐ I won’t beat this addiction
☐ I’ll never be normal                         ☐ I won’t be able to finish school
DEVELOPING HOPE - WORKSHEET 1

Describe what it is like when you feel hopeless.

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EFFECTS OF HOPELESSNESS

Consider the following list and mark the feelings and actions occurring in your hopeless times:

- Sadness
- Despair
- Increased cynicism
- Discouragement
- Shame and embarrassment
- Lowered energy and lowered motivation
- Increased substance use behaviors
- Increased fear of failure
- Suicidal ideation or attempts
- Self-doubt, low self-esteem
- Feelings of uselessness
- Increased anger, irritability, and frustration
- Increased negative thinking
- Self-sabotaging behaviors
- Depression
- Isolation and avoidance patterns
- Self-injury behaviors
- Helplessness
- Lack of interest or motivation
- Indecisiveness
- Desperation
- Guilt

THE ART OF MOVING FORWARD

If you are not careful, negative momentum can quickly build and hopelessness can take root. Expect delays along the way. It is tempting to connect hope and confidence to your success and failure, especially when drugs and alcohol are involved. Do not tie your optimism and hope only to abstinence or your hopelessness to substance use or relapse. Instead of trying harder to never make another mistake, accept where you are, learn what you can, let it go, and move on. Dwelling on mistakes will keep you stuck in the past. Your recovery and future are ahead of you, not behind you.