

Activity 9-3: Caregiver relapse prevention plan

Think about your own needs as the relative of a person with concurrent substance use and mental health problems. As we discussed in Chapter 5, it is essential for you to take good care of yourself and to develop a self-care regime. Should you begin to notice signs of increased stress, anxiety, depression, fatigue or other symptoms in yourself that might indicate that you are becoming overwhelmed (*caregiver relapse*), what steps might you take to care for yourself? Write down a personal “caregiver relapse prevention action plan” for yourself.

If my family member suffers a relapse, I will take the following steps to care for my:

Physical health:

Emotional health:

Social health:

Spiritual health:

Relapse prevention

Sample caregiver relapse prevention plan

Physical health:

If my husband Frank starts drinking again, I will take care of myself physically by taking a “time out” to go for a long walk. This helps me to clear my head and calm down so I don’t blow up at him and call him a failure. I will also try to stick with my plan to eat good food, but if I slip and go back to junk food a couple of times, I will be kind to myself—relapses are stressful for all of us in the family and if I eat a bag of chips when I’m upset, it doesn’t mean I’m an awful person. I will just go back to eating a good diet afterward.

Emotional health:

I will take care of myself emotionally by reading the material that I got from my family support group and from Frank’s therapist about why people who stop drinking suddenly start again. This always helps me to remember that addiction is an illness that gets better gradually. It will also remind me that recovery is often a long, slow process and that relapses are often part of the person’s journey. Maybe this will help both me and my husband learn something positive from this experience.

I will also read the material I have about bipolar disorder to remind myself that sometimes, when people start getting too high or too depressed, they might turn to alcohol for comfort. All of these things help me cope when Frank picks up a drink again after being sober for a while. When I understand what’s going on better, I don’t blame him or myself. This helps me to stay calm and I don’t end up freaking out.

Social health:

If Frank relapses, I will call my best friends: Lucy from my family mood disorders support group, and Beth from my Al-Anon group. I will ask them to go to a family group meeting with me and then out for a coffee after.

Spiritual health:

I will increase the length of my yoga exercises to more than 15 minutes, and I will go back to my daily meditation readings.