



Red Flags for Decision Making – Warning Signs for Productive Living

When dealing with substance use and mental health issues it is important to make positive lifestyle changes. However, it is just as important to make sure to avoid repeating past mistakes, especially ones that can derail your progress. One way that we can prevent repeating our mistakes is to see the warning signs or “red flags” ahead of time and then change our course in time to prevent making a bad decision. This exercise is about recognizing some red flags in life and then coming up with a personal plan to prevent negative decisions so we can stay on the positive course toward forward progress.

Opening Exercise - Directions – Review this list below and consider the following points for each one and discuss your answers:

- Have you heard this before? If so, what were the circumstances?
- What **red flags** come to mind? What potential concerns may be present when you hear this kind of statement?

12 “Don’t worry” Phrases that Should Potentially Trigger Worry - (...Or at least trigger some legitimate concern because of potential red flags)

Have you ever heard someone say...?

- “Don’t worry, there’s no way we’ll get caught”
- “Don’t worry, this is 100% a sure thing”
- “Don’t worry you have absolutely nothing to lose”
- “Don’t worry that was the past, I’ve changed”
- “Don’t worry, there is no chance (I/you) will get pregnant”
- “Don’t worry I know I did it to all of them, but I won’t do it to you”
- “Don’t worry, if something goes wrong and we get caught, I will just say it’s all my fault”
- “Don’t worry, even though I may look a little off, I am in complete control”
- “Don’t worry, all of those warnings are just there to scare people”
- “Don’t worry I know you caught me, but this was the actually first and only time I ever did this”
- “Don’t worry, I know you found out, but I promise was going to tell you”
- “Don’t worry, you can’t get hooked if you are just smart about it”

Other? – Have you heard any other dubious “don’t worry” statements in your life? – *If yes please share them with the rest of the group*



Process:

Discuss: “Sensible people will see trouble coming and avoid it, but an unthinking person will walk right into it and regret it later.” (Proverbs 22:3)

Discuss the following RED FLAGS and what the greater meaning could be... (Answers provided)

A plan or scheme sounds “too good to be true” ... **(It probably is)**

Someone lies about little things, sometimes even for no reason... **(They will very likely lie about big things)**

Person treats everyone else poorly... **(You’re probably next in due time)**

Someone goes out of their way repeatedly to convince you how honest they are... **(They are probably not)**

Disconnect – Lots of positive words but not a lot of action to back it up... **(Their words have little value)**

Ideas designed to appeal to your emotions but little substance behind them... **(Probably not reliable)**

Someone trying to make a deal with you looks like they could pack up and leave quickly... **(They just might)**

Person has an answer for every single thing... **(No one really has an answer for everything)**

Person uncaring with animals, children and/or family... **(Good chance they may treat you poorly eventually)**

Again, what are some of other red flags that you try to always stay aware of in life?



Planning to Avoid Mistakes – The 10 R's

Directions – Review the following list of steps for avoiding mistakes by staying aware of red flags. If done in person, hand everyone a copy of this list and everyone should put an S next to areas of STRENGTH and an N next to areas where you might NEED IMPROVEMENT – Be honest with yourself. If done via telehealth just discuss this list together as a group and have the group voluntarily comment on areas where they are stronger or need improvement. **When possible, discuss personal examples of real-life situations that apply to these principles**

- 1- **Relax and Review** – When you are around new people or in new situations make sure to keep an eye out for red flags. Allow yourself the time to calmly contemplate what is really being said and done and if you see any red flags, slow down and think before you move further
- 2- **Refrain** – Impulsive decisions can be a trap. If you see red flags, hold off on making a move
- 3- **Rewind** – If it looks like a duck and sounds like a duck, it must be a duck – Does something sound familiar? Use your own past experiences to help guide you from repeating former mistakes whenever you see red flags
- 4- **Reason** – Let your thinking be your guide instead of your emotions and fantasies. Try not to let yourself be seduced by being sold a “dream” scenario. Keep it real with yourself using the following guidelines
 - a. **Reasonable** – If someone is proposing something, does it sound reasonable?
 - b. **Realistic** – Same as above, putting emotions aside, does everything seem realistic?
 - c. **Rational** – Using your rational mind does it all add up and make sense?
- 5- **Research**- We live in the age of Google so why not do some research and check into anything that does not sound right? Talk to others you know who you can trust too
- 6- **Risk Analysis** – Once you do all of the other R's, make a decision based on a sound **risk analysis** which examines the rewards and the risks – Ask yourself, are you really ready for worst case scenario? How likely is that to happen? Sometimes it is best to go by the old saying “When in doubt, leave it out”

Discuss areas of strength and areas needing improvement as a group