



“Two-Way Coping Strategies” for Mental Health and Substance Use Issues

Important: Read First – This worksheet highlights similarities between substance use and mental health disorders, however this paper is not claiming to offer “the solution” for mental health disorders simply by comparing the two. Actually, mental health recovery is often complex and multi-faceted, thus requiring a diverse and varied array of strategies, therapies, coping skills and other treatments based on each individual's unique circumstances and symptoms. For example, mental health recovery may require a combination of use of medication, individual therapy, group therapy, support groups, family therapy, trauma therapy, cognitive-behavioral techniques and a host of other coping strategies and treatment approaches. This exercise just offers some additional ways to view and address mental health with the understanding that some ideas may work for some but not necessarily for everyone.

4 Concepts from Addiction Recovery that may be Helpful for Some Types of Mental Health Disorders:

___ **Insight** – Substance use related problems rarely (if ever) get any better without first some degree of insight. Self-awareness of the existence of any problem is needed in order to begin to make some changes to improve that problem. The same principle is true when it comes to mental health recovery, healing starts with insight.

___ **Support** – “You cannot do it alone” is often heard in the world of addiction recovery. Mental health closely follows this principle as well. Positive socialization and support can also be essential in mental health recovery. An encouraging friend and a compassionate, listening ear are excellent “medicine” for most mental health issues just the same as for addiction.

___ **Relapse Prevention Planning** is such a huge part of addiction recovery. Once progress is made in recovery it is so important to have a plan to sustain that progress and avoid going backward. The same is true for mental health. When someone makes progress mentally and emotionally, then planning to stay on a positive path is extremely helpful. Two important concepts from relapse prevention planning are:

- **Triggers** – Knowing what types of people, places, things, thoughts, feelings, conditions and events that may disrupt progress is important for both addiction and mental health recovery.
- **Relapse Warning Signs** – It is also helpful to know what types of attitudes, thinking and behaviors are signs that things may be starting to move in a negative direction.

___ **“One Day at a Time”** is a saying so often associated with substance use recovery, as taking things little by little, day by day (or even hour by hour) can be so helpful especially when life feels overwhelming. The idea of “one day at a time” works extremely well for mental health issues like depression, anxiety and others.

___ **Acceptance** is another idea often talked about in addiction recovery. “Accepting the things we cannot change...” has helped so many who struggled with addiction. Acceptance is also very helpful with mental health disorders as well. Often accepting our current circumstances that we may not be able to change at the moment, no matter what they may be, can so much better than “swimming against the current” and hoping for “magic” answers to suddenly happen or just waiting for things to get better on their own.

After reviewing and discussing this list as a group, place your initials in the line next to each of the above concepts that you feel can be helpful for you. Discuss your answers as a group.



Other recovery concepts that can be effective for both addiction and mental health recovery:

___ **CBT Skills** – CBT stands for Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy which is based on the principle that if you can change your thinking, you can change your feelings and behavior. CBT is a huge part of recovery from substance use disorders as part of that process is to change “addictive thinking” patterns. This is also highly effective in mental health recovery. Changing negative thinking can help with a variety of mental health disorders including depression, anxiety and others. There are many CBT skills but here are two that are easy to use and very effective when practiced for either substance use issues, mental health or both

- **Positive Self Talk** – This involves learning to tell yourself positive and encouraging messages that eventually take the place of negative self-messages. Ex.: *“I can do this” or “I can and will get better!”*
- **Cognitive Reframing** – This involves challenging irrational thinking and then restating these thoughts in a more accurate and hopeful light. For example, someone depressed may say something like *“There is no point in trying, things will always turn out bad”* – Cognitive reframing of that statement to be more accurate and hopeful may sound like: *“The truth is that sometimes things will not work out the way that I want them too but this does not always happen and if I keep trying, things will eventually get better”*

___ **Exercise** – Getting up and getting active and moving is proven by research to be effective in helping with both substance use and mental health issues.

___ **Hobbies/New Interests** – Filling empty time with positive things that we can learn to take an interest in, is effective for both substance use and mental health

___ **Searching for Meaning and Purpose** – Increasing awareness and involvement in things that are deeper, more purposeful and more meaningful than the day-to-day grind is proven to be helpful with both substance use and mental health issues

___ **Therapy for Trauma (when applicable)** – If there are unresolved issues from the past that are impacting current functioning, then getting some help with past trauma can make a difference with both substance use and mental health issues

___ **Medication (When appropriate)** – Sometimes motivation and effort are not enough. When a struggle with mental health or addiction is persistent and does not get better just by working on it, then there is no shame in seeing an appropriate prescriber for a consultation for medication for help with a substance use disorder, mental health or both. Taking medication for these issues is not a “crutch” and it does not mean someone is “weak” but rather is just means some extra help is needed. To put it in perspective would you criticize someone for taking insulin for diabetes or for taking high blood pressure medication to prevent a heart attack?

After discussing these additional concepts, write your initials next to the ideas you are either working on or considering working on to help improve your situation. Discuss your choices

And then it happens...
One day you wake up and you're in this place.
You're in this place where everything feels right.
Your heart is calm. Your soul is lit. Your thoughts are
positive. Your vision is clear. Your faith is stronger
than ever. And you're at peace. At peace with where
you've been. At peace with what you've been
through. And at peace with where you're headed...