

# ***RELAPSE PREVENTION***

**CRIMINAL THINKING/BEHAVIOR GROUP**

**A ROAD MAP TO SUCCESS**

*To many, total abstinence is easier than total moderation"*

Saint Augustine

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# WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

This is only one of the many questions you will be asking yourself as you begin your recovery process. The biggest question you will probably be looking to answer is "Why did I do it?" You may also be asking, "What do I need to do so that I will never do this again?"

The basic reason that you are here is quite simple, you are a criminal offender. The question of why you are in this group is quite different and may only be answered by you and your motivations for joining the group. If your motivation is to stay out of prison, you may need to look closer at what you want. Your crime is a part of many behavior patterns that affect your thoughts and actions. The memory of being in prison will eventually fade and, if the driving factors behind your offense behavior are not thoroughly explored and new patterns of thought and behavior developed, you will most likely offend again. Current research shows that many offenders re-offend 3-5 years after their release. This is about how long it takes for those adverse memories of prison life to fade and for you to become more comfortable in the outside world. There can be only one prime motivation for working in this group that will truly make a difference: To not have one more victim. If that is not your motivation, do not give up now. The therapy process may help you to find some answers to your questions, but it will take hard, sometimes painful work.

## WHY DID I DO THIS?

First, there is no simple answer to this question. Many factors played a role in you becoming a criminal offender. And although you may believe that you are unique and no one else could have possibly lived through what you have and did what you did you will find that you are really not that much different from other criminal offenders who are in the group with you. You probably came from a family where one of your parents, most likely your father was absent. One, or possibly both of your parents had a drug and/or alcohol addiction and you most likely used drugs or alcohol at an early age. You probably felt that you did not fit in with your family or you assumed a role that was not appropriate for a child in the family such as caring for your siblings or acting as an intimate partner to your parent(s).

You probably did not do well in school. You may have had very good grades but went through periods where your grades would drop; you probably did not do homework or take part in many after school activities. You were bored and did not relate well to other students.

You may also have been subjected to some form of abuse, especially sexual and/or physical abuse. If you did, you probably did not tell anyone. In fact, you may have never spoken about it with anyone.

As an adult you did not feel like you fit into the social scene. If you were married, your marriage was turbulent and may have ended in divorce. Your work history is unstable and you may fluctuate between workaholic and failure. You are probably wondering what kind of work you are going to do when you are released.

You may have questions about your personal identity and feel out of touch with yourself. Finally, your criminal behavior most likely began at an early age. You have probably been in trouble with the law and have committed many crimes for which you were never caught.

The cycle of your behavior is influenced by many different factors. You must work on identifying changing these many and varied aspects of your past and present life if you hope to be successful in your future life. You can not focus solely on your criminal behavior and hope to change completely.

You do have many problems in your life and are feeling a lot of pain and frustration. But you have taken the important first step to changing your criminal behavior, but you have a lot of work to do.

You will learn a lot more about why you did what you did as you work through some of these issues.

# WHAT DO I DO NOW?

The first step to change is to fully participate with your group. You can not change if you do not talk about your problems, your behaviors, your feelings and what you have done. You must take complete responsibility for your actions and be accountable for your future actions. The group process begins with a complete disclosure of your past criminal behavior, whether you were arrested for these crimes or not! You must also understand that you have many different areas of your life to work on, you can not focus solely on your offense.

In disclosing your past criminal history you will tell honestly and openly the details of your crimes; what you did, who the victim(s) was/were, how many times you committed a crime and when. You may be embarrassed or ashamed but you must be open and honest in your disclosure. This is the foundation from which you will build your new life. All of your past criminal behavior was built on a foundation of secrecy, you must have a new, open foundation.

You will be questioned and receive feedback from the group members and your therapist. This is the premise of group therapy; listening to other's view points and ideas and applying those views to your life. You will gain new knowledge and be able to examine your behavior through others. You may also be confronted about your behaviors, especially your behavior in group. This is a very important tool. You may use these tools to grow as you learn more about yourself and become more familiar with the group process.

## BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

In beginning your journey to recovery you will encounter many obstacles and barriers that you must overcome. Most of these barriers will come from within yourself. A common trait of many criminal offenders is to over-simplify their life. When speaking of past abuse in their lives many offenders say things like, "It wasn't that bad", or "I kind of got used to it." This trait is also carried over to the actions and effects of their crime, "I just...", or "I only..." These are examples of some of the many *defense mechanisms* common to many criminal offenders beginning treatment.

When you are defensive in treatment you are basically refusing to accept the need to face your responsibility for your actions. Any change you do make will be superficial and will provide no genuine help in living a successful life. Defensive behavior is a part of your past history and takes many forms. They are mainly a way to avoid dealing with the truth and reality of your life. The most common defense mechanisms of criminal offenders are *minimization, denial, rationalization, intellectualizing and dependency on religion*.

Minimization is an attempt to make your actions seem less serious than they really are, i.e., "I didn't physically hurt anybody." When you minimize your behavior you deliberately attempt to lessen the effects of and your responsibility for your actions.

Denial is refusing to accept or believe the truth about your crimes or problems. This is quite common among criminal offenders.

Rationalization is making excuses to explain and/or justify your actions.

Intellectualizing is attempting to explain or understand your behavior without accepting or experiencing the emotional side

Religiosity is an unbalanced dependence on religious beliefs of spiritual powers to keep from offending

You will hear more about defense mechanisms in the group process.

# BASIC PREMISES

A premise is a statement that serves as the basis for an argument. There are certain "Basic Premises" that apply to every offender. In this case the premise is that one or all of these factors are a part of your make-up that allows you to commit the crime you did. Every criminal offender fits somewhere within these basic premises. Some, or all, of these premises apply to you.

This list of Basic Premises was conceived and developed by the members of a group like the one you are in now. The group members discussed the issues that led to their individual offense and discovered that there were certain similarities in all of their behavior patterns. From that discussion the list below was formed. The items are listed in the order in which the group members ranked each as having the most influence in their situation with the highest first.

1. **Attraction.** You were attracted to the crime.
2. **Gratification.** You committed this act to receive gratification.
3. **Acceptance.** You were looking for acceptance. That may have been acceptance emotionally, physically or of yourself and your thoughts and feelings. You wanted to find personal acceptance from someone else. You wanted to feel ALIVE.
4. **Doing What I Want To Do.** This is very simple. You did want you wanted to do. No matter what the effect was on your victim or any one else.
5. **Manipulation.** You manipulated your victim to fulfill your own desires.
6. **Grooming.** You "groomed" (set-up) your victim.
7. **Control/Access** You controlled your victim through emotional and/or physical threats, monetary or emotional coercion or other means to carry out your offense and worked on gaining access to your victim.
8. **Justification/Rationalization.** You made it OK in your mind to do the things you did, even though you knew it was wrong.
9. **Secrecy/Lies.** A vital part of your behavior was in living a lie and keeping secrets. You lived a dual identity and kept the offender part of your personality hidden. You trained your victim to be apart of your secret.

Which of these premises apply to you. Why? Do you believe that one, some or all of these premises do not apply to you. Why? You may want to discuss your thoughts with your group.

# RELAPSE PREVENTION

**ab·sti·nence** (àb'ste-nens) *noun*

The act or practice of refraining from indulging an appetite.

[Middle English, from Old French *abstenance*, from Latin *abstinentia*, from *abstinēns*, *abstinent-*, present participle of *abstinēre*, to hold back.

Abstinence implies the willful avoidance of pleasures thought to be harmful or self-indulgent: Self-denial suggests resisting one's own desires for the achievement of a higher goal, such as the good of another person. In a state of abstinence a person puts aside his own need for immediate gratification and considers the needs of others and how his actions will affect others (victim empathy) thereby avoiding criminal acts and behaviors. This is the goal of Relapse Prevention; to maintain a state of abstinence.

Relapse Prevention utilizes a set of three tools (The Relapse Prevention Guide, Decision Matrix and Behavior Chain) designed to help show you that crimes don't *just happen*. One of the basic premises of Relapse Prevention holds that every crime starts with a negative thought and/or feeling which sets in a motion a pattern of events and thoughts, based on your decisions and choices, which lead to the crime. These tools will help you to recognize those patterns, make thoughtful choices and interrupt your cycle of behavior at the earliest possible point and avoid an offense. The tools should be studied, learned and used in every aspect of every day of your life.

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every crime starts with a  
negative thought or feeling

This booklet contains brief descriptions of the Relapse Prevention tools along with examples of the tools themselves. These though, are only a part of the entire package necessary to succeed in your goal of abstinence. Victim empathy, inter-personal relationships, anger control, identifying and understanding your feelings, handling conflicts and journaling your thoughts are necessary elements of developing a complete program for success.

In using this booklet remember that these are only a small part of the tools you will need to succeed. There is no single device that will prevent you from re-offending. Keep in mind too that the Relapse Prevention Guide is just that, a guide. Intellectual knowledge will not overcome the powerful emotional needs that played a part in your offense(s). You must work on your personal, emotional issues while learning *and using* the Relapse Prevention tools in your everyday life, especially while you are incarcerated. If you do not practice appropriate Relapse Prevention techniques in prison, you will have an even more difficult time on the streets. After you parole the Relapse Prevention tools will play a important role in completing parole, and continuing to live, successfully.

You have the ability to do whatever you set your mind to in life. Keep looking forward and don't give up. You can succeed as long as remember that what you did is not who you are. You are an important person with the great advantage of knowing that you have taken the steps to take control of your own life, accept responsibility for your actions and strive to change yourself for the better. Combine these tools with your desire to grow and mature and you will accomplish great things in life. Good luck!

# THE RELAPSE PREVENTION GUIDE

The most important thing to remember as you begin, and continue, your treatment is that you have the capability and potential to reoffend. If you believe that you will not reoffend because you "choose not to" you may already be on the road to a new offense. Again, *the first step to success is to understand and be aware of the fact you have the potential to reoffend*. To avoid a reoffense you must be aware of your cycles of behavior, control your thoughts and actions and maintain a state of abstinence.

The Relapse Prevention Guide may be thought of as a "road map" to either maintaining a state of abstinence or a possible offense. The Relapse Prevention Guide does not describe definite, inflexible steps that every person will take. This is merely a way to show the thoughts, actions and behaviors that may lead to an offense. For instance, the goal of Relapse Prevention is "*Abstinence*" or not committing any criminal behaviors. When a state of abstinence is not being met, certain negative feelings may arise. These feelings are defined as the "*Abstinence Violation Effect*" or AVE. The actions which led to this point are the "*Apparently Irrelevant Decisions*" (AID), decisions that seem to have no meaning connected to a crime but which may eventually lead to a High Risk Situation, a situation in which an offense is most likely to occur.

High risk situations are the most critical moments of a criminal offenders recovery. The ability to identify and escape and/or avoid a high risk situation is vital to your success. High risk situations may be internal (your thoughts, feeling or emotions) or external (an actual place or situation where an offense may occur). High risk situations may vary for each person such as how you cope with negative thoughts or feelings (anger or depression for instance) or with your presence in certain situations.

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*the first step to success is to understand and be aware  
of the fact you have the potential to reoffend*

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The way out of these situations, and the way to overcome the negative thoughts and feelings is through an "*Adequate Coping Response*", an action to get out of a High Risk Situation, conquer the negative thoughts and return to a state of abstinence.

The Relapse Prevention Guide also discusses a "*Lapse*" and "*Relapse*." A lapse is any active criminal thought, feeling or action, but not necessarily a prosecutable criminal act. A prosecutable criminal act is a relapse, an act that is unlawful and may result in arrest.

The Relapse Prevention Guide is not a one-way street. In actual practice, you will most likely move up and down the Relapse Prevention chart. You may for example be in a state of abstinence, find yourself in high risk situation and make an adequate coping response to return to abstinence.

Just as criminal behavior is a cycle, Relapse Prevention operates in a cycle with the goal of returning to, and maintaining, abstinence. With hard work and commitment you can learn to recognize and anticipate high risk situations before you are in one and develop strategies to escape or avoid them. This is the sum and substance of Relapse Prevention. It is incumbent on you to take the initiative and control of your own life in your quest for success.

The Relapse Prevention chart is a tool to help you identify the patterns of behavior that are a part of your criminal cycle, and, provide the map to successful escape and avoidance strategies to maintaining abstinence.



# THE RELAPSE PREVENTION CHART

## Abstinence

The goal of RP is Abstinence. Abstinence means not actively having criminal thoughts, ideas or actions. In a state of abstinence you will feel a higher level of self esteem, you will believe that therapy works, you will not *actively* have criminal thoughts or ideas.

## Apparently Irrelevant Decision (AID)

OR: Seemingly Unimportant Decision (S.U.D.)

OR: Seemingly Unimportant Behavior That Leads to Error (S.U.B.T.L.E.)

An Apparently Irrelevant Decision (AID) is a decision, thought or action that seems to be *innocent and without any specific meaning*, that may lead you into a situation where your offense cycle could start.

*Making an AID and continuing with your actions will lead you into a- ➡*

*Not following through with an AID will return you to a state of abstinence ➡*

## High Risk Situation

In a High Risk Situation you will be in a negative emotional state and feel some conflict about what you are doing. Things will not "feel right."

*To escape a High Risk Situation you will need to have an ➡*

## Adequate Coping Response

An Adequate Coping Response is an action you take to escape or avoid the High Risk Situation. This is an important time, you must do something to get out of this situation, raise your self esteem and return to abstinence.

*If you do not have an adequate coping response you will fall into a ➡*

*If you have and use an adequate coping response you will return to abstinence ➡*

## Lapse

When you actively let the criminal thought, idea or action take its course or engage in some other criminal thinking behavior that is not an actual offense, you are in a lapse.

*When you are in a state of lapse you will feel the- ➡*

## Abstinence Violation Effect (AVE)

The AVE is a feeling of low self esteem, a belief that therapy doesn't work and you failed. You will face the problem of immediate gratification, feel like things aren't really as they seem and place yourself closer to another offense. To overcome the AVE you again need an-



## Adequate Coping Response

*If you do not have an adequate coping response you will ➡*

*If you have and use an adequate coping response you will return to abstinence ➡*



## Relapse

**You committed a crime.**

**Back to the Big House**



# COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR CHAIN

Cognitive Behavior may be defined as “known behavior.” The Cognitive Behavior Chain is a tool that will help you to recognize, or “know,” your behavior patterns: actions, thoughts and feelings that are a part of your offense cycle. These patterns of actions and behaviors are linked together like a chain, your “behavior chain.” The behavior chain begins long before your offense takes place. Events occur such as setting up a time and place for the offense to happen. This chain of events may have been set in motion minutes, hours, days, weeks or even longer before the actual offense. The Cognitive Behavior Chain may be thought of as a “flow chart” of these actions.

The Behavior Chain also offers the opportunity to review the thoughts and feelings that go along with the action. This can show you that there is another way to act and think in the same situations that can interrupt your offense cycle and avoid offense. The earlier you can break the offense action pattern, the easier it is to avoid an offense.

You may use this tool to examine any offense. You will notice that there are two rows in the chain. The first row is used to write out in the boxes marked “Offense Action” the events and thoughts that actually took place. Write down what you actually did, this is an ACTION you took, the steps towards an offense. In the next box marked “Violation Thinking,” write what this action meant to you. Continue this up to the offense. This is your pattern of behaviors, thoughts and actions, your Cognitive Behavior Chain

In the second row, write in the Avoidance Actions boxes, write down the actions you could have taken to break this chain. In the Safe Thought boxes write down the thinking you could have used that would have been safer than your Violation Thinking.

An example:

| Offense Action   | Violation Thinking   | OFFENSE                        | Violation Thinking  |
|--|--|--------------------------------|---|
| 7. Stopping by roaddogs house on the way home from work. | I'm just gonna stop and say hi,                              | 8. Smoking a joint with homey. | I'm tired, it's been a long day at work, and it's only one joint. |
| Avoidance Action   | Safe Thought   | Avoidance Action               | Safe Thought  |
| 7a. I wil go straight home from work.                    | I am not going to go by his house, I know he has primo dope. | 1a. No drugs in my possession. | Instead of smoking a joint, I'll go out and exercise to relax.    |

You should begin this exercise at the earliest point possible in your offense chain and follow through with your actions up to, and including, the offense. However, for some it may be best to begin the Cognitive Behavior Chain at the point of the actual offense and work backwards through the actions that led to the offense. This may help you to recognize the patterns in a different light and see the patterns more clearly. When you complete this exercise share and discuss your chart with the group.

# THE DECISION MATRIX

*The highest possible stage in moral culture is when we recognize that we ought to control our thoughts.*

Charles Darwin

Every criminal offense takes place as a result of your own decisions. No one forces you to commit a crime, it is your choice. There are though, factors that influence your decisions. The Decision Matrix is a tool that allows you to discover, write out and process your feelings that take place immediately after, and long after, your offense. An offense may be an actual crime or criminal behavior related to the crime. You will also exam what your feelings may have been if you didn't offend. The Decision Matrix should not be confused with the Cognitive Behavior Chain.

One of the purposes of the Decision Matrix is to see how your need for immediate gratification may have led into your offense behavior, this is known as the "Problem of Immediate Gratification." (See the *PIG*). Finding a way to delay your gratification needs to a more appropriate setting is a key to avoiding a re-offense.

|             | IMMEDIATE            |                 | DELAYED                 |                    |
|-------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
|             | POSITIVE             | NEGATIVE        | POSITIVE                | NEGATIVE           |
| OFFENSE     | Love<br>Satisfaction | Fear<br>Disgust | Continued<br>love       | Anger              |
| NON OFFENSE | Acceptance<br>Peace  | Loss<br>Alone   | Self-<br>Esteem<br>Calm | Lonely<br>Unwanted |

Use the Decision Matrix to examine the feelings you experienced from your offense and then compare them to what you may have felt if you didn't offend. *You will discover that you will have better, and longer lasting, positive feelings through recognition and control of your own behavior in a non-offending lifestyle.*

The Matrix is divided into two sections, OFFENSE and NON OFFENSE . In the boxes marked IMMEDIATE/DELAYED and POSITIVE/NEGATIVE you will write out those thoughts and feelings mentioned above.

- The IMMEDIATE feelings are those that were felt during the time the offense was taking place.
- The DELAYED feelings occurred after the offense. This could be anywhere from minutes to months afterwards.

## Start with the OFFENSE section:

In the IMMEDIATE/POSITIVE boxes write out the positive feelings you had during the offense.

In the IMMEDIATE/NEGATIVE boxes write out the negative feelings you had during the offense.

In the DELAYED/POSITIVE boxes write out the positive feelings you had after the offense.

In the DELAYED/NEGATIVE boxes write out the negative feelings you had after the offense.

## Continue with the NON-OFFENSE section:

In the NON OFFENSE section write out what your IMMEDIATE and DELAYED feelings may have been in the same situation if you DID NOT commit the offense.

# COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR CHART

be brief. Use pencil. Only write events that could have been seen, not thoughts or feelings. This concerns ACTUAL BEHAVIOR and your interpretation of the behavior.

|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|----|------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 1  | Offense Action   | Violation Thinking | Offense Action   | Violation Thinking | Offense Action   | Violation Thinking | Offense Action   | Violation Thinking |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
| 1a | Avoidance Action | Safe Thought       | Avoidance Action | Safe Thought       | Avoidance Action | Safe Thought       | Avoidance Action | Safe Thought       |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |

|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|----|------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 5  | Offense Action   | Violation Thinking | Offense Action   | Violation Thinking | Offense Action   | Violation Thinking | Offense Action   | Violation Thinking |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
| 5a | Avoidance Action | Safe Thought       | Avoidance Action | Safe Thought       | Avoidance Action | Safe Thought       | Avoidance Action | Safe Thought       |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |
|    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |                  |                    |

# DECISION MATRIX CHART

|            | IMMEDIATE FEELINGS |          | DEFERRED FEELINGS |          |
|------------|--------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|
|            | POSITIVE           | NEGATIVE | POSITIVE          | NEGATIVE |
| OFFENSE    |                    |          |                   |          |
| NO OFFENSE |                    |          |                   |          |

# VICTIM EMPATHY

With all the reasoning behind why you are in treatment there is one overriding reason you should be here. You have harmed others, making them victims of your criminal behavior. Victims are the final standard that **MUST** become very important in your life. Having no more victims is the only measure of whether you are successful in therapy or not. Even if you find satisfaction in your own life, if you have satisfying relationships, if you are successful in your job or career, and enjoy life to the fullest *but have one more victim*, then you have failed in all your time, energy and effort in your treatment.

No matter how you feel as a criminal offender, you will **NEVER** fully appreciate the full consequences of your actions on your victims. If you spend years behind bars and suffer through daily life, you have paid a small price compared to what your victim will pay over a lifetime. The effects of your criminal actions last long and will affect many others whom the victim will come in contact with over their life.

Victims may live in emotional, physical or financial poverty, or all of these at the same time. They may never be able to love another person. Nightmares, sleep disorders, sexual problems, uncontrollable anxiety, prostitution, eating disorders, lack of confidence, drug abuse, lack of self-esteem, hypochondria, alcoholism, confusion and inability to make choices, guilt, depression, an inability to form healthy relationships, and self-defeating behaviors are only some of the effects on crime victims. In therapy, as much as it may hurt, you **MUST** read and think about the experiences that victims have gone through, and are now going through, as a result of your criminal behavior.

Treatment is all about never having a victim again. One of the most important goals of your treatment should be *empathy* for victims. Empathy is learning to feel what someone else feels.

Think about something that happened to you, something that was painful, sad and unpleasant. If you wanted someone to understand how you felt and to help and care for you, you wanted empathy from them.

Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes, to see the world through their eyes, and feel what they are feeling. Learning to feel empathy doesn't "just happen." You have to learn to develop empathy by practice, over and over and over again. You learn empathy by feeling deeply, caring for, and paying close attention to the feelings of others, not just your victims. You need to be aware of the thoughts and feelings of people in the world around you.

When you care about someone you are more likely to feel empathy for them. When you empathize with someone close to you, a friend, relative, a roommate, you understand how he or she feels. If you really knew and cared about what your victims felt before, during, and after your crimes, you would not have committed them.

Some offenders enjoy hurting their victims because it makes them feel powerful, he can make the victim feel things he doesn't want to feel himself. Some chose not to see that their behavior causes emotional, spiritual, and/or physical pain to their victims. If the offender really understood how much pain they cause to people they say they *care* about, they would stop what they are doing! Caring and empathy goes hand-in-hand. True empathy is feeling care and concern for people whether you know them or not. It is a concern for life and a respect for others and their lives. Empathy does not exclude strangers.

## DEVELOPING EMPATHY

Most men who have no empathy have shut off their own feelings of fear, shame, pain, confidence, and joy. When you shut off painful feelings, or chose to feel *only* painful feelings (or feel "sorry" for yourself) you lose the ability to experience positive feelings. To develop empathy you must learn feel and *accept* your own feelings. When you accept your own feelings you will be able to feel others' too. You can only empathize with feelings that you are willing to experience yourself. If you are unwilling to feel hurt and shame, you will be unable to empathize with others.

Think back to your offense. You may have felt fear, guilt, shame or remorse immediately after you committed your crime. If you did, that may be the start of learning to empathize. Another way to start learning empathy is to think of a time when you felt bad. It may have been when you were physically

hurt, arrested, in fear, or maybe you were abused as a child. Whatever it is, allow yourself to feel the intensity of those feelings. Imagine yourself as the victim of a crime. How would you feel? Victims *feel* intensely. No matter how intensely painful, sorrowful or depressed you feel about your crimes as an offender, your victims felt and feel worse.

The focus of empathy is not how you feel, it is how others feel.. The only way you can understand the depth of their feelings is to feel deeply yourself and *then put yourself in the other person's place*. Think of how you would feel if you were experiencing what they are experiencing.

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**Feeling empathy *is not* about giving up power and control in your life. It takes a strong person to care about others, to feel what they feel, and to be aware enough to want to help. *It does NOT mean indulging in self pity!***

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Feeling sad for someone else's misfortune is a form of empathy; feeling sorry for yourself is self-pity. Self-pity keeps you from looking at the effects of your crimes. It enables you to continue your offense behaviors. Self-pity does not help you change; it encourages you to blame others for your misfortune. When you're wrapped up in self-pity, you focus on what you don't like and how everyone is else is better off. You use it to feed your anger and greed instead of making productive changes.

Disgust about your crime is an appropriate and realistic feeling for an offender. Being disgusted with the pain you have caused to the people you have affected is a step in the right direction, But, it only works when you use this feeling to motivate yourself to change. Without a commitment to change, being disgusted with yourself is another form of self-pity. It only feeds into your cycle of offense behavior.

### **EMPATHY IS THINKING BEFORE YOU ACT**

At times you will be overwhelmed with angry, frightening or discouraging feelings. When you're "in a bad mood" it is easy to lash out at whoever is handy, or even "set up" another crime. Before this happens, STOP. Take a moment to think about how the other person will feel. How do you feel when someone uses you? How do wish they had treated you? Learning to think of the other person before dumping off on them is another way to learn empathy. Try to put yourself in your victim's mind. What did your victim think about you while you committed your crime? How do you think he or she would have wanted you treat them?

### **SHARE WITH OTHERS**

When you are feeling lonely and depressed, sad or discouraged, take the time to talk with others. The more you share your *feelings* and thoughts with good people (Yes, even in prison) the more they will share with you. Sharing leads to understanding and develops empathy.

When you share your feelings and thoughts with an empathetic person, you learn how others respond. Think about how your most supportive friends, family, or group members support you. Use this helpful experience to realize the feelings of others and help them. It is important to note that you must be careful about how you chose supportive people to be in your life. A person who supports everything you do or say, even if it is criminal, is not helping you. *Empathy is not the same as enabling*. People with empathy understand your feelings and at the same time give you honest feedback that holds you accountable for your actions.

You cannot develop empathy when you withdraw from people; you must be involved with people. Living in a vacuum leaves you empty, despairing and suspicious. Isolation kills empathy.

## **PRACTICE CARE AND CONCERN FOR OTHERS.**

Part of treatment is to feel empathy with victims. Focus on understanding the effects of your crime on your victims. Try to put yourself in your victim's place. Think about these questions and use your answers and thoughts to learn empathy for others. It may help you to write about your thoughts and feelings and share them with someone else or with your group. You may write your responses below.

1. What *physical feelings* do you think your victim felt just before, during, and after your crime?
2. What do you think your victim *thought* just before, during and after your crime?
3. What *emotions* do you think they felt just before, during and after your crime?
4. What do you think your victims are now experiencing physically, emotionally and mentally?
5. How do you think your crimes affected their friends and families?
6. Think about someone you dislike. How do you think they feel physically, mentally and emotionally?
7. Think about the social worker, police officer and/or district attorney who handled your case and investigation. How do you think they felt physically, emotionally and mentally when they interviewed you and your victims?
8. Think about how your victim has changed since your crime. How have they changed?

Discuss your responses to the above questions with your group. Because empathy is not one of your personality strengths (or you would not have committed your crime), spend some extra time considering these thoughts and questions. The amount of empathy is not important, *it is whether it is real or not.*

The final criteria of progress in therapy is NOT your level of satisfaction with yourself and your life. It is NOT how well you communicate. It is NOT your understanding of yourself. It is NOT your knowledge of the Relapse Prevention model. It is NOT memorizing charts graphs and chains. *It is: Have you changed your deviant ways of thinking, acting and feeling? Can you and society be sure that you will NEVER have another victim!!?*



# WHAT IF I WAS A VICTIM?

One of the most common traits of criminal offenders is that they were abused in some form early in life. This abuse may have been physical, sexual, physical or simple neglect for your well being. You most likely experienced *abuse reactive* behavior as a result of this childhood.

Abusive reactive behavior may include acting out against other people, lighting fires, harming animals or hiding your emotions and experiencing feelings of shame, embarrassment, guilt, hatred and most of all confusion. These feelings and actions may vary between intense and subtle. When these emotions and actions occur regularly they become *fixed responses* or, in a sense, habitual, and develop as your behavior patterns. It is important to understand that your past life, and especially any past abuse, influences your present and future behavior and actions. Although the abuse has affected your thoughts and emotions, the abuse though *did not* make you a criminal offender.

The only way to work through your own abuse issues is to accept that it did happen. It is essential for criminal offenders to talk about their past abuse. You must then talk about the abuse and the feelings you experience as a result. Many offenders believe that their abuse does not affect them as an adult and refuse to discuss it. This in itself is an indication of the drastic effects childhood abuse has on an adult, the inability to even talk about it. If you can not talk about, you can not fix it. The criminal offenders group, and even more appropriately if it is available a survivor's group, is a safe and appropriate place to work through these issues.

## THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

From the beginning, at the earliest point of your memories. You may want to write down the memories you have. Do not be surprised if the memories are disjointed or there are gaps. This is quite common to abuse survivors. The memories may be good at the same time that they are confusing (i.e., enjoying the physical sensations of sexual contact while being confused about the emotional feelings). This confusion is still present in you today and directly affects your daily thoughts. You probably learned that people are unpredictable and you may feel betrayed by those who are supposed to protect you. Even if you weren't abused you probably learned to feel this way for other reasons. The fear, anger, low self-esteem, inadequacy, distrust and other negative emotions are all things you must work on and resolve.

## BECOMING A SURVIVOR

The first step to becoming a survivor rather than a victim is to look closely at your own life and working to change those things that you don't like. *You must make the decision to change.* You have built a protective wall around you to protect yourself from being hurt again. As a survivor you must create an opening in that wall and let others in, that is what talking about does, it lets others in. Remembering the past abuse and sharing your feelings about what happened while working to overcome the negative feelings that have controlled you for so long is what will move you from being a victim to being a survivor.

As you begin this difficult work stick to it. You will probably want to quit and give up because it may become too painful. Or you may want to hold onto the anger because you feel safe with it inside you. Your memories, emotions, thoughts and feeling directly affect who you are today. You must correct those old ways, let go of the anger and negative thoughts and build a future based on who you can be and can be. Nothing that was done to you as child is your fault. The decision to grow into a strong, responsible adult is now your choice. It's a survivor's decision.

# ***PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT***

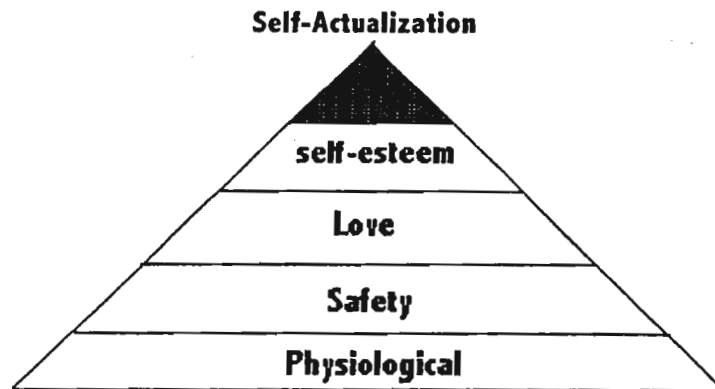
# MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

*We must cultivate our own garden. . . . When man was put in the garden of Eden he was put there so that he should work, which proves that man was not born to rest.*

Voltaire

Abraham Maslow was a "humanistic" psychologist who believed that certain basic needs must be satisfied before an individual can feel a level of intimacy with others. Maslow theorized that human beings act the way they do because they are striving to have these basic needs met. When these needs are not being met, we feel hurt. When a need is met, we feel good, but another need immediately takes its place until a state of self-actualization is reached. Maslow likens this cycle to personal motivation, "I am motivated when I feel a desire or want or yearning or wish or lack."

These needs are often depicted in a pyramid with the most basic human need representing the foundation of the pyramid.



The essence of this model is the realization that we can understand ourselves and others better when we recognize the relationships between our needs and motivations.

- ✂ When, as an individual, survival (**Physiological**) is threatened, other's needs become less important. We do what we must to survive.
- ✂ When we know we will survive, one's need for security (**Safety**) becomes important. We act in a way which we think will help us to reach a minimum level of security.
- ✂ When survival and security needs are satisfied to some degree we begin to seek social satisfaction (**Love**) in belonging to a group, having friends and giving and receiving affection.
- ✂ When our social needs are starting to be met to some degree we seek more status (**Self-esteem**) with the goal of reaching greater self-realization (**Self-Actualization**) and personal development. We know, and are comfortable with, who we are.

The environment in which we exist strongly impacts the level of attention we may give to meet our needs. In prison, the basic need of survival takes precedence over most others. As a result, there is little if any attention remaining for building self-respect, learning new behaviors to raise self-esteem or merely taking the time to appreciate all that life has to offer. However, many people in prison felt these same feelings (motivations) before coming to prison.

Using the examples above, can you tell what needs were you trying to meet when you committed your crime. Were those need met? What effect did your actions have on your victim's needs? What other things can you do to meet those needs now, without committing a criminal offense?

# SELF-ESTEEM

**self-es-teem** (sĕlf'ĭ-stēm') *noun*

Pride in oneself; self-respect.

Quite often in the group process you will hear of high or low self-esteem. Many criminal offenders have a low sense of self-esteem which is a reflection of their feelings of guilt, shame or other negative personal self-thoughts because of their personal and criminal background. Reversing these feelings and creating an appropriate sense of high self-esteem is crucial to success. Self-esteem however must not be confused with arrogance or narcissism.

A person with a healthy sense of appropriate self-esteem will see themselves as a capable, responsible person who has the ability to be a positive, productive member of society. For a criminal offender, the danger of low self-esteem is found in the need to artificially create high self-esteem through criminal acts.

Appropriate self-esteem is built in part by recognizing and meeting some basic human needs in an appropriate manner. These needs can be called the:

## THE "A" LIST

**Acceptance:** is accepting each person (yourself included) for who they are at any moment; the innocent child, the obnoxious jerk, the caring friend, a person you may see as weak or controlling or arrogant or..., it doesn't matter who or what they (or you) are, it is important to accept them as they are.

**Accomplishment:** is starting and following through to completion any task you set out to do. Taking a chance and starting something new, or at times something very familiar, can be overwhelming. It is important to focus on your accomplishment. What you can do is important, not what you might not be able to do.

**Acknowledgment:** is recognition for your accomplishments. This may be one of the most difficult things for a criminal offender to accept; that you can do good things and you are a good person. One of the most important things for a criminal offender to understand is that what you did is not who you are. You have good qualities and deserve recognition and praise for your good works. When you are given praise, accept it simply and humbly. It may be uncomfortable at first, but keep reminding yourself that the praise is the truth.

**Affection:** may be a very confusing thing. When you have continually received inconsistent messages about affection and love it can be quite confusing when someone cares for you. Affection does not necessarily require that you do something, it is what being a friend is. Practice *just being there* for someone (and for yourself), and accepting when someone is there for you.

**Anticipation:** is sometimes felt as anxiety or fear; expecting the worst in any situation. When you have a high sense of self-esteem you can look forward to the hope for a better tomorrow and the excitement of the possibilities that life has to offer knowing that you can handle anything that comes your way. Anticipation makes the bad times better because you know that no matter what happens, you're strong enough and good enough to deal with it. Don't expect disappointment, be sure of success!

There are other ways to build and describe your own personal self-esteem. Make your own list of your needs and share them with your group while you use them in your daily life.

# WORDS THAT HEAL:

## USING POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS TO RELEASE NEGATIVE BELIEFS

An affirmation is a positive thought or idea that you *consciously* focus on in order to produce a desired result. Using affirmations is a simple yet powerful technique that can heal and transform your most deeply held beliefs. Working with affirmations to heal your life is a simple and enjoyable process. What follows is a method found quite effective.

### PICK AN AREA OF YOUR LIFE THAT NEEDS HEALING.

The topic of your affirmation can involve a relationship, health, work, finances, peace of mind, or anything else you feel the need to heal. For an example, let's consider the area of peace and anger. Perhaps you have been carrying around some old anger you are now ready to release.

### DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT TO OCCUR IN THAT AREA OF YOUR LIFE.

Ask yourself, "What would it feel like if this part of my life were healed?" "In our example, you probably want to let go of the anger and experience peace and forgiveness.

### USING THE FIRST PERSON ("I" statements), FORM A SHORT, SIMPLE STATEMENT THAT EXPRESSES THE DESIRED OUTCOME.

As you choose your words, keep in mind the following points:

- Write your affirmation in the present tense, as if the experience were happening in this moment. Thus, you would say *I AM PEACEFUL* instead of *I WILL BECOME FILLED WITH PEACE*.
- State it positively. When you say *I AM NOT ANGRY*, the subconscious mind screens out the not and hears *ANGRY*. To prevent this from occurring, rephrase the affirmation to directly state what you want - e.g., *I NOW RELEASE MY ANGER*.

### EXPERIENCE HOW IT FEELS.

Once you have written your affirmation, say it to yourself a few times. When you have found a good affirmation, it will feel right to you (fulfillment brings fulfillment). If the affirmation doesn't quite work, you can fine tune it by changing one or two words. Thus, *I AM EXPERIENCING PEACE* may work better if stated as *I AM AT PEACE* or *I AM PEACEFUL*.

### REPEAT YOUR AFFIRMATION EACH DAY.

Say it to yourself, say it out loud, write it down. Repetition is the mother of learning. Consider the affirmation *EVERY DAY, IN EVERY WAY, I AM GETTING BETTER AND BETTER*. Imagine filling your subconscious with these healing words day after day. Over time, your mental and emotional outlook will clearly improve.

When you repeat an affirmation, you impress its thought pattern on your mind, thereby transforming your previously held beliefs. The more you use your affirmations the more rapid and powerful the healing will be.

# YOU DESERVE IT

You deserve to be happy, but no one can make you happy if decide not to be. Here are some guideline to help you get ahead of the curve and make the decision to be satisfied in your life:

- ◆ Examine your life. Where do you want to go on your journey and how do you want to get there? Where do you want to be 1, 3, 5 or more years from now. Believe that you can get there and you will.
- ◆ Listen to that little voice inside you. That voice can be your best friend or your worst enemy. Listen to the positives, shun the negative.
- ◆ Fear is an acquired emotion. You were taught to be afraid, you can learn to overcome it.
- ◆ Don't live down to other's expectations of you.
- ◆ You get of life what you expect out of life. Expect more!
- ◆ Take a chance. Believe in yourself and take a risk once in awhile. You can do anything you set your mind to. Be bold!
- ◆ Be persistent.
- ◆ If you want to keep on living the way you're living keep on doing the things you're doing.
- ◆ If you want to change and grow, change and grow.
- ◆ If your are at the end of your rope, look up. If you look up, you can climb up.
- ◆ Be prepared.
- ◆ Decide to be happy. Being happy is something *you do*, make the decision to just do it.
- ◆ Who do you run with? If you run with losers, you're a loser. Run with the winners and you'll finish at the head of the pack.
- ◆ Take a chance. If you don't take chances you can't grow. If you don't grow you can not be your best. If you are not at your best you are probably not very happy with your life. See the connection?
- ◆ Practice makes better. Be the best you can, don't worry about perfect.
- ◆ It doesn't what happens, it matters what you do with it.
- ◆ What other people think of you is not important, what you think of yourself is.

The future is yours. Create your destiny and work towards your destination.

# ***RELATIONSHIP SKILLS***



# SIX THOUGHTS THAT SABOTAGE MARRIAGE

## MARITAL MYTHS

### **ROMANTIC LOVE MAKES A GOOD MARRIAGE.**

A man and a woman stand clasped in each other's arms watching the sun slowly sink into an iridescent sea. They vow eternal devotion. In time they will descend the hill together, silver-haired, but no less devoted. This picture inspires many people to wed, yet in search of romantic marriage they often end up in not-so-romantic divorce.

Men and women who expect marriage to be a continuation of the ecstasy of their courtship are in for disappointment. Romance thrives on barriers, frustrations, separations and

**Men and women who expect marriage to be a continuation of the ecstasy of their courtship are in for disappointment.**

delays. Remove these obstacles, replace them with the everydayness of married life, and ecstatic passion fades. Some couples feel cheated and declare their marriages bankrupt.

Romantics ignore the fact that people grow weary of each other unless they have cultivated common interests and values. Conjugal affection is a slow-burning, heart-warming flame. It

cannot exist without kindness, consideration, communication, adjustment to each other's habits, joint participation in several activities, consensus on values, and respect.

Married couples must build up a "common capital" of acts, habits and experience, without the impossible illusions of the romantic ideal.

### **HUSBANDS AND WIVES SHOULD DO EVERYTHING TOGETHER**

"I don't think it's right for a husband to go one way, and a wife another," said 44-year-old Alf, who insisted that his wife go boating with him.

Marie preferred reading a book on the beach. "Is it asking too much for Alf to do what he enjoys while I do what I enjoy?" she asked. "But I like doing things as a twosome," Alf

explained.

It is not good to pressure one's partner. Instead, offer trade-offs. Alf could have said: "It's important to me that you go boating, and so I promise to do something you enjoy."

Many people feel guilty when they do things, or go places without their husbands or wives. In a good marriage, there will be 75 to 80 percent togetherness but also

sufficient separateness to permit individual growth and privacy.

### **GOOD SPOUSES SHOULD MAKE THEIR PARTNERS HAPPY.**

One frequent error is to assume responsibility for other people's feelings. If someone believes that happiness is in the hands of another, the tendency is to sit back and expect large portions to be dished up as if it were apple pie.

For 15 years Jean catered to Lionel's every whim, trying to make him happy. But Lionel was a malcontent who found fault with everyone and everything. Once Jean understood that it is impossible to MAKE anyone happy, least of all Lionel, she became more relaxed and outgoing. When Lionel realized that Jean no longer accepted the blame for everything, he started occupying his time more productively.

Taking charge of your own gratification and fulfillment increases the likelihood that your marriage will be enjoyable and rewarding.

### **HUSBANDS AND WIVES SHOULD "LET ALL HANG OUT."**

After stressing that he had come to see me solely to assist his wife, Valerie, with HER hangups, Bert invited me to "Fire away with any

questions." I asked him about some of Valerie's claims: Was it true that he often yelled at her, and in a temper had thrown a TV set through the window? Had he really flung a cup of hot coffee at his 14-year old stepson?

Bert shrugged and said, "Well, doc, if a man can't blow off some steam at home, he's likely to end up with ulcers or a heart attack."

Bert was expressing the sentiments of many. At work most people find it necessary to be on their best behavior; thus home becomes the place to release any pent-up emotions- "Let it all hang out." Instead of tackling the source of their frustrations, they kick the dog, beat their children, abuse their spouses and see nothing improper or shameful in so doing.

Yet attacks generate counterattacks. The most common retaliation is "Passive-aggressive" behavior. Rather than going toe-to-toe with the attacker, the injured person becomes a saboteur. Nora, for example, was extremely angry when Marv, lost his temper, but she would never oppose him directly. After one of his outburst she "Accidentally" burned his dinner and "Lost" his favorite cigarette lighter.

Politeness, tact and good - humor all help to create a relaxed and loving home. Treat your spouse with at least as much respect as you

would afford a perfect stranger.

### **TRUE LOVERS KNOW EACH OTHER'S THOUGHTS.**

How often have I heard people claim-. "If he truly loved me, he would know it without being told." This myth is especially prevalent in the area of sexual intimacy. "If he really was tuned in to me, it would be unnecessary to tell him what to do." Or, "When a woman is really in love with a man, she can sense exactly how to please and satisfy him. If she has to be shown how to turn him on, she is not for him."

Poppycock! One cannot automatically experience another person's feelings, regardless of the intensity of devotion; we learn through instruction, by, example, or by trial and error.

It makes sense for-marriage partners to teach one another how best to get along with each other - this means say what you mean, mean what you say, and don't expect your spouse to read your mind.

### **A HAPPY MARRIAGE REQUIRES TOTAL TRUST.**

One of my friends in college had been married six months. I noticed that Gary's wife spent a lot of time with another young man, and I commented to my friend that he was asking for trouble. "Oh come on," he protested.

"Mike and I have been pals for year s. I have a lot of studying to do so why should I expect Sue to sit at home?" I pointed out that Mike was good-looking, well off financially, and available. Gary insisted that he trusted both. Alas, in a short while Sue informed Gary that she and Mike had fallen in love, and asked for a divorce-

Most good marriages tend to be based on a tinge of insecurity- To be absolutely certain of a spouse's fidelity or devotion is to take the other person too much for granted- It is realistic to believe that one's partner can succumb to temptation. If you regard your spouse as too homely to attract another person, your trust will not generate respect, excitement or satisfaction.

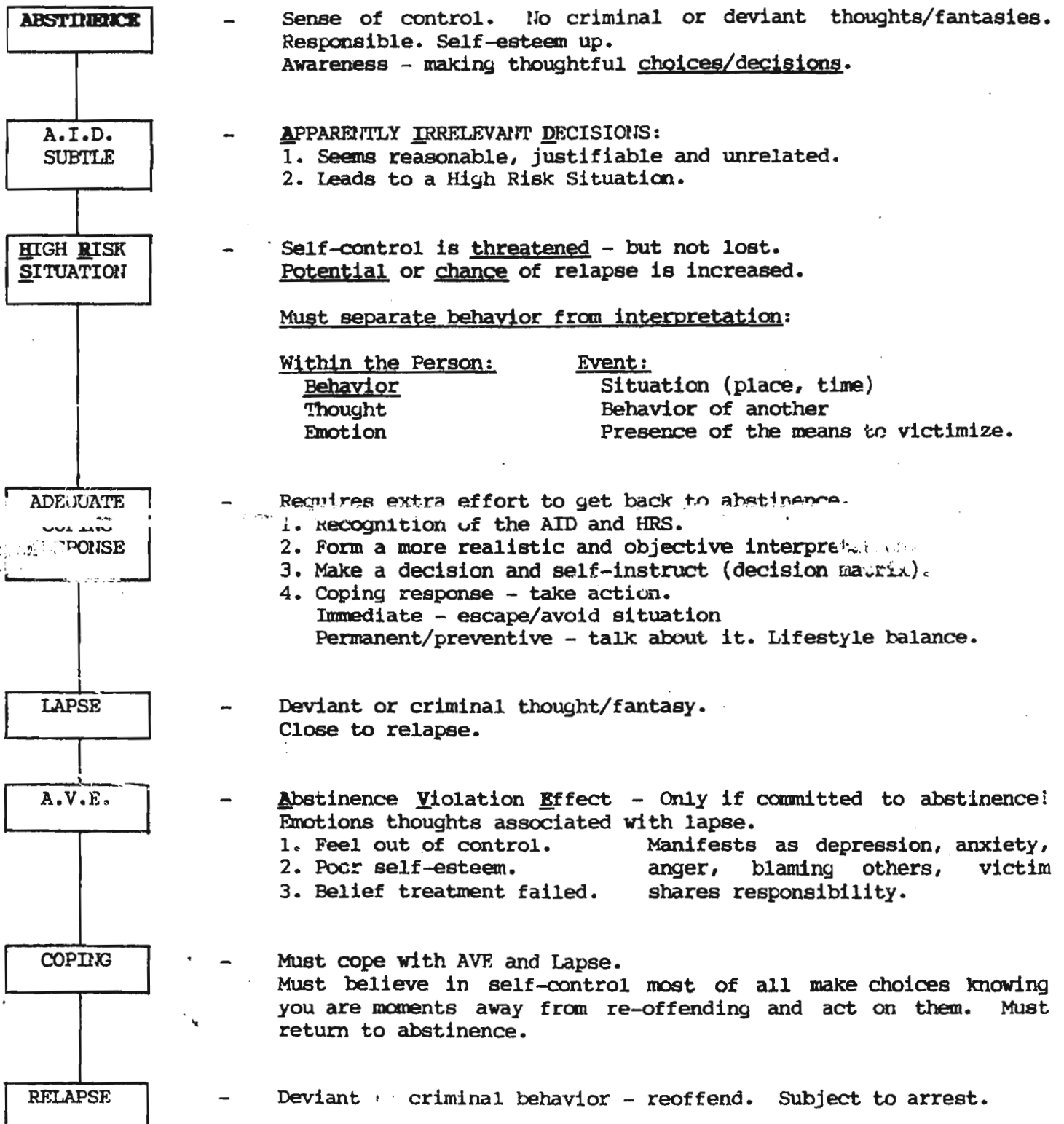
On the other hand, if you consider your spouse quite capable of attracting members of the opposite sex if neglected or mistreated inside the marriage, you will increase your own displays of caring and affection that make marriage worth preserving.



# *PERSONAL SKILL TOOLS*

## RELAPSE PREVENTION

**PURPOSE:** To learn your unique chain of behavior (choices) that lead to the offense.  
"It doesn't just happen."



# PERSONAL PARTNERSHIP PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

While this is far from inclusive, you may find a starting point with which to discuss your personal relationship problems that may have had a part in your offense. Use your thoughts to discuss your findings with your group.

## The Problem:

### Affection Without Friendship

Many relationships are initially based on desires and attractions, but friendship - compatibility, trust and respect - is the key to a mature relationship.

**Solution:** Identify what you like in your closest friends and look for these qualities in a prospective partner.

### Unrealistic Expectations

People often choose partners based on their personal needs at the time. When the negatives appear disillusionment and resentment sets in when expectations are not fulfilled.

**Solution:** Identify, recognize and verbalize your expectations.

### Unjust Dependence

Sometimes partners depend on a single partner to fulfill all of their needs.

**Solution:** Develop healthy friendships outside of the relationship

### Self-righteousness

Some partners believe that their principles are more important than their partner's. As a result, arguments become huge fights.

**Solution:** Stop trying to always win. Admit that you may be wrong.

### Denying Mistakes

Many times a partner may blame "circumstances" instead of himself insisting that he just can not be wrong.

**Solution:** Consider how you may be acting unfairly and that you can make mistakes.

### Perceived Inequity

People usually are biased about how much they contribute to a relationship believing that they give more than the other.

**Solution:** When you feel this way, discuss it with your partner and be willing to look at their contributions.

### Bad Communication

Men and women communicate differently. They listen and talk on different planes.

**Solution:** Listen actively, ask questions and pay attention. Learn to understand what your partner is really saying.

### Low Self-esteem and Insecurity

Some people feel that they must have a relationship to be happy and whole, yet feel unworthy of having a relationship.

**Solution:** Use positive affirmations and magnify your positive traits.

### The Inevitable Letdown

Eventually the spark fades in every relationship and the partners begin taking one another for granted.

**Solution:** Spend at least four *intimate* minutes a day with your partner. Make your partner a central part of your life and relationship.