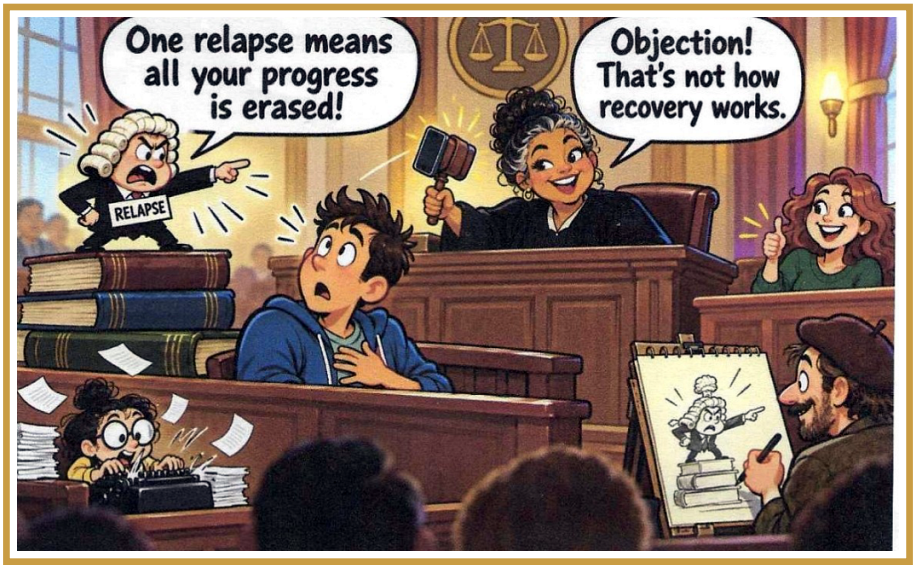
Recovery and Relapse







Daily Reflection: Navigating the Turning Points

"When we are hurt, or when our pride is wounded, we may feel that using drugs is a solution. However, we have found that using only compounds our problems..."

— Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, p. 81

The Ripple Effect of a Single Choice

There are days in recovery when the old way of thinking tries to whisper familiar lies. When life gets overwhelming, heavy, or intensely emotional, the mind might trick us into believing that a relapse offers an easy escape or a temporary pause from reality.

But recovery teaches us to do something vital: play the tape all the way through.

A relapse is never just about that single moment of using. It is about everything that follows—the immediate return of the physical obsession, the crushing weight of guilt, and the rapid spiral back to places we promised we would never return to. When we pause to remember the actual cost of a relapse, we break the illusion of the "quick fix."

Staying Clean vs. Getting Clean

Getting clean is an event—a powerful, courageous starting line. Staying clean, however, is a daily practice. As the Just for Today literature reminds us, recovery isn't a permanent shield we put on once; it is a daily surrender.

When the road gets rough, the solution isn't to look backward. The solution is to lean harder into the tools that got us here:

- Reach out: Pick up the phone before picking up a substance.
- Show up: Get to a meeting, even when—and especially when—you don't feel like it.
- Hand it over: Re-surrender the day's anxieties to your Higher Power.

Feelings are not facts, and difficult phases always pass if we give them time. We don't have to carry the weight of forever; we only have to navigate the next twenty-four hours.

Just For Today

"Just for today, I am grateful for the gift of recovery and the fellowship that supports it. I know that using is never a solution. If a challenge arises today, I will face it with faith, knowing I don't have to walk this path alone

A Personal Recovery Story

I'm the second oldest of five children. I would consider my childhood very normal until the age of 10, when my parents divorced. My mother definitely had her hands full and did the best she could with what we had. We all did our part in pitching in with the house and chores. I myself took on more of the caretaker status for the younger siblings. I still maintained my tomboy scrappy persona. It took on more of a protector role now. Through my teenage years my friendships with my friends in elementary school, strengthened and deepened. Sleepovers were a source of escaping my home life. I drank occasionally and smoked weed maybe three times. It was always in a social setting or at a party. I loved the feeling of being happy and carefree for a change.

In my early 20s, I would party with my friends on the weekends, but it never debilitated my work or home life. Eventually I began a career with animals. At 22 I got pregnant and a year later opened up my own business. Suddenly running a household didn't seem like a chore compared to having employees, clients, and a child.

Over the next decade, one drug was slowly added after another. One to enhance work production, mental stability, sleep quality and eventually I would add vodka on top of it all to complete my daily cocktail. The old saying goes "it's not a problem, until it's a problem!" My life had definitely become a huge problem. My pride wouldn't let me ask for help. I was relentless in trying different ways to help myself. Finally, in 2020 my family had had enough and intervened. I went to a recovery center and spent the next six months learning, studying and ultimately realizing that I was an addict.

I was not used to submitting to anyone's way except my own. I was too unique to be like everyone else the text and so easily described. I repeatedly tried to pick and choose which parts of the program I wanted to take part in and reject the others I didn't find appealing. I despise being uncomfortable, and not getting my way. I was so programmed to justify, modify and mold situations to my liking or benefit. Since then, I have relapsed a bazillion times, gone to multiple rehabs, and hurt many relationships I claimed to cherish. My ego wouldn't let me ask for help. My stubbornness and need for control took me back out every time.

I was constantly comparing out to see how much better I was because I'd never been to jail or arrested. I would tell myself I wasn't as bad, because I'd never done the "hard drugs." Eventually, my "not yets" turned into my reality. The good girl who followed rules and used to organize school events, bridal showers, baby showers and chaperoned field trips was now a criminal. I had thought I hit my rock bottom so many times, only to go back out and find I could dig deeper. Going to jail was when I dug the deepest internally, though. Sitting in a jail cell is a good time to reflect and think, because that's all you have to do.

Don't get me wrong...some of these women were scary as hell, but the majority of them were just like me. They were genuinely good people that got wrapped up in something they had never planned on when they were kids. It didn't matter how or what brought each of us there. We all ended up in the same place. The same goes for those in Narcotics Anonymous. We're not interested in what it took to get us here but only that we made it here. Apparently the literature is accurate in stating that it all leads to jails, institution or death.

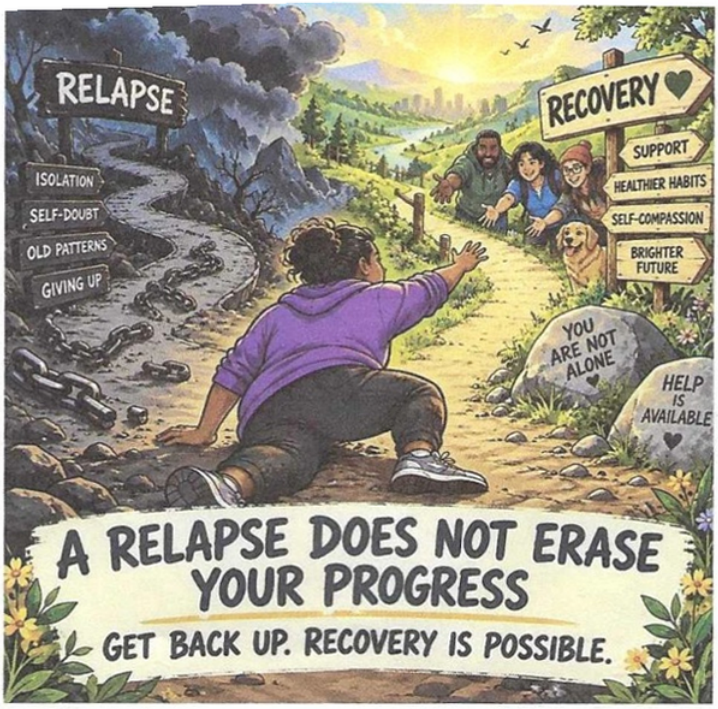
I have almost 15 months clean, and today my stubbornness refuses to go backwards. Today I'm relentless in not using, no matter what. I tried Karla's way so many times and it never worked. My Higher Power has deemed it fit that I'm still here, despite my best efforts. I surrender everyday to the cold hard truth that I'm an addict and can never use "successfully." I surrender to the fact that I can't and don't have to do this alone anymore. My new home is in the rooms or Narcotics Anonymous. The only thing I absolutely refuse to do today, is give up my chair.



RECOVERY STORY

Strength · Hope · Change

Recovery and Service



Excerpt from the Introduction of our book, Narcotics Anonymous:

"Everything that occurs in the course of N.A. service must be motivated by the desire to more successfully carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. It was for this reason that we began this work. We must always remember that as individual members, groups and service committees, we are not and should never be in competition with each other. We work separately and together to help the newcomer and for our common good. We have learned, painfully, that internal strife cripples our Fellowship; it prevents us from providing the services necessary for growth."

The Gratitude Tree Speaks

I am the Gratitude Tree.

I have watched people come to me carrying heavy hearts, tired minds, and stories they sometimes struggle to put into words. Yet where they stand before me, they begin to think about the things they are thankful for.

Each leaf placed upon my branches represents a moment, a person, a lesson, or a blessing.

Some leaves speak of family.
Some speak of friendship.
Some speak of second chances.
Some speak of strength found during the hardest days.

And some leaves simply say, "I'm grateful to be here."

I have learned that gratitude doesn't mean life has always been easy. It means that even through the difficult seasons, we can find something worth holding onto.

Every leaf tells a story.

A story of someone who didn't give up.
A story of someone who reached out for help.
A story of someone who forgave.
A story of someone who found hope when they thought hope was gone.

As my branches grow, so does the reminder that we are never truly alone. The people who have touched our lives become part of our story, and the kindness we receive gives us the strength to pass that kindness on to someone else.

So when you add your leaf to my branches, don't just think about what you're grateful for.

Think about how far you've come.

Think about the people who helped you along the way.

Think about the strength you found inside yourself.

And remember that even the smallest expression of gratitude can bring light into someone's darkest day.

I am the Gratitude Tree, and these are my leaves.

Together, they speak one beautiful message:

There is always something to be grateful for.

Dear N.A. — Finding Our Way

The "Dear NA" column is a shared space for recovery reflection and is not a substitute for personal sponsorship or direct, personal suggestions.

All responses and insights featured in this column are drawn directly from approved Narcotics Anonymous literature, informational pamphlets (IPs), and the shared experiences of our fellowship. For individual guidance and to work the steps, we strongly encourage reaching out to a sponsor and building a personal support network within your homegroup.

Dear NA,

I keep getting a few weeks or months clean and then relapsing. Each time I return to meetings, I promise myself that this time will be different. I attend regularly at first, collect phone numbers, and talk about finding a sponsor. As soon as life begins to improve, however, I stop doing the things that helped me get clean.

I start missing meetings, ignoring phone calls, and telling myself that one time will not hurt. After I use, I feel ashamed and wonder whether the NA program can really work for someone like me. I see other members celebrating years of clean time while I struggle to put together a few months.

am tired of repeating the same cycle, but I am also afraid that I will relapse again. How can I stop comparing my recovery to everyone else's, become willing to follow suggestions, and finally give myself a real chance at staying clean?

—Tired of Starting Over

Dear Tired of Starting Over,

You are not beyond help, and you are not the only person who has struggled with repeated relapse. Many NA members returned more than once before they became willing to practice the program consistently. What matters today is not how many times you have fallen—it is that you are still reaching for recovery.

Try not to measure your recovery against someone else's clean time. Their celebration does not prove that you are failing; it proves that staying clean is possible. Every member begins with one day, and the only clean time any of us truly has is today.

You have already identified your pattern: when life improves, you stop attending meetings, answering calls, and following suggestions. That awareness is valuable. Recovery cannot be saved only for difficult days. The actions that help us become clean are often the same actions that help us remain clean.

This time, take the suggestions you previously only considered. Choose a sponsor and call them regularly. Attend meetings even when you feel good. Get a home group, find a service commitment, work the Steps, and build relationships with members who will notice when you begin pulling away. Most importantly, become honest before the desire to use turns into using.

In loving service,
Dear NA

Dear N.A. — Protecting My Recovery

Dear NA,

I've noticed something in recovery that I have a hard time understanding. Sometimes when a person is thinking about using again, they don't seem to want to go out alone. Instead, they start reaching out to another recovering addict, especially someone who may already be struggling, and before you know it, both people have relapsed.

Why would someone who knows how painful active addiction is encourage another recovering addict to go back out with them? And if I recognize that someone around me is headed toward relapse and trying to pull me in that direction too, what should I do?

—Protecting My Recovery

Dear Protecting My Recovery,

Relapse can affect much more than the person who returns to using. When someone begins moving away from recovery, their thinking and behavior may change before they ever pick up a drug. Isolation, stopping meetings, disconnecting from a sponsor and other recovering addicts, and returning to old people, places, and behaviors can all put recovery at risk.

Sometimes two struggling addicts can reinforce each other's thinking. Something one person might have resisted alone can begin to sound reasonable when another person agrees with it. That doesn't excuse encouraging someone else to use, but it reminds us why protecting our own recovery has to come first.

We cannot control another addict's decision. We can offer support, encourage them to call their sponsor, take them to a meeting, and remind them that they are welcome in NA. But we do not have to follow them into active addiction to prove that we care about them.

If someone is trying to involve us in using, that may be the time to create distance and immediately reach toward recovery instead: call our sponsor, contact recovering addicts, get to a meeting, pray, work the steps, and tell somebody exactly what is happening.

One addict may not be able to make another addict stay clean—but another addict doesn't have to make us use either.

Your recovery is worth protecting.

NA Literature for This Topic

This discussion can be paired with:

In loving service,
Dear NA

Dear N.A. — Ready to Come Back

Dear NA,

I recently relapsed, and I am struggling with shame, guilt, and disappointment. Before it happened, I slowly stopped calling my sponsor, attending meetings regularly, and being honest about what I was feeling. I convinced myself that I could handle everything alone. By the time I realized how far I had drifted from the program, I had already picked up.

Now I am afraid to return to meetings because I feel like I have let everyone down. I know that relapse does not erase everything I learned, but starting over feels overwhelming. Part of me wants to hide, while another part knows that isolation will only make things worse.

How do I let go of the shame, walk back through the doors, and begin rebuilding my recovery one day at a time?

—Ready to Come Back

Dear Ready to Come Back,

First, please remember that you are not alone—and you are still welcome in Narcotics Anonymous. Relapse does not make you a failure. It means the disease became active again and that you need the support of the program now more than ever.

Shame tells us to hide, but recovery invites us to be honest. Walk back into a meeting, raise your hand, and simply say, "I relapsed, and I need help." You may be surprised by how many members understand because they have walked the same road. The people who truly care about your recovery will be grateful that you returned.

Call your sponsor or another trusted NA member. Attend a meeting today, get phone numbers, and stay close to recovering addicts. Examine what happened before the relapse—not to punish yourself, but to recognize the warning signs. Stopping meetings, avoiding your sponsor, becoming dishonest, and isolating were signals that your recovery needed attention.

You have not lost everything you learned. Bring that knowledge with you as you begin again. Focus only on staying clean today. You do not have to rebuild your entire life at once; you only need to take the next right action.

The doors of NA remain open. Come back, sit down, listen, and let the fellowship love you until you can learn to love yourself again. Just for today, you never have to use again.

—NA

In loving service,
Dear NA

Finding Our Way Back

Finding Our Way Back: Recovery and Relapse

When we first walk into the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, many of us think recovery is simply a matter of not using drugs. We measure our success entirely by the calendar, treating long periods of clean time as an absolute victory and a relapse as total failure.

But as Chapter Seven of the Basic Text reminds us, this perspective is far too simplistic.

True recovery isn't just about physical abstinence; it is about a deep, internal change in how we think and live. If we are honest, we know that physical drug use rarely happens ou of nowhere. It is almost always preceded by an emotional or spiritual lapse—times when we let complacency, dishonesty, or pride creep back in. When we stop taking care of our spiritual maintenance, we leave ourselves completely defenseless.

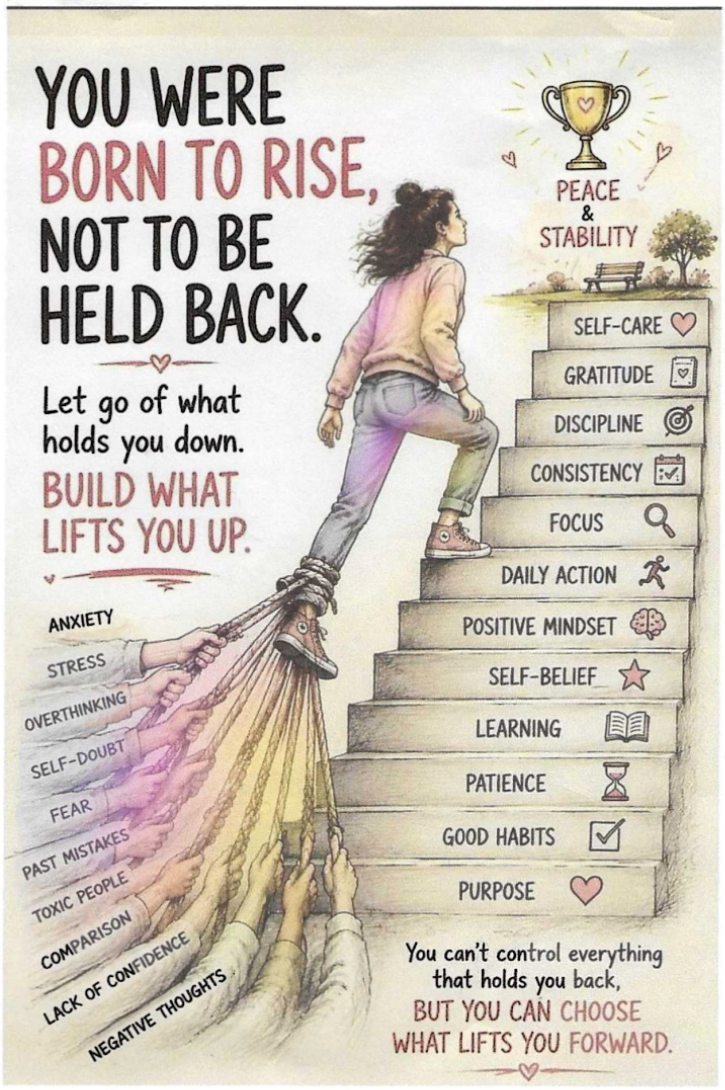
A Tool for the Journey: IP #6

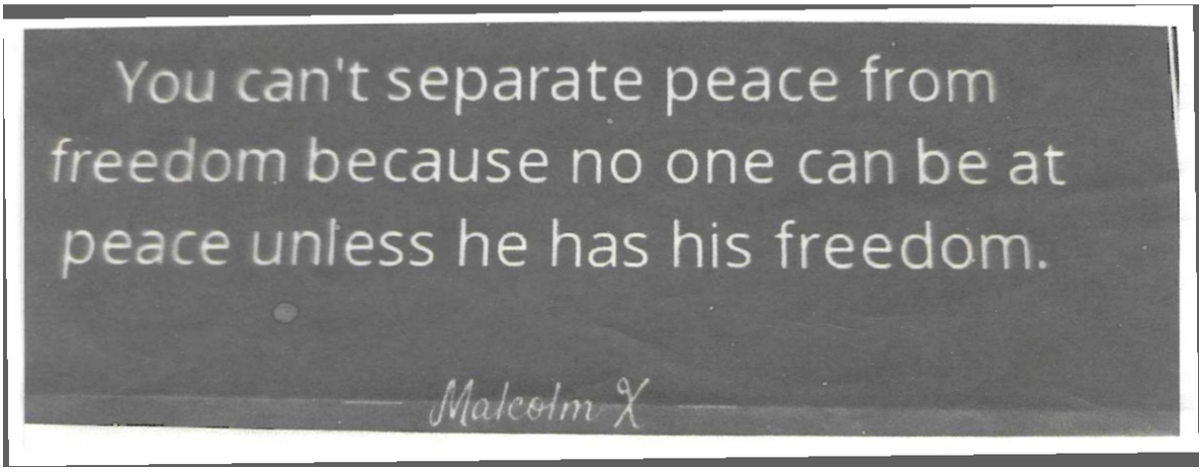
For a closer look at these subtle warning signs, Information Pamphlet #6 (Recovery and Relapse) is an invaluable resource. IP #6 beautifully explains that if we survive a relapse, i doesn't have to be the end of our story. Instead, it can act as a "jarring experience" or a "nuclear blast" that shatters our apathy and procrastination, forcing us into a more rigorous and honest application of the program.

We don't have to navigate these struggles alone. By staying connected to the fellowship and working the Twelve Steps, we can spot the warning signs before the physical relapse occurs. Remember: we are never responsible for our disease, only for our recovery. Keep coming back.



You Were Born to Rise





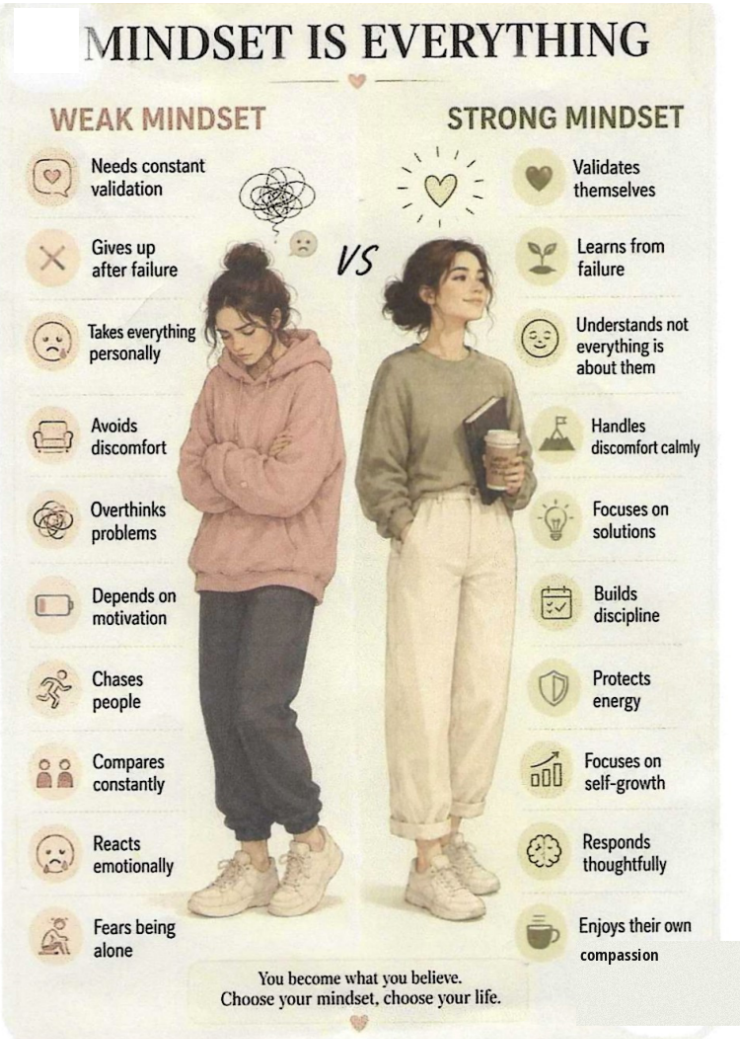
I Am Your Disease



I hate meetings. I hate a Higher Power. I hate anyone who has a program. To all who come into contact with me, I wish you suffering and I wish you death. Allow me to introduce myself. I am the disease of addiction. CUNNING, BAFFLING and POWERFUL, that's me. I have KILLED MILLIONS and I am pleased. I love to catch you with the element of surprise. I love pretending that I am your friend and your lover. I have given you comfort, have I not? Wasn't I there when you were lonely? When you wanted to die, didn't you call me? I was there. I love to make you hurt. I love to make you cry. Better yet, I love to make you so numb that you can neither hurt nor cry. When you can't feel anything at all, this is true glory. I will give you instant gratification and all I ask of you is long term suffering. I've been there for you always. When things were going right in your life, you invited me. You said you didn't deserve these good things, and I was the ONLY ONE who agreed with you. Together, we were able to DESTROY ALL THINGS GOOD in your life. People don't take me seriously. They take strokes seriously, heart attacks seriously, even diabetes. Fools that they are, they don't know that without my help, many of these things would not be possible. I am such a hated disease, and yet I do not come uninvited. YOU CHOOSE TO HAVE ME. So many have chosen me over REALITY and PEACE. More than you hate me, I hate all of you who have a Twelve-Step Program. Your Program, your Meetings, Your Higher Power, ALL WEAKEN ME and I can't function in the manner I am accustomed to. Now I must lie here quietly. You don't see me, BUT I AM GROWING, BIGGER THAN EVER. When you only exist, I may live. When you live, I only exist. BUT I AM HERE... and until we meet again, I WISH YOU SUFFERING AND DEATH.



Mindset Is Everything



Gratitude in Hard Times

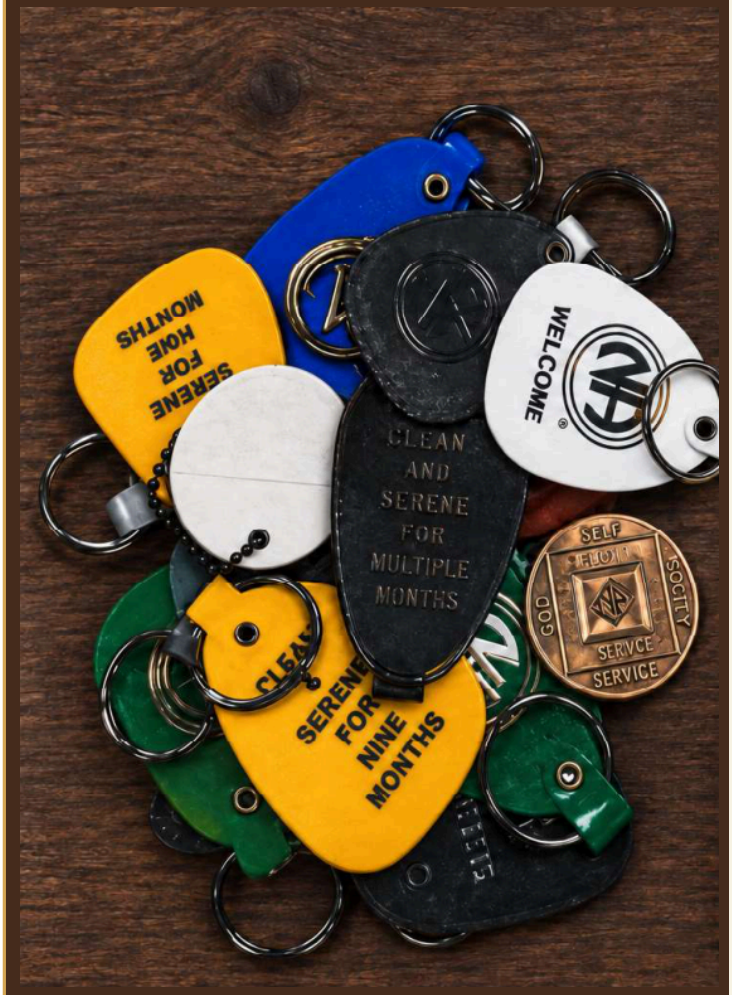
Gratitude does not mean pretending that everything is okay. It does not erase our pain, solve every problem, or require us to be thankful for the difficult things happening in our lives. Gratitude simply helps us remember that hardship is not the whole story.

During hard times, our thoughts can become focused on everything that is wrong. Recovery teaches us to pause and notice what remains: a meeting we can attend, a sponsor we can call, another clean day, a safe place to sleep, or someone who listens without judging us. These things may seem small, but they can become the light that guides us through a dark season.

Some days, gratitude comes easily. On other days, the only thing we can say is, "I am grateful that I did not use today." That is enough. We do not need a perfect life to practice gratitude; we only need the willingness to look for one good thing.

Gratitude will not always change our circumstances, but it can change how we walk through them. It reminds us that we have survived difficult days before, that we do not have to face today alone, and that hope can still grow—even in hard times.

Let's Celebrate



RECOVERY CELEBRATIONS

ONE DAY AT A TIME
STRONGER TOGETHER

Lee B. - 5 years - 11/2

Sam N. - 3 years - 11/3

Cat B. - 5 years - 11/5

Stacie H. - 9 months - 11/5

Steve H. - 5 years - 11/8

Shirley J. - 3 years - 11/10

Dick H. - 9 months - 11/10

Christina F. - 2 years - 11/16

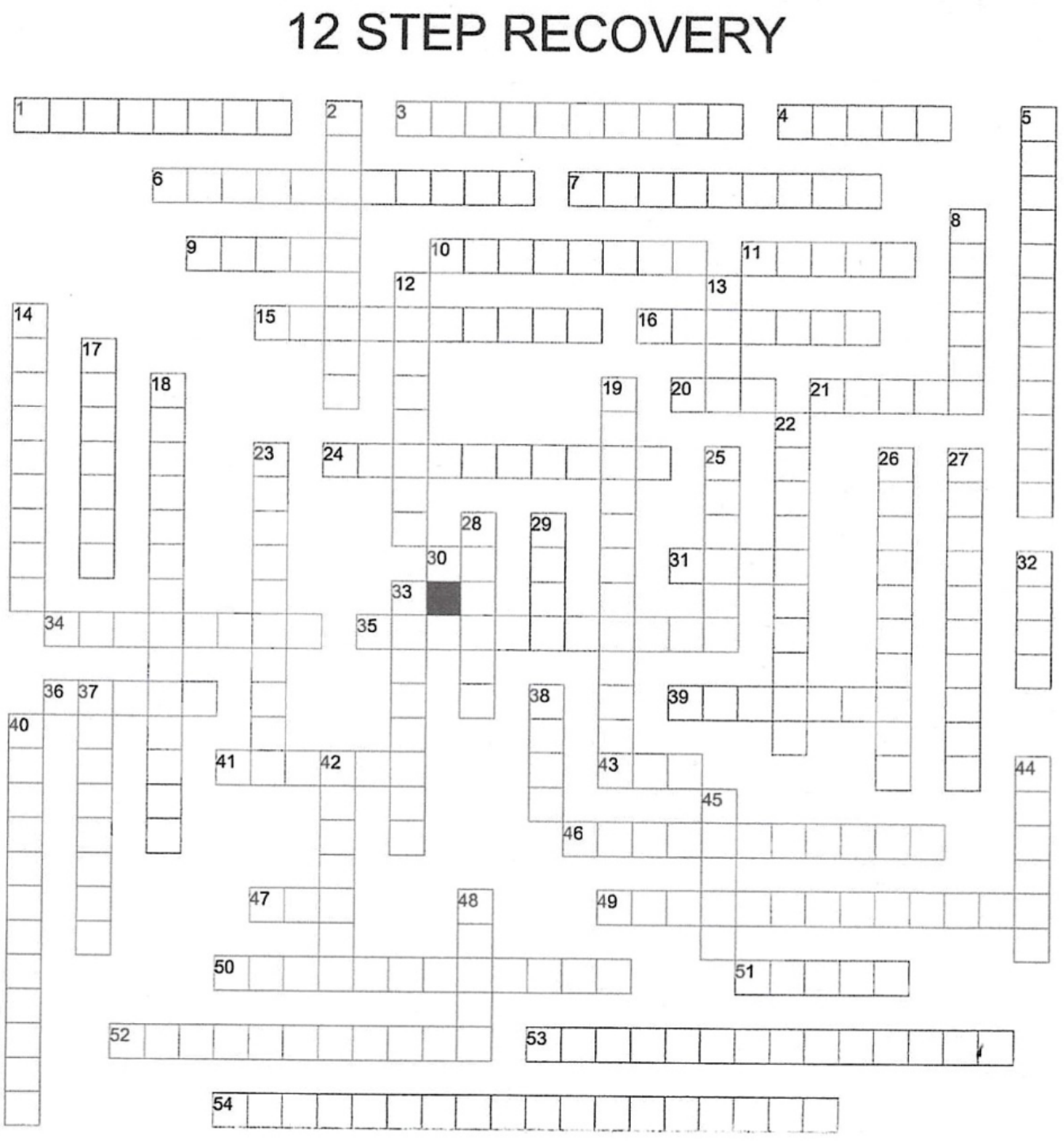
Connie B. - 1 year - 11/21

Monica R. - 1 year - 11/24

Campbell N. - 1 year - 11/28

Different Journeys - Same Hope

12 Step Recovery Crossword



Crossword Clues

Across

1. The word _____ implies action.
3. This is a program of complete _____ from all drugs.
4. Until we took Step One, we were full of fear and _____.
6. We need to change our playmates, _____ and playthings.
7. "Having had a spiritual _____
9. "Staying clean MUST always come ___."
10. Many of us ended up in jail, or sought help through medicine, _____ and psychiatry.
11. The_____ Step is the key to freedom.
15. We feel that our lives have become _____.
16. This may be done in _____ at the end of the day.
20. Step____ frees us from the wreckage of our present.
21. Sometimes, the only amend we can make is to stay _____.
24. A second admission must be made before our _____ is complete.
30. The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous, as adapted from ____are the basis of our recovery program.
31. We begin to pray only for God's _____ for us.
34. In the _____ Step, our lives take on a deeper meaning.
35. The only _____ for membership is a desire to stop using.
36. The first step to recovery is to stop _____.
39. Most addicts will see that_____ is impossible the moment it is suggested.
41. Regardless of what we tried, we could not _____ from our disease.
43. Willingness is what we strive for in Step ____.
46. The Eighth Step starts the process of_____:
47. just for today , you never have to ____ again!
49. By working the steps, we come to accept a _____ will.
50. All that is essential is that we open the door to a _____ _____ than ourselves.
51. We can find meaning and purpose in life and be rescued from insanity, depravity and _____..
52. May I please have a_____ _____ or a fatal accident?"
53. We didn't stumble into this Fellowship brimming with love,honesty _____ or willingness.
54. We didn't stumble into this Fellowship brimming with love, _____, open-mindedness or _____.

Down

2. The only way to keep from returning to active addiction is not to take that _____ _____.
5. NA is a nonprofit Fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a _____.
8. The newcomer is the most important _____ at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away.
12. As with each step, we must be _____.
13. We use to live and ___ to use.
14. Step Six helps us move in a spiritual _____.
17. As a result of attending a few meetings, we begin to feel like we _____ belong somewhere.
18. "We made a searching and fearless _____ _____ of ourselves."
19. "We humbly asked Him to remove our _____."
22. _____ is the key to our symbol;
23. The Twelve _____ of NA are not negotiable
25. Very simply an _____ is a man or woman whose life is controlled by drugs
26. Very simply, an addict is a man or woman whose life is _____by drugs.
27. The only requirement for_____ is a desire to stop using.
28. The First Step has left a _____ in our lives.
29. In Step ____, we begin to get in touch with ourselves.
32. The white book, Narcotics Anonymous, was published in .
33. We found that by putting _____ first, the program works.
37. The steps are our _____.
38. Narcotics Anonymous was formed in July ____ with the first meeting held in Southern California.
40. We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become _____.
42. The Second Step is necessary if we expect to _____ ongoing recovery.
44. Humility is a result of getting _____ with ourselves.
45. Step ___ is the test of our newfound humility
48. If you are an addict and have found this book, please give yourself a ----- and read it

Steps to Recovery Word Search

Steps to Recovery

Y S S G K G R Z F I W T X K I S L V A H P S X L
L E X P K X N A N P L J A I T X G V D A O T T S
M C G Q F Y G V G D Q W I X T A U A M S L W N E
H I S G N K E E Z W M O R Q B A I R I V D H E R
P O K X F N P X R W M O S S C S D A T C Z O M V
Q H O W T C M S U A S V U E A J A P T Z T F T I
R C J O O R L Z C N H R E O C L N W I K B U T C
E M R X A C U O O A R S J A I N C J N O X E I E
W Y O A N Y W P D E V Y N O W C E Y G R L W M J
O D L D U S S D N E U T Z I P D L U K R O V M H
P G E Q P A I D H A R I L H W G U Q Q X C P O O
R K S N Q C E B T Y G L X E E E P G V E V Q C Z
E U N B T R S Y R R I I U R D H K B F J S C M R
H Z U I M W U E A N I M C K W T I C H Q Y N W Z
G P O O O C V T G T E U P Y V T E R Z M T G O E
I N C B F O I N I T P H Y U P Q M Z G U N I A C
H V N S C T E G V F X J T S Y V T K C O U D T J
H O P E U S F O R G I V I N G A W A K E N I N G
C D R D S Z G J T H Q R N V E X P E R I E N C E
X C E U K P T L F G B B E Z M O B B A B S Q C E
E P O H S T W K A Q U O R L O O D U V H B P V B
H C H I H Q S O B E R C E Y W C D P Z I G M K F
R T V B M I U E X T R G S H A L T S C Q N A X I
I C O N F I D E H T G N E R T S Q D C E C I M N

higher power
experience
awakening
addiction
strength
confide
halt

consequences
inventory
admitting
guidance
recovery
choices
hope

committment
surrender
counselor
serenity
service
share

willingness
forgiving
gratitude
humility
sponsor
sober

Literature Corner

NA Information Pamphlets

IP #6 · Recovery and Relapse
Relapse, warning signs, and returning to recovery.

IP #8 · Just for Today
Staying clean one day at a time.

IP #9 · Living the Program
Practicing recovery principles in daily life.

IP #11 · Sponsorship
Guidance, honesty, and support from a sponsor.

IP #16 · For the Newcomer
Meetings, support, and beginning recovery.

IP #22 · Welcome to Narcotics Anonymous
Belonging and staying connected.

IP #29 · An Introduction to NA Meetings
Attending meetings and participating.

Additional reading

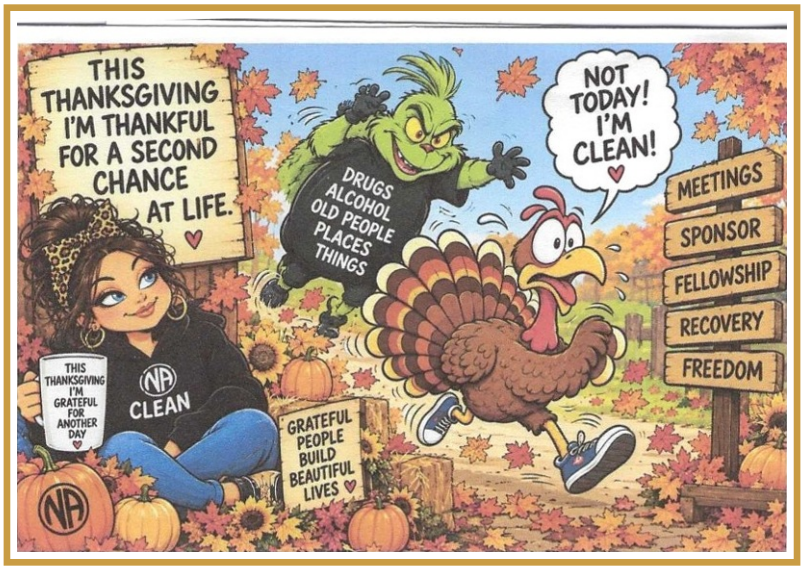
Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, Sixth Edition:
Chapter Seven · Recovery and Relapse;
Chapter Nine · Just for Today / Living the Program.
Find pamphlets at na.org/literature.



48 Musts · Answers

ACROSS	DOWN
6. OTHERS	1. SEPARATE
7. SERVICE	4. PRESERVE
8. HONEST	5. PERFECT
9. OFFICERS	6. PERSON
10. ACCEPT	7. MEDITATION
11. GIVE	8. COMMIT
12. ABSTINENCE	9. RELAPSED
13. TRAGEDIES	10. LON
14. GRAFT	11. BEFORE
15. CLEAN	12. ATTITUDE
16. PAST	13. ATMOSPHERE
17. UNDERSTAND	14. ADDICTION
18. COMPETITION	15. ADAPT
19. ADMISSION	16. PAIN
20. SOMETHING	17. FOUNDATION
21. JOINED	18. PROBLEMS
22. WILLING	19. HELP
23. STRENGTH	20. GRATEFULLY
24. ALONE	22. PICTURE
25. UNITY	23. TOGETHER
26. SPIRITUAL	24. LIE
27. WILLING	26. SURVIVE
28. EXPRESSION	27. FIRST
	28. LOSE

Our Closing Message





To all readers,

Keeping the anonymity of our departed members is a profound way to respect them, treating them with the exact same dignity as if they were still sitting right next to us in the rooms.

As we put together the December Narcotics Anonymous Newsletter, we are dedicating a special portion of this issue to honoring the beautiful souls we have lost. While we do not use names or identifiable details, their spirit, their recovery, and the footprints they left on our hearts remain fully alive.

Looking back on my time in fellowship with them, my mind floods with beautiful moments shared. I think of the infectious laughter in the parking lots after tough meetings, the quiet nods of understanding from across the room, and the unconditional warmth in their hugs when words weren't enough. Sharing those moments didn't just comfort me—it completely opened my mind. It taught me that our bonds transcend our struggles, and that the love we cultivate in recovery is never truly lost; it simply weaves itself into the fabric of the staying clean journey for those of us still here.

If you have a reflection, a lesson learned, or a beautiful, anonymous memory of a member who has passed that you would like to share for the December issue, please reach out. Let's continue to carry their message and keep their spirits close.

Submit : Newsletter@shevana.org

Closing Message

Recovery is not a straight line, and relapse does not erase the progress you have made. Each day offers a new opportunity to begin again, seek support, and take the next right step. Be patient with yourself, celebrate every victory, and remember that you do not have to walk this journey alone.