

## House of Sobriety: The Mental

- The Mental Level of Your House of Sobriety is your THINKING
  - What you think affects what you do
  - All these levels are interconnected and interdependent
  - Important to become aware of how your thinking affects your health, your life, and your sobriety
  - Important to identify what sorts of *thoughts* are dangerous to your sobriety and learn how to go about changing them
- Remember: “I am a person with addiction.” Whenever you begin to doubt that statement you are in trouble.
- **Vignette:** *You’re walking down the street and you see someone passed out on the sidewalk. You can tell that person is a drug addict. You sniff a few times, make a face and think I was never that bad. You can use this incident to continue using, with rationalizations like:*
  - “If he’s an addict, then I’m certainly something different.”
  - “I’ve got a problem, maybe, but I can handle it.”
  - “I’ll never let myself get like *that*.”
    - These are thoughts that occur to both using and recovering alcoholics and addicts.
    - Thoughts like these indicate that the alcoholic or addict has not accepted or surrendered to their disease. They may be sober now, but their mind is preparing their body to take a drink.
    - Thoughts like the following are extremely dangerous because they show a mind setting the stage for the physical act of using or drinking again:
      - ❖ “I wasn’t that bad.”
      - ❖ “I was never really addicted to the stuff.”
      - ❖ “Now that person, she’s a *real* addict.”

- If you ask someone who has relapsed what they were thinking about when they first started using or drinking again, and whether or not they struggled with it, the answer is often “I just did it; I didn’t really think about it. It wasn’t a struggle at all.” Why? Because the mind has already struggled with the idea and fought out the battle in the mental arena. It was all decided before the person with an addiction problem actually went out and started using again.
- **Cognitive Distortions:** “Stinking Thinking” is what AA members call these kinds of thoughts. “Stinking Thinking” is evidence that the addiction is attempting to take over once again and establish control. The hallmark symptoms of addiction—*rationalization, denial, minimizing, projection*—can be found in the spoken and unspoken thoughts of an addict on the verge of relapse.
  - “My wife is really the cause of my problems. How can I live with this woman and expect to stay clean?”
  - “The psychiatrist told me my real problem was with my mother, and now that she and I are on good terms, I don’t see how a drink every now and then can hurt.”
  - “Why do I have to be an addict? Why can’t I party like everyone else? It’s not fair.”
  - “I’m not sure I ever really was an addict. I was never arrested and I still have my license.”
  - “I’ve been clean and sober for three years. How could a little marijuana hurt me?”
    - Chances are you won’t express these thoughts to others because you know (actually, your addiction knows) what their reactions will be.
    - It is important to identify these warning signs as the whisperings of the addiction and take immediate steps to protect yourself.
    - It is important to understand that this not the logical *you* talking. It is not your *Wise, Clear Mind*. These thoughts are the addiction’s way of trying to call you back and reestablish its power over you. It is *Addict Mind*, trying to take control again.
- **Addiction Re-activation:** What reactivates your addiction? Your body’s stability can be undone by:
  - Stress
  - Illness
  - Grief
  - Guilt
  - Becoming complacent and not going to recovery groups or the other places where you can get support

- Deciding to spend time with people you know are not supportive of your recovery.
- Not taking care of yourself: neglecting diet, exercise, your social life, your spiritual life.
- When your life gets back on track and your life of active addiction seems like a long time ago, you can start to take your recovery for granted. This is human nature. Heart attack victims start neglecting their exercise program after surgery; people with high blood pressure work in high stress jobs; diabetics sneak sweets. These are all examples of people with chronic illnesses who “forget” how sick they once were. Forgetting that you suffer from a chronic and incurable disease puts you at risk for a dangerous and potentially fatal relapse.
- **Recovery Meetings/Groups:** For the person with addiction, 12 step meetings (and other recovery fellowship groups, such as All Recovery and Smart Recovery) are one of the best ways to keep in touch with your disease and maintain your discipline.
- Regular attendance at addiction support group meetings helps you develop and grow as a human being by keeping you in constant touch with your disease and with others who suffer from it.
- Going to groups reminds you that you have a *chronic disease*.
- When you hear other people’s stories, you remember your own, and you know that you are not alone.
- When you meet other people who are struggling to get or stay sober, you are reminded what it was like for you.
- Many others argue that AA and NA are not for them, that they are too anxious or shy to go to groups, or that the program is for religious fanatics, or that meetings are too crowded or too boring or full of people they can’t relate too.
- Some people have managed to stay abstinent without the assistance of recovery support groups, but statistics show people who attend recovery support groups are much more likely to maintain abstinence over time.
  - **Anxiety:** Are you anxious about being in a group? If so, there’s no rule that says you have to speak at a 12 step meeting. Just sit and listen.
  - **Behaviors:** Is it because you don’t feel comfortable with the people in NA/AA? You can find 12 step meetings that consist primarily of loggers, or meetings that consist mostly of professionals; there are all-men groups and all-women groups. Every meeting is different, and if you go to several it’s likely you will find one where you can feel comfortable.
  - **Religion:** Is your reluctance due to what you perceive as the religious aspect of AA/NA? Remember the “higher power” 12 step group members talk about is whatever you want it to be—it is God to some, Love to others, the laws of nature

to others. Some people are more traditionally religious than others, and by trying out different groups you will be able to find one where you feel at home and find other people who share your perspective and philosophy.

- It's essential in your present and future life that you do not allow yourself to become isolated or to forget what your life was like as a person in active addiction. Recovery meetings will keep you in touch with your disease, with your past, and yourself; in the process it can help you live happily sober for all the years remaining to you.