

Facilitator Notes #5: The Four Stages of Growth in Recovery

Overview: This lesson switches from what we know about addicts and their behaviors in lessons 1-4 to more about their process of recovery. The main ideas behind this lesson, are to educate parents and family about what to expect and also interestingly, this lesson has many cross-over applications to us as parents in our own “recovery,” from our old behaviors and habits. This lesson uses the analogy of “stages of life” to illustrate, the need for adult coping skills in order to survive in life without resorting to mind altering substances. When put in the context of Delayed Emotional Growth, we can better understand why relapse occurs. We can also learn to accept relapse as a part of recovery and realize that in many (most) cases, relapse does occur. Refer to notes on statistics in Lesson one to get an idea of how often studies show that relapse occurs, particularly in the first year of recovery.

Notes:

- Blanks: D = delayed, E = emotional, G = growth
- This lesson has a fairly large amount of material, and yet it can be an *eye-opening* experience for many that hear it (even multiple times). This lesson is better presented in sections, rather than all at once, although that is certainly possible as well. In other words, reading a section and discussing it before reading the next section is usually easier for people to understand.
- This is a lesson that is presented to addicts in many recovery programs in some variation. Noting this to the parents may help them realize that if their loved one has been or is in recovery, they will hear something similar to this in a recovery program. The key topic is having the appropriate adult coping skills to manage life without drugs and/or alcohol.
- Under the section on “Why we relapse,” there is a comment, “Maybe we didn’t have the best teachers...” It is important to be sure that this is not misunderstood to place blame. It is helpful to point out this line and ask if it makes anyone feel guilty for not being the best teacher. Then follow up with a question, “Did you ever purposely harm your children when you were raising them or hope they would take drugs or abuse alcohol? (Best answer: “Of course we did not do this; we did the best we could, with the information we had, and we hoped for the best in our children, but they make choices and we cannot control that. “
- Good reminder to use the motto from Al-Anon, the three C’s. We didn’t **Cause** it; we cannot **Control** it and we cannot **Cure** it.

Driving points home:

- Key in on the first section under Why we relapse, to the phrase, *non-judgmental relapse*. Ask the group what that means. (Best answer: relapse is not something to judge them over, it is a part of their recovery. You may not like it, but in most cases, this and the resulting consequences are what helps them learn to live without drugs and alcohol). Use the illustration of an addict attending an AA meeting, “If someone goes to an AA meeting and stands up and tells the group, they relapsed after 5 months of sobriety, ended up back on the street, got arrested, were released today and came to the meeting, would the group immediately start lecturing them and telling them what an idiot they were for throwing away 5 months of sobriety?” (Best answer, no they would accept them and welcome them and thank them for being there and encourage them to live each day sober) i.e. no judgement in AA meetings.

- To emphasize why they relapse, you can summarize by stating, “They go back because they do not have the skills, they need to live their life without using drugs again, so relapse is a teachable moment.” When you don’t have the skills to handle work, family and love, as noted under *How not to relapse*, then you need to gain these skills to help you to not resort to mind altering substances. Reminder, “When the student is ready the teacher appears.” (Another reason to be “*thankful*” when they relapse, as this may be the time, they realize they really do need help and cannot do it “their way.”)
- Regarding the stages of life, they can be read in reverse if you think it works better. In other words, from stage 4 to stage 1. Either way, to drive the point home, you can use this question, “How will I know if they are not ready at a certain stage?” (Best answer: they will relapse or struggle and that can be seen as a sign they need to learn more skills from the previous level)
- This lesson can be depressing for people if they see their loved one in the pre-school stage; so a way to change the focus, is to ask, “Has anyone here seen their loved one move from pre-school all the way to the college stage of life?” (hopefully someone will, if not, share with them the story of someone you have heard of or seen)
- One question that comes up is that their loved one bounces around between the stages, this is a good time to remind them that this is not a hard and fast model, and that people move at their own pace and that it is possible to jump around. This can be a good time to turn that into a question for the group, “Have you seen a loved one jump from stage to stage or even skip a stage?”
- A good way to drive home a universal point in dealing with addicted loved ones is to ask, “How do you know which stage they are in?” It is their experiences and actions that will tell me where they are; not their words.

Cross-reference material from Mike Speakman’s book, *The Four Seasons of Recovery*

- Page 169-171 (Relapse)
- Page 171-173 (Relapse Triggers)
- Page 173-175 (Why Relapse Happens)
- Page 195-196 (What to do when my adult child relapses?)