



Recovery Notes

Susan F. Walsh, Ph.D. LCSW

Scientific Recovery

COMPASSIONATE • PRIVATE • PERSONALIZED • PROVEN

For Problems with Alcohol

OUTPATIENT TREATMENT FOR HIGH-PROFILE WOMEN

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The Journey to Recovery

Every woman's experience in changing a problem with alcohol will be personal. But, if successful, she will undergo a process of significant personal and emotional growth. She will develop new ideas and behaviors that will help her to maintain a pleasurable, satisfying, addiction-free life.

Research studies have identified six different stages women may go through when they change a problem with alcohol. Although these stages are separated for purposes of discussion, not every woman will go through all of the stages or go through them in an orderly fashion. It is common to take two steps forward and one step back when making any significant change. A woman may get stuck in

one stage for a while, go back and forth between stages, or revisit an early stage of change after having progressed to a later stage.

Stages of Change

PRECONTEMPLATION

The first stage of changing a drinking problem, called *precontemplation*, is one in which a woman is not aware of her problem. She is resistant to change because she doesn't think she has a problem with alcohol, even if other people can readily see that she does.

CONTEMPLATION

The second stage is called *contemplation*. In this stage of change, a woman is willing to consider the possibility that she has a problem with alcohol. This recognition offers hope for change. Women in this stage begin thinking about the impact that alcohol is having on their lives and the lives of others. They are often interested in learning about alcoholism and treatment options. Talking with a treatment professional at this time can be helpful to a woman who is reflecting on the pros and cons of her drinking. But, a woman in this

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stage is on the fence. Even though she may acknowledge that her drinking is causing problems, she is not yet ready to make a decision to change.

PREPARATION

Making the decision to stop drinking is the primary characteristic of the stage

Susan F. Walsh, Ph.D. LCSW

333 East Ontario Street Chicago, IL 60611 • (312) 642-4333 • www.scientificrecovery.com

of *preparation*. Weighing the pros and cons of her drinking finally tips the balance in favor of making a change, with much thought given to the advantages of quitting. While not all ambivalence has been resolved, mixed feelings no longer represent an intractable stumbling block to change.

Often, with the help of a treatment professional, women will make a realistic assessment of the level of difficulty involved in stopping drinking. They will begin to anticipate obstacles and dangers and come up with tangible solutions that will become part of their ongoing recovery work.

Women in this stage typically feel ready and determined to take action and they want to make a sensible plan. Often, with the help of a treatment professional, women will make a realistic assessment of the level of difficulty involved in stopping drinking. They will begin to anticipate obstacles and dangers and come up with tangible solutions that will become part of their ongoing recovery work.

ACTION

Women in this stage of change put their plan into *action*. This stage typically involves making some form of public commitment to stop drinking in order to get external confirmation of the plan. Making such public commitments not only helps women obtain the supports they need to recover from problem drinking, but also

creates external monitors. Women often find it very helpful to know that others are watching and cheering them on.

If she has not already done so, a woman in this stage may enter counseling or some form of outpatient treatment, or start to attend AA meetings or other mutual help groups. In addition to getting and staying sober, during this stage a woman begins to learn more about herself so that she can change her thinking, her emotions, and her self-image. She learns that coping with her drinking problem requires much more than simply stopping drinking. A woman will address the basic issues of recovery, such as coping with thoughts about and cravings for alcohol; handling people, places, and things that may influence her to drink again; managing upset feelings; and, dealing with family and relationship problems. Mutual-help groups and other forms of social support can provide structure in a woman's life and help her stay connected to others who care about her recovery.

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Nothing succeeds like success. A woman who has implemented a good plan begins to see her plan work and makes necessary adjustments to the plan along the way. The many things that alcohol may

have taken away begin to be restored, along with hope, self-confidence, and continued determination not to drink.

MAINTENANCE

Successful change requires building new patterns of behavior that are sustained over many years. This stage of sustained change is called *maintenance* or *relapse prevention*. In this stage, an alcohol-free life is becoming firmly established, and the risk of a return to old behavior patterns gradually diminishes.

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Because alcoholism is a chronic disease, the possibility of relapse is always present. So, a woman learns to identify and manage relapse warning signs and high-risk situations. Women at this stage of change are equipped with a variety of relapse prevention skills. They know where to get the supports they need.

But, even so, a woman may experience a strong temptation to drink and fail to cope with it successfully. Alcoholics who relapse frequently learn from the relapse. The experience of relapsing and returning to sobriety often strengthens a woman's determination to stay sober.

TERMINATION

The ultimate goal and final stage of the change process is *termination*. The woman with a drinking problem has, through experiencing repeated successes, acquired the confidence and skills to cope with life's problems without fear of relapse. In this stage, alcohol presents neither a temptation nor a threat. A woman in this stage is able to enjoy her life with a very low risk of relapse.

— Susan F. Walsh, Ph.D.

Scientific Recovery

Scientific Recovery is an evidence-based treatment program for women seeking state-of-the-art, individual therapy for problem drinking. Our focus is on professional women who have recognized that alcohol is a problem they no longer want in their lives. Our goal is to assist women not only to eliminate their alcohol dependence, but also to be happy that they did.



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