

Counselor's Treatment Manual

Matrix Intensive Outpatient Treatment for People With Stimulant Use Disorders

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Session 3: Avoiding Relapse Drift

Goals of Session

- Help clients understand the process of relapse drift.
- Help clients identify things in their lives that are anchoring their recovery.
- Help clients identify things that must be avoided because they threaten to send clients into relapse drift.

Handouts

- RP 3A—Avoiding Relapse Drift
- RP 3B—Mooring Lines Recovery Chart

Presentation of Topic (15 minutes)

1. *Understanding How Relapse Drift Can Lead to Relapse*

In the group session on boredom (RP session 2) clients learned that boredom can be a sign that they are not taking an active role in their recovery, that they are just going with the flow. Relapse drift is the process by which people slide from abstinence to relapse without even realizing what is happening. A useful comparison is that of sailors who anchor a boat before going to sleep below decks. If the anchor is not properly set, the boat will drift away during the night; the sailors wake up to find they are in unfamiliar waters, far from their safe anchorage.

Although relapse may feel like a sudden occurrence—an unforeseeable disruption of recovery—often it is the result of a gradual movement away from abstinence that is so subtle clients can explain it away or deny responsibility for it. Relapse rarely occurs without warning signs. Clients need to remain vigilant for signs of relapse. (In Early Recovery Skills session 7, these early warnings of relapse were referred to as addictive behaviors.)

2. *Understanding the Importance of Mooring Lines*

People who are successful in recovery find ways to remain abstinent. Pursuing certain activities or avoiding certain people and situations becomes essential to maintaining recovery. Identifying these recovery-supporting behaviors and checking to make sure they are in place also are essential to maintaining abstinence. These recovery-supporting behaviors are the “mooring lines” of people in recovery. They keep clients anchored in recovery and alert them to the first signs of relapse drift. Clients need to examine their recovery process and identify their mooring lines. Doing so allows them to list and monitor the things that are anchoring their recovery.

3. *Monitoring Mooring Lines*

To monitor their mooring lines, clients need to identify them and list them as specifically as possible. Merely listing “Exercise” is not as helpful to the client as listing “Ride bike for at least 30 minutes, 4 times a week.” Likewise, listing a friend as a mooring line is not as helpful as writing “Talk on the phone with Louisa once a week.” Clients should avoid listing attitudes or things that are not quantifiable as mooring lines. Although a feeling of optimism may help clients stay abstinent, it is not easy to monitor. The goal is

to have clients make a list of activities or behaviors whose presence or absence they can note. Detailed, concrete listings give clients better indications of whether their mooring lines are secure.

Handout and Focused Discussion (45 minutes)

Clients should be given time to read handout RP3—Avoiding Relapse Drift and complete handout RP3B—Mooring Lines Recovery Chart before the discussion begins. Clients should not be forced to comply if they find it difficult or uncomfortable to complete the handout in the group. The handout is primarily a tool for discussion. The counselor steers clients away from reading their responses and encourages them to converse about the issues the handout raises. The counselor ensures that all clients have an opportunity to participate.

- Go over handout RP 3A—Avoiding Relapse Drift. Cover any aspects of the topic that were not addressed in the didactic portion of the session.
- Go over handout RP 3B—Mooring Lines Recovery Chart. Give clients 5 to 10 minutes to complete this chart.
- Ask clients to share the activities, behaviors, and people they identified as mooring lines.
- Have clients explain how one of their mooring lines helps keep them abstinent and secure in their recovery.
- Ask the recovering co-leader to share his or her experience with mooring lines. Have they stayed the same over time? Or has the co-leader added new mooring lines as recovery has progressed?
- Ask clients to share the activities, behaviors, and people they must avoid if their recovery is to remain anchored.
- Ask clients how often they will check their mooring lines. It is recommended that they check them at least weekly.
- Review with clients the steps they can take if they realize that more than two of their mooring lines are missing and they are drifting toward relapse.

Open Discussion (30 minutes)

The counselor should carry over from the previous discussion any important issues that have not been addressed fully. Although it is important for clients to be able to speak about what is on their minds, the counselor should make sure that the session's topic has been explored completely.

Five minutes before the end of open discussion, the counselor should ask clients to share briefly their experience of doing the homework from the previous session. The counselor can decide how detailed the followup on homework should be. The goal of asking is not to discover which clients have not done the homework but to encourage clients to work on their recovery between sessions and to share that work with the group.

Homework

Instruct clients to check their mooring lines once before the next RP session.

How Relapse Happens

Relapse does not happen without warning, and it does not happen quickly. The gradual movement from abstinence to relapse can be subtle and easily explained away or denied. So a relapse often feels as if it happens suddenly. This slow movement away from abstinence can be compared to a ship gradually drifting away from where it was moored. The drifting movement can be so slow that you don't even notice it.

Interrupting Relapse Drift

During recovery people do specific things that keep them abstinent. These activities can be called "mooring lines." People need to understand what they are doing to keep themselves abstinent. They need to list these mooring lines in a specific way so they are clear and measurable. These activities are the "ropes" that hold recovery in place and prevent relapse drift from happening without being noticed.

Maintaining Recovery

Use the Mooring Lines Recovery Chart (RP 3B) to list and track the things that are holding your recovery in place. Follow these guidelines when filling out the form:

- Identify four or five *specific* things that now are helping you stay abstinent (for example, working out for 20 minutes, 3 times a week).
- Include items such as exercise, therapist and group appointments, scheduling activities, 12-Step meetings, eating patterns.
- Do not list attitudes. They are not as easy to measure as behaviors.
- Note specific people or places that are known triggers and need to be avoided during recovery.

You should complete your Mooring Lines Recovery Chart weekly. Place a checkmark

Avoiding Relapse Drift

next to each mooring line that you know is secure and record the date. When two or more items cannot be checked, it means that relapse drift is happening. Sometimes events interfere with your mooring lines. Emergencies and illnesses cannot be controlled. The mooring lines disappear. Many people relapse during these times. Use the chart to recognize when you are more likely to relapse, and decide what to do to keep this from happening. (After 5 weeks when the chart is full, transfer the list of mooring lines to a journal or pages 12 and 13 of your *Client's Treatment Companion*, and continue to check your mooring lines.)



