

GDC Session #4

Managing Cravings: People, Places, and Things

Objectives of Session

1. Define the terms “craving” and “trigger” as they relate to people, places, and things.
2. Identify when to avoid certain people, places, and things that trigger a desire to use cocaine or other drugs.
3. Identify direct and indirect social pressures to use cocaine and other substances.
4. Identify strategies to cope with social pressures and cravings to use substances.

Methods/Points for Group Discussion

1. Use a discussion format to review the clients’ answers to the handouts and the educational material for this session. Write the major points on a chalkboard or flip chart, if desired.
2. Ask group members to share their own experiences related to this material as it is reviewed.
3. **Triggers** refer to experiences, people, situations, events, or things (objects) that stimulate a desire or craving to use cocaine or other substances. A trigger can lead to a relapse if the recovering person doesn’t have coping strategies to manage the craving.
4. **Craving** refers to an impulsive, spontaneous urge to use cocaine or other substances. A craving may include strong thoughts of using drugs, physical symptoms such as heart palpitations and sweating, or behaviors such as pacing.
 - Cravings are triggered by many external stimuli in the environment, such as the sight or smell of substances or people, places, events, or experiences related to substance use (e.g., drug dealer, friends who use, places where cocaine was used, music associated with getting high, etc.).
 - Cravings also are triggered by internal factors, such as obsessions or thoughts about using drugs, or mood states such as anxiety, boredom, or depression.
 - Cravings to use cocaine or other substances are temporary and will pass in time. The client needs to use coping strategies to resist giving in to a craving.
5. Clients may experience direct and indirect **social pressures** during recovery. These pressures can lead to relapse if the addict is not prepared to handle them and refuse offers of alcohol or other drugs.

6. Ask clients to give examples of social pressures and other triggers to use drugs or alcohol. After eliciting clients' examples of triggers, review the common triggers listed below that clients didn't identify.

■ **Social Pressures and Triggers To Use Drugs and Alcohol**

- Drug-using friends or family members.
- Dealers.
- Events or celebrations where alcohol or drugs are present.
- Music associated with partying or using substances.
- Sex and sexual partners.
- Drug paraphernalia.
- Corner or house where drugs were obtained.
- Neighborhood where drugs were used.
- Some jobs (particularly if people used drugs on the job).
- Money or the anticipation of getting money or a check.
- Weekends or celebrations.
- Smell of crack or the smell of matches.
- Sight or smell of other drugs.
- Feeling lonely, sad, angry, bored, or depressed.
- Positive memories of getting high.
- Negative thoughts of recovery.

7. Discuss how to avoid the triggers that members have identified as powerful.

8. Ask the group members to identify strategies that they've used in the past or could use in the future to manage a drug craving or resist social pressures to use cocaine or other substances.

■ **Behavioral Strategies**

- Call a friend or sponsor to discuss the craving.
- Go to an AA, NA, or CA meeting or to a recovery club.
- Get some physical exercise.
- Read, particularly about recovery.
- Spend time with sober people.
- Keep busy.
- Distract oneself with an activity.
- Avoid high-risk people, places, and events.
- Be firm when refusing offers to use substances.

■ **Cognitive Strategies**

- Remember that cravings and desires for substances eventually go away.
- Think positive and tell yourself you can fight off your craving.
- Talk yourself through the craving.
- Pray or ask for strength from your higher power.
- Practice ahead of time how to refuse substance offers.

GDC Session #4 Handouts

1. “Cravings To Use Cocaine or Other Drugs.” Adapted from *Group Drug Counseling Participant Recovery Workbook*. Holmes Beach, FL: Learning Publications, Inc., pp. 9-12.
2. “People, Places, Events, and Things.” Adapted from *Relapse Prevention Workbook*, 3rd ed. Holmes Beach, FL: Learning Publications, Inc., pp. 12-14.

Suggested Educational Videos

Living Sober Video A: *Resisting Social Pressures to Use Chemicals*. Gerald T. Rogers Productions, 1000 Skokie Blvd., Suite 575, Wilmette, IL 60091, 1-800-227-9100.

GDC Session #4, Sample Handout #1
Cravings To Use Cocaine or Other Drugs

During recovery, particularly the early months, it is common to experience urges or cravings to use cocaine or other substances. A craving may occur at any time, even if you are actively involved in a recovery program. Cravings may differ in frequency and intensity with each person. It is important to be aware of things that may trigger a craving, physical and psychological signs of craving, and positive coping strategies.

Cravings can be triggered by things you see in the environment that may remind you of using drugs or getting high, feelings such as anxiety or anger, or things that you don't seem to be able to identify. Physical signs may include tightness in your stomach or feeling nervous throughout your body; psychological signs may include increased thoughts of how good you would feel by using alcohol or drugs or feeling you need cocaine or other substances.

Think of times when you have experienced a strong craving for cocaine or other substances. Answer the following:

1. What triggered your urge or craving?

Being pissed off, wanting a "reward," pressure to use from other addicts, feeling bored.

2. What were the physical signs?

Restlessness, feeling "angry," tightness in my stomach.

3. What were the psychological signs?

Increased thoughts that I need or deserve cocaine or a drink, revenge fantasies, thinking about ways to "sneak" some drugs.

An important issue, especially in the early stages of recovery when you are not used to handling urges or cravings, is living with cravings without giving in to them and losing your sobriety. Keep in mind that urges or cravings normally decrease in frequency and severity as your sobriety progresses. List below specific steps you can take to help you survive a craving to use drugs or alcohol, then review the ideas that follow:

1. *Tell myself I'd better control my craving before it controls me.*

2. *Think of how I'll disappoint myself and my kids.*

3. *Take a brisk walk or do something physical.*

4. *Talk about it to recovering friends or my sponsor; refuse to keep it a secret and let it build up.*

Strategies for Managing Cravings

- **Recognize and label your cravings.** Learn the signs of your cravings and label them (craving, desire, urge, or drug hunger).
- **Talk about your cravings.** Talk with your sponsor or an AA, NA, or CA friend, counselor, close friend, or family member. This can provide you with relief, and you'll hear how others coped with cravings.
- **Go to a self-help meeting (AA, NA, CA, etc.).** This will provide you with an opportunity to discuss your cravings with others and hear how others have coped with their own cravings.
- **Do something active now!** This can help redirect your energies and divert your attention. Make a list of activities with which you can keep yourself busy if your cravings get strong.
- **Write in a journal.** Put your thoughts and feelings into words and write them in a journal. Describe your cravings and the situations in which they occur. Keep track of the outcome of your cravings and positive coping strategies you used.
- **Get rid of drugs, paraphernalia, and booze.** Don't keep substances in your home. Get rid of drug paraphernalia such as papers, pipes, needles, mirrors, etc.
- **Keep a craving coping card in your wallet or purse.** Write down a list of positive coping strategies and carry this list on a 3 x 5 index card in your wallet or purse.
- **Be aware of high-risk people, places, and situations.** There may be people, places, or situations that you must avoid to reduce your risk of using drugs, especially during times when you feel a strong craving. Since you can't avoid all high-risk people or situations, you need to be prepared ahead of time so that you can cope with cravings or desires to use if they pop up.
- **Pray.** Ask God or your higher power for help and strength to get through your cravings.
- **Read recovery literature.** Read passages from the *Basic Text*, or other books and guides on cocaine recovery. Reading may provide you with coping strategies, inspire you to continue your recovery journey, or calm you down.
- **Practice positive thinking.** Tell yourself that you can successfully put off your desire to use drugs. Remind yourself that cravings eventually go away, and remind yourself of the benefits of staying drug free. Repeat the slogans of 12-step programs.

GDC Session #4, Sample Handout #2

People, Places, Events, and Things

People, places, events, and things (or objects in your environment) are among the many “triggers” that can stimulate your desire to use cocaine or other drugs. When you actively used drugs, you learned to associate certain cues with using cocaine. These cues may include the people from whom you purchased drugs or with whom you “got high”; the corner, block, or house where you bought or used drugs; events like parties at which drugs were available; and the things that were involved in your drug use, such as money, drug paraphernalia, music, etc. Other triggers that stimulate an urge to use drugs include certain weekends, celebrations, or events during which you feel social pressure to use substances.

It is important to identify your personal triggers to use cocaine or other drugs. Once you recognize what leads you to crave cocaine, you have made a good start. The next step is to know when and how to avoid the people, places, events, and things that trigger your craving for drugs because this will help reduce your vulnerability to use substances.

Sometimes recovering people test themselves by being around the people or events they associate with drug use. If you find yourself testing your self-control, examine your reasons for doing this and consider that this behavior probably will lead you to use drugs again. To break out of your cycle of addiction, the safest, wisest plan to follow is to avoid people, places, events, and things that remind you of cocaine or other substance use as much as possible.

A variety of **social pressures** must be successfully handled to stay sober. Social pressures may be **direct**, such as being offered alcohol or other drugs, or **indirect**, such as being involved in a family gathering or work-related function at which alcohol or other drugs are being used. Successful recovery will require you to **be aware of how you might be affected** by the various social pressures and **what you can do to deal with** the pressures without using alcohol or other drugs.

1. List the social pressures (people, places, events) to use drugs that you think you will face during your recovery.

Parties of any kind

Bars

Rock 'n' Roll concerts

Certain friends' homes

My brother's house

2. Think about how these social pressures will affect both **your behaviors** and **your feelings**. List below what you may think you will experience when the social pressures occur:

Your Behaviors: *Pressures could make me get closer to people using so I felt part of the group.*

Your Feelings: *Excited at first, then worried I could make a bad decision and get high.*

3. After you identify social pressures to use cocaine or other drugs and the thoughts and feelings you may experience when these pressures occur, **think about what you can do to help yourself cope** with the social pressures without using drugs. Review the following list for ideas.
 - Identify high-risk people and social situations to avoid because of the pressure you will face to use cocaine or other drugs.
 - Tell people that you have a problem with cocaine.
 - Simply refuse any offers of drugs without giving an explanation.
 - Say that you are not using drugs today.
 - Ask the person who is offering you drugs not to do so because of the problems your cocaine use has caused.
 - If you begin to feel anxious and pressured in a social situation, it is advisable to leave the situation. This is especially important if the people who are present can influence you to use cocaine or other drugs, including alcohol.