



Examining Your Mental Cushion –

Understanding the Nature of the Mental “Cushion”:

When it comes to substance abuse, quite often a return to negative behaviors after a period of progress is based on a sense that there is a cushion between oneself and the potential consequences. This is very similar to the concept of a safety net. When someone knows there is a safety net ready to break their fall, they often may be willing to take more risks. Therefore, at times someone who is not using substances may use again when they start to think that they can get away with it without getting into any trouble.

Consider some other life areas where you may have a mental cushion. In other words think about areas where you allow yourself a little wiggle room to take risks. Think about some of the following life areas: (Keep in mind, the point of this exercise is not to condone breaking the law, taking unnecessary risks, or bending rules but rather to help gain insight into the mental process behind allowing ourselves to take risks with potentially harmful behaviors like substance abuse)

Think about and Discuss:

- 1. When there are no police visible, how many (if any) miles per hour do you generally allow yourself to go over the speed limit?**
- 2. How late (if at all) do you tend to allow yourself to get to work if no one is paying attention?**
- 3. Are there any areas with regard to hygiene habits that you occasionally try to get away with (skipping a shower, not shaving, re-wearing a dirty clothes item, not brushing or flossing, etc.?)**
- 4. Are there situations where you will sneak in texting or other communication that is not allowed where you are not supposed to if you believe you can get away with it (for example while at work or school)?**
- 5. Think of other obvious or subtle examples of when you think you won't get caught you sometimes may try to bend the rules, stretch the truth or otherwise try to get away with things that you know you really shouldn't be doing. Be honest:**



Thinking about the above things helps us to understand how in many life areas we either consciously or unconsciously may have established a cushion with regard to an amount of leeway we may give ourselves with our decisions that may not be right or good for us in the long run. Understanding this process can help you understand the concept of the mental cushion when it comes to abuse of substances. Now let's apply the same line of thought to substance use issues and other negative behaviors. While trying to be as honest as you can with yourself: Consider each of the following and think – Would I use?

1. What do you think the likelihood would be that you would use again if all of your external motivators were removed. (For example, no more legal system, family pressure removed, etc.)

2. What would happen if you woke up one day and found out you received a huge settlement of money?

3. What if a new version of your favorite substance came out that was undetectable by drug tests?

4. What if you won a month long vacation to go a country where there was little or no penalties for using your favorite substance?

5. What if your relationship partner and your closest friends all started using your favorite substance at the same time in your life (Would you join them)?

6. What if someone offered you a large amount of a substance for free?

7. What if you just knew that you could somehow use just this once and there was no way anyone would ever find out?



8. What if you lost your job or primary source of income?

9. Using your imagination, can you think of any other situations that would make it incredibly difficult to prevent allowing yourself to use again?

FINAL DISCUSSION – ENDING ON A POSITIVE NOTE:

The objective here is to stay on a positive path and avoid allowing ourselves to go back toward the negative, so let's consider what could help prevent that by reviewing and discussing the following:

1. Can you remember any past situations where you got high because you thought that you could get away with it but it did not work out that way? What can you learn from those past experiences?

2. What helps you keep your consequences in the forefront of your mind? In other words, what helps you to stay aware of what will happen if you get caught getting high again? Even if you don't get caught, what other consequences may eventually come about in your life?

3. Are there any positive people in your life that help you stay on the right path? What in particular do those people do to help keep you in line?

4. If you start to think to yourself thoughts such as "I can get away with this if I really want too" then what other thoughts can you think of in their place, in order to stay on the right course?



5. What other life situations could help you strengthen your resolve to stay on a positive path? (For example, going back to school or getting a job). Is there anything realistic you can do today to get started?

6. Our thoughts are so often the starting point for our future actions. For you to stay on a positive course going forward, what are some positive and encouraging thoughts that you can practice thinking about on a regular basis that will keep you motivated? Try to come up with at least 2 or 3:

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