



## COPING WITH SETBACKS – What is a “Cushion?”

**Cushion** - something that lessens the effects of hardship, distress, or the like: *His inheritance was a cushion against unemployment.*

*“I figured I could get away with it and I’d be OK”* - For many who experience setbacks, the problem itself may be recognized, however there can be pattern of returning to negative behaviors due to a false sense that consequences are still far enough away not to be worried about them just yet.

To understand this better consider the following:

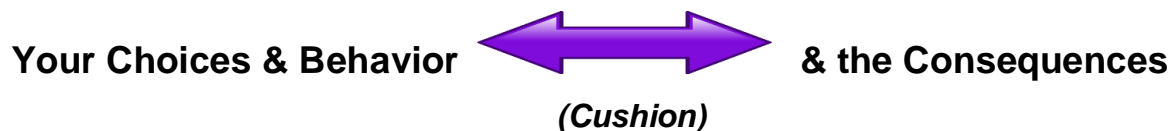
**Mother** – “Do not do that or you’ll go blind!”

**Child** – “Can I do it until I go blind in one eye?”

Simply put, having a “cushion” means believing that:

- “I can get away with this for a while longer before I really get into big trouble” or
- “I still can do this a few more times before I really need to stop”

**Consider how some factors can increase a feeling that there is a cushion between:**



Factors that can affect the sense of a “cushion” between your actions and the consequences:

**Money** - The ability to pay for a high-priced lawyer or to go to an expensive rehab can create a sense of a cushion or protection from the consequences.

*For example – “I’ll get high this one more time and if I get caught I will just promise my wealthy parents that I will go away to rehab again”*

- **Discuss as a group** – Has having money ever been a factor in your avoiding the consequences of your substance use? Give some examples from your own experience

**“Connections”** – Being the child or other close family member of someone with a degree of power (such as a police officer or a politician) can serve as a cushion from one’s consequences when we use these connections to get out of trouble



- **Discuss** – Has anyone ever consistently used their personal connections to get out of situations where substance use should have gotten you into trouble?

**Appearance, charm and charisma**– Being born attractive or just innocent-looking or else just having the special ability to persuade or “sweet talk” others into letting you off the hook when you get caught can create a sense of a cushion from consequences

- **Discuss** – Has anyone here regularly used or depended upon their looks or their charm in order to consistently escape consequences of their substance use?

**Youth** – Sometimes being young can create a sense of distance between yourself and the consequences of your choices today.

- **Discuss** – Does anyone here ever find themselves thinking anything like – “I am still young enough to get away with this for a while longer before I really need to change?”

**Medicated Assisted Treatment (MAT)** – MAT can be extremely helpful *when used properly* but sometimes people use MAT as a cushion from experiencing discomfort. For example – “I can get away with using dope this weekend, I’ll just buy a few Suboxone next week on Monday for when I have to go back to work”

- **Discuss** – Is anyone here willing to admit to misusing MAT in this manner? (Getting high when you want to then just using MAT to avoid getting sick, then doing it all over again)

**Clean Time** – Of course clean time can be an excellent indicator of progress, however people may “give their self permission” to use after a period of abstinence after thinking the following types of thoughts:

- “I deserve this” or “I’ve earned it” – (Allowing yourself to use after abstaining as a reward)
- “It’s been a while since I have been in trouble so people will give me a break if I mess up now”
- **Discuss** – Has anyone had the experience of “giving yourself permission” to return to getting high after a period of progress by telling yourself that you “deserve it” or by telling yourself that other people will go easy on you because it has been a while since you have been in trouble?



## **CLOSING DISCUSSION – Facing the Music**

When it comes down to it, we can sometimes cushion ourselves from consequences for a while but eventually we have to face the music and deal with the consequences that we have been cleverly trying to avoid

- **Discuss as a group** – What eventually happens over time to most people when they use things like, money, connections, appearance, youth, etc. to keep allowing themselves to go in the wrong direction?
  - Can anyone provide a real life example of someone who eventually had to face the consequences after a period of cleverly trying to avoid them?
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**Finally, as a group, pick one of the following quotes about consequences below and share with the rest of the group why you chose it:**

“Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful.” - Margaret J. Wheatley

“If you build the guts to do something, anything, then you better save enough to face the consequences.” - Criss Jami

“We are free to choose our paths, but we can't choose the consequences that come with them” - Sean Covey

“We all make choices, but in the end our choices make us.” - Ken Levine

“Do not be deceived...for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.” – Galatians 6:7

“A real leader faces the music, even when he doesn't like the tune” - Anonymous

“Things are not the way they used to be, I won't tell no lie; one and all we have to face reality now”  
– Bob Marley

“Men of thoughtless actions are always surprised by consequences” – Sarah Addison Allen

“Some people create their own storms, then get upset when it rains” - Unknown

“You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today” - Abraham Lincoln