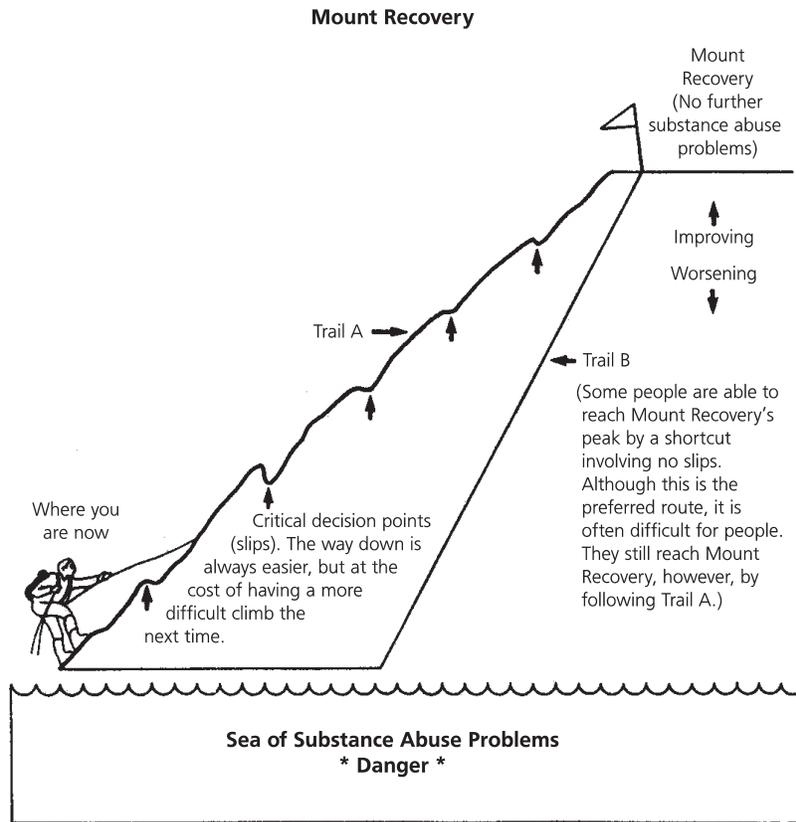


Climbing Mount Recovery

RECOVERY FROM SUBSTANCE ABUSE IS LIKE CLIMBING A MOUNTAIN



★ *What do you notice about Trail A and Trail B?*

Trail A is trial and error—mistakes along the way, but people eventually make it to the top.

Trail B is perfect—no problems, just a direct path to the top. Very few people do it this way!

The message: Either trail will get you there.

If you do not like to imagine mountain climbing, select another image that works for you: A trip to a foreign country? Running a marathon? Learning to drive a car? Or none at all?

PREPARING FOR YOUR TRIP

As with any other journey, you need to be prepared. Just as for climbing a mountain you need to take hiking boots, food, a tent, and a flashlight, for your recovery trip you will need to do the following:

→ **Tell everyone close to you where you're heading** and ask them to help you with it (e.g., not using substances around you, never offering you substances).

(cont.)

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→ **Be prepared for “bad weather.”** Some people find that as they stop using substances, their PTSD gets worse for a while. Just like a storm, this does *not* last forever. It simply means that you need to face feelings that have been hidden by substance abuse. Accept and honor those feelings. Strive to cope with them as best as you can without using.

→ **Take your list of Safe Coping Skills**—they’re just as vital as food to survive on this mountain! It’s also best to pack a list of reasons not to use substances, and a list of rewards for yourself for each day you don’t use. Keep all of these in your wallet for easy access.

→ **Be prepared for down times.** On all adventures, there are times that are not fun. When you give up substances, you may feel miserable and deprived. Just keep climbing up the mountain—better times await you ahead. The view from the top is incredible!

→ **Take “maps.”** Just like having maps and a tourist guide, you’ll need to learn everything you can about your journey—from self-help groups, books, educational videos, and talking to people who have recovered.

→ **Carry a phone so that you can reach out for help if you get stranded.**

→ **Set a starting date.** How about today?

→ **Don’t take guilt, self-hatred, blame**—these weigh you down.

→ **Remember that there is never a good reason to use.** Even if you’re homeless, had a fight, and lost all of your money in a single day—none of this means “It’s okay to use.” Using a substance will not get you a home, get you out of a fight, or get your money back . . . but it *will* make you *less* able to cope with your problems.

→ **Remember that as you reduce substance use, your PTSD may get worse;** be prepared for this, seek help, and remember that it won’t last forever.

→ **Surround yourself with safety**—safe people, safe places, safe things.

→ **Never “test” yourself by seeing whether you can turn down a substance.** Just as you should never test your safety by walking down a dark alley at night, you should never test your recovery by walking into a substance abuse situation.

→ **Know that cravings are normal.** As long as you don’t actually use, you’re okay.

→ **Fight “AVE” (the “abstinence violation effect”).** This is a common pattern in recovery: If you use once, you think you might as well keep using because you’ve already failed. No—don’t keep using! Just stop and pick yourself up. Having 1 drink is better than having 10 drinks.

→ **Remember the bottom line: To heal from PTSD, strive to be substance-free!**

→ **Memorize the “Three Main Thoughts That Lead to Substance Use” (see the box below).** They are like snakes in the grass—they will jump out and hurt you when you’re not looking.

THREE MAIN THOUGHTS THAT LEAD TO SUBSTANCE USE:

⌋ “I’ll just have one” ⌋

‡ “I can handle this alone” ‡

⊠ “I don’t care” ⊠

★ *Is there anything else you need for your journey?* _____
