

Time Management

Medical Patient Education Module

Structuring One's Time

If the patient has a chaotic, disorganized lifestyle, the counselor will help the patient to identify what he or she does each day and help to structure his or her days to encourage abstinence. People with drug-use disorders often live in an impulsive and chaotic manner. Order and structure can help to lessen the risk of relapse. One of the defining features of drug addiction is the priority that the drug assumes in the individual's daily existence. Many addicts organize their entire daily routine around obtaining, administering, and recovering from the effects of their drug(s).

Because of the time these behaviors require, many people with a drug-use disorder experience a void, or a sense of loss, shortly after stopping the drug. They have spent so much time working for drugs and associating with people, places, and things associated with taking drugs that they have difficulty imagining what to do when they are not using drugs.

The counselor must try to counteract this lifestyle, as well as restructure the content of the addict's daily activity, by trying to help organize the patient's daily routine. One way to help the patient achieve a better organizational pattern is to work out a daily schedule for the week, or until the next session, and to review it. Structuring one's time is an important aid to recovery, because having definite plans and staying busy helps the recovering a person with substance dependence not to have excess free time, which is all too likely to be spent thinking about using drugs. When newly recovering addicts have too much free time, they are likely to recall the "good times" they had using their drugs. This experience is called "euphoric memory" and understandably tends to lead to desire for the drug.

Also, a structured life helps the patient to reduce residual physical symptoms from the cocaine use and to decrease negative emotional effects, such as depression or boredom. The counselor will discuss how the patient spends his or her time and help the patient structure the time to support abstinence. This structure should include getting up each morning and going to bed at night at regular times, scheduling time for 12-step meetings at least 3 to 4 times a week, and including time for handling personal responsibilities and engaging in healthy recreational activities.