

Inside A Hole in the Sidewalk by Claudia Black

Dear Readers:

In over twenty years of my work in the addictions field, I have had the honor of witnessing thousands of men and women of every age recover from various addictive disorders. Many are fortunate to remain abstinent from their first day of recovery, but there are those who relapse after several weeks, several months or even after years of abstinence. While I have met people who have relapsed at each phase, one of my most vivid memories was in working with a man who had been clean from alcohol for thirty years. Within just three days of starting to drink again, he needed to be hospitalized because he was so physically sick. Just as significant, he was as spiritually and emotionally bankrupt as he had been thirty years previously when he first quit drinking. Thus, the severe consequences of a relapse. Many people die in relapse, others remain chronic relapsers. Others who relapse eventually return to a program of recovery and find continuous sobriety.

While the most prevalent substance addictions are to alcohol and other drugs, this workbook can be utilized for a wide range of addictive disorders — from nicotine, alcohol and drug addictions, to sex, work, spending, gambling, food, and relationship addictions. The common theme in relapse is the resumption of self-destructive behaviors. Being an addict, in and of itself, means one is prone to relapse. To assume and simply hope it will not occur is denial. We must all take a proactive stance. Addictions are diseases of isolation and recovery begins with connecting to others who can help us understand our addiction, offer a path for recovery, and provide hope. Recovery is also about being accountable and taking action. Picking up this book is a statement that you take your addiction seriously and want to be proactive against a possible relapse. Whether or not you have a history of relapsing or want to immediately begin to work at potential stumbling blocks, this book can be a major asset.

It is my hope that if you have picked up “A Hole in the Sidewalk,” you are already involved in a recovery process. The single greatest contributor to relapse is to lose sight of recovery as the first priority in life. Without recovery, all will be jeopardized — be it our relationship with God, our family, our job. Irrespective of importance, all are threatened if we cannot stay in recovery. If you are not involved in a recovery process, then please immediately seek a resource in your community that can give you direction as to what is available to you. **This book is not meant to be a program of recovery. It is meant to be an additional tool for your recovery.**

As previously acknowledged, people relapse at different phases in their recovery, and for very different reasons. Knowing this, I have chosen to address various issues that I believe are often overlooked, or need to be reinforced. Most people will use this book as a workbook and start from the beginning. If you choose, after you have completed the first section (“Getting Started — A Look Over Your Shoulder”) you can skip to the various themes that explore the issues you identify to be a priority. Please do not limit your responses to the numbers or lines offered. You may find it helpful to use a journal. I encourage you to share what you are learning about yourself with a counselor, therapist, sponsor, or recovering friend.

Depending on the addiction, the language that signifies recovery includes words such as clean and sober, abstinence, sobriety, etc. To be inclusive of the many possible addictions, I have chosen to use the word recovery. I ask you, the reader, to identify those behaviors that represent relapse, as well as recovery, from your own addiction(s).

Each section offers additional tools for your recovery. To remind you that knowledge about addiction and recovery is a tool, at the close of each section there is a toolbox icon. The more tools you gather and use, the more your recovery will be strengthened.

A very powerful tool is to acknowledge why we are grateful for our recovery everyday. Each section concludes with an opportunity to stop and reflect — not just on the exercises completed, but the day. In recovery, we often talk about the need to live *One Day at a Time*. Recovery, *One Day at a Time*, is a gift — that is why it is called the *present*. It is my hope that the moment for reflection will be something you include in your daily practice.

You will quickly see that I have a bias towards Twelve Step recovery. No other singular resource has been so instrumental in helping great numbers of people recover from various addictive disorders. If you choose not to utilize the Twelve Step programs you will still find this book helpful. I strongly encourage you to look at your resistances and be more open, and/or actively seek another avenue that will support you in recovery. I know of no other life threatening illness that is as treatable as addiction. At the back of the book you will find a listing of websites and telephone numbers for many programs and resources.

My hope for all addicted people is that they find recovery.

Know I am with you in spirit.

Claudia Black

Table of Contents:

Addiction History

Getting Started – A Look Over Your Shoulder

Overconfidence

Hey – No Problem

Control

I've Got It

I'll Handle This

Feelings

Name That Feeling

The “F” Word: Fear

How Do You Plead – Guilty?

Cry Me a River – or Drought

Angry? Me?

Anger

Aristotle's Challenge

Mad... and It's Not About You

Hostility Roadmap

Resentments

Whose Poison Is It?

The Needle Is In the Red Zone

Multi-addictions

One, Two, Buckle My Shoe – Three, Four

Triggers

Triggers – and I Don't Mean the Horse

Relationships

The Helping Hand

Trigger Relationships

Relationship View

Warning Signs

Watch Your Step

Spirituality

Came... Came to... Came to Believe

Packing for the Spiritual Journey

Secrets

Behind Closed Doors

Daily Schedule

Suit Up and Show Up

Priorities

First Things First

Meditation

Peace of Mind

Abstinence vs. Sobriety

Good vs. Best

Emergency Plan

But Wait... There's More

A Hole in the Sidewalk

Same Song, Second Verse, Same Theme

Resources

Excerpts



I'll Handle This

Letting go of self-will means letting go of control. It is the manipulation of people, places, and objects. Controlling behavior is about many things.

- Controlling behavior can be a response to shame. It compensates for our inner belief that says, “I am not adequate, I am insufficient, I am damaged.” We may have carried this message with us for most of our lives.
- Controlling behavior gives us a sense of power to compensate for the sense of powerlessness. It may be a false sense of power, but false or not, it is better than no power.
- Growing up in what was often a dysfunctional home, we may have learned from early on that the illusion of having *some* control in our chaotic environment was critical for survival. Control brings predictability.

However we learned it, we don't need to be critical of our control. We just need to recognize if it is interfering in our recovery today.

There are many styles of control. The four styles listed below are among the most common.

Sweet Controller — Sweet, polite, and pleasant. “And, I *always* get what I want.”

Distant Controller — Emotionally cold, rigidly efficient, and a master of details.

Passive Controller — “I don't care. It doesn't matter to me. That is okay, but I will get you in the end.” Otherwise known as the Martyr.

Angry Controller — “I want what I want when I want it. And I will darn well get it.” The Intimidator.

What style(s) of control did your parents use?

What style(s) of control do you use today?

Irrespective of the controlling style, controllers operate from a position of fear, shame, and distrust. We pay the consequences for our controlling behavior. We may not know how to listen or follow direction. We may lack in creativity or spontaneity. We may withhold thoughts and feelings, and we often intimidate people. Control is a major barrier to recovery. Faith and control don't peacefully coexist. If you are searching for intimacy, you can't have it without letting go of control.

Trying to be in control has left us very angry or depressed because our needs cannot be met. Despite our best efforts to control, we often find ourselves frustrated and resentful because our efforts to control have failed — *again*.

In order to let go of attempting to control events and other people in our lives, we need to increase our understanding of our responsibility for our feelings and actions.

Letting Go of Self Will

As you answer these questions, rate yourself on a scale of one to ten, one meaning the least and ten the most.

Are you unselfish or do you put your needs before the needs of others? If the latter, give an example.

Unselfish-1 _____ 10-Selfish

If you rated yourself 7 or above or 3 or less, do you think this area contributes to the possibility of relapse?

Yes No

If yes, explain:

Do you admit and take responsibility when you are wrong, or do you make excuses, justify, or blame

others? If the latter, give an example.

Responsible-1 _____ 10-Blame, justify

Do you let go and forgive, or do you hold onto resentments and self-pity? If the latter, give an example.

Forgiveness-1 _____ 10-Resentment

Do you tend to deal with problems directly, or do you procrastinate or avoid dealing with problems? If the latter, give an example.

Act-1 _____ 10-Avoid

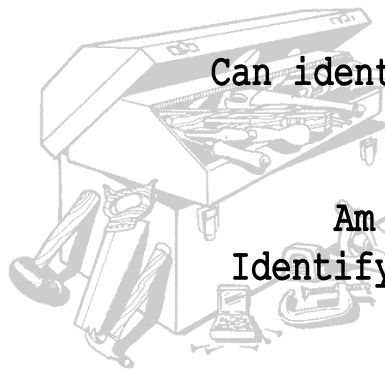
If you rated yourself 7 or above on any of these scales, do you think this area contributes to the possibility of relapse?

Yes No

If yes, explain:

If letting go of control is a problematic area, identify on a daily basis two areas you want to practice “letting go.” It may be the same two areas repeatedly, but staying aware of your intent will help you to be able to follow through. One way to do this is to use the sentence stem, *Today I will let go of control of _____* in a morning meditation.

Remember that each day in recovery, learning to let go of our need to control helps us to stay in the moment; to trust in our Higher Power; to accept that we don’t have to have all the answers, have a plan for everything, or to control everything.



Can identify self will behaviors

Am accountable

Consider others

Am willing to let go

Identify controlling behaviors

Today, I am grateful for _____



The Needle Is In the Red Zone

As addicts, we often hang on to resentments. As part of a program of recovery, it is essential to learn as much about our resentments as we can. In order to learn how to release resentments, we need to first know the specific themes of our resentments and how they are present in our lives.

Having listed specific resentments in a previous exercise, do you see any particular themes to your resentments? Are they regarding specific people or issues?

Resentments often stem from unrealistic expectations or distorted thinking. When we are resentful, we often lose our serenity and in our anger have a **SLIP**. This stands for **Sobriety Losing Its Priority**.

The following exercise is designed to help you identify resentments, the thinking associated with resentments, and the consequences. Example:

I am resentful at	For	What I told myself that was unrealistic or distorted	What I did
My co-worker	Not including me in a project	He didn't value my work — I'm not good enough	I got loaded
My spouse	Having friends	I should have all of my wife's attention whenever I want it	I had affairs
My sponsor	Spending time with others	I should have all of my sponsor's attention	I didn't follow directions

I am resentful at	For	What I told myself that was unrealistic or distorted	What I did

Looking back at the resentments you listed, what role did you have in the situation(s) that led to your resentments?

Example:

Co-workers — I made assumption

My spouse — I had unrealistic expectations

My sponsor — I had unrealistic expectations, grandiose thinking

If resentments are a problem for you, it may be helpful to do a daily inventory of resentments and identify your role. We can only be accountable for ourselves. Remember, it's our poison, not theirs.

Today I will let go of _____

Today, I will surrender it to my Higher Power.

Today I will let go of _____

Today, I will surrender it to my Higher Power.

Today I will let go of _____

Today, I will surrender it to my Higher Power.

Identifying resentments and then surrendering them to your Higher Power will be extremely helpful. Remember that this exercise is to help you release expectations and resentments. Each day as you learn to release expectations, fears, and resentments, you learn to live life guided by your Higher Power.



Today, I am grateful for _____



Trigger Relationships

Certain behaviors within relationships are serious relapse triggers. For Mike, working and traveling with his alcoholic father is a serious trigger for his recovery from substance abuse. “It is extremely difficult for me to work and be around my father when he is actively engaging in his addiction. I am constantly confronted by my anger with him and my own desire to use.”

For Lori, a sex addict, being around her brother-in-law, with whom she acted out sexually, is a trigger. Also, being around her sister, with whom she has tremendous guilt, is a trigger. “I feel so much shame and guilt when I am around them. I constantly think about my actions and beat myself up. The hard thing is that I can’t avoid them because they are part of my family.”

For Kevin, returning to work where his co-workers and friends use drugs is a trigger. “How am I supposed to go back to work with these people? My whole social life with them is centered on drinking and using. We would use at lunch, after work, and weekends. Without chemicals, how do I relate to these people?”

For Sherry, being around her father, who was her childhood perpetrator, triggers her eating disorders. “Whenever I see my dad, I feel so much anger, pain, and shame; I medicate my feelings by eating. Then, I feel guilty for acting out in my eating disorder. It is a vicious cycle.”

It is vital that you identify the relationships that will be significant triggers.

Which people are the greatest triggers in your life?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

What is it about your relationship with them that is a trigger for you?

When thinking of these trigger relationships, consider:

- Do you need to say some things directly to this person to set the stage for a different relationship?
- In what ways can you limit contact?
- What acts of self-care can you employ if you must see this person? Acts of self-care could be things you do before and after you have seen them, as well as what you do and say while with them. For example, you may talk to your sponsor prior to a visit. If this is a family reunion, you may choose to stay away from where so many others are staying and partying, and also limit the amount of time you spend at the event. Another limit to employ when focusing on self-care is to know ahead of time what topics of conversation you are or are not willing to have.
- Would Al-anon be a useful support? Al-anon is a Twelve Step self-help group for families and friends of addicts.
- List other strategies that would be helpful.
- Talk to others in recovery about their successful strategies.

Recent Relationships

Allowing ourselves to be in painful relationships where we do not take care of ourselves is also a trigger. Sue, who is new to recovery from her eating disorder but doesn't address how her partner chronically berates her, is very likely to relapse.

Name two people with whom you have had a recent painful relationship:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

Think about the most recent relationship and answer these questions:

What hurtful behavior took place that you tolerated?

What rationalizations did you use to accept the hurtful behavior and allow it to continue?

In what ways did you take care of yourself?

In what ways did you *not* take care of yourself?

How were you hurtful toward the other person in the relationship?

Repeat the same questions in regards to the second person who is a trigger for you.

What hurtful behavior took place that you tolerated?

What rationalizations did you use to accept the hurtful behavior and allow it to continue?

In what ways did you take care of yourself?

In what ways did you *not* take care of yourself?

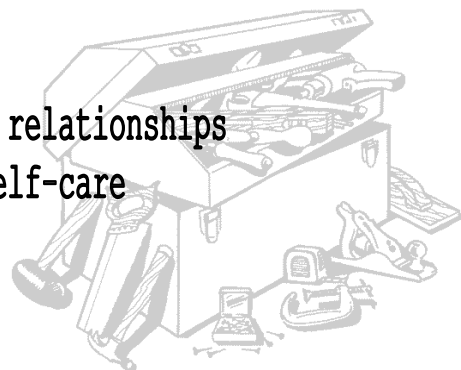
How were you hurtful toward the other person in the relationship?

Identify any patterns or similarities between these two lists.

It is essential to identify the aspects of relationships that can be hurtful to your recovery. While we will

not always be able to stop others from hurtful behavior, we are responsible for how we react.

Identify trigger relationships
Plan for self-care



Today, I am grateful for _____