

Slide 2

**RELAPSE PROCESS**  
from Terence Gorski  
GORSKI-CENAPS 2001



Relapse is more than just using alcohol or drugs:

- It is the progressive process of becoming so dysfunctional in recovery that self-medication with alcohol or drugs seems ...  
like a reasonable choice.

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Slide 3

**Relapse v Recovery**

- Relapse is more than the simple act of resuming use or picking up .
- Return to use is the last act in a whole sequence of events.
- This sequence is marked by changes in thinking, attitude and behavior.
- In order for relapse to occur an individual must have first been actively *in Recovery*.

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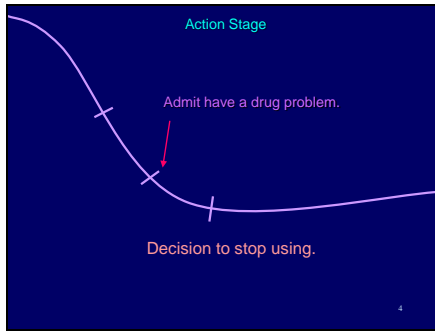
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Slide 4



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Slide 5

### Relapse v Recovery

- You can't relapse if you're not *in Recovery!*

The diagram illustrates the Stages of Change model. A blue curve starts at the top left, dips down through the 'Action' stage, and then rises through 'Early Recovery' and 'Ongoing Recovery'. The stages are labeled as follows: Precontemplation, Contemplation, Action, Early Recovery, and Ongoing Recovery. Below the curve, several key concepts are labeled: 'Create Doubt' (between Precontemplation and Contemplation), 'Explore Ambivalence' (between Contemplation and Action), 'Attempt Abstinence' (under Action), 'Establish Identity as a Recovering Addict' (under Early Recovery), and 'Develop Fulfilling Life' (under Ongoing Recovery). A small number '47' is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide.

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Slide 6

### Recovery 1,2,3

- Individual recognizes they can no longer safely use alcohol and drugs. *(Step 1)*
- The individual decides or agrees to seek help. *(Step 2)*
- As a result of this treatment they begin working a recovery program that leads to positive changes. *(Step 3)*
- Relapse process represents the unraveling of this recovery program.*

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Slide 7

### RELAPSE PROCESS

- The relapse process is a lot like knocking over a line of dominoes. The first domino hits the second, which hits the third and soon a progressive chain reaction has started.

The slide features the title 'RELAPSE PROCESS' at the top. To the right of the title is a photograph of a line of dominoes, with the first domino on the left having just fallen and is hitting the second domino. Below the text is a solid black square.

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Slide 8

**RELAPSE PROCESS**

2 Big Differences:

- 1st, each domino in the line gets bigger:
  - Each problem - gets a little bit bigger and heavier until the last domino is like a 10' tall, 4' wide concrete block.



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Slide 9

**RELAPSE PROCESS**

1st Big Difference:

- When this 10,000 lbs. block begins to fall, it is too heavy to handle alone.

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Slide 10

**RELAPSE PROCESS**

2nd Big Difference:

- The dominoes circle around behind.
  - When the last one falls it hits from behind where we're not looking.

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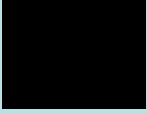
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Slide 11

**RELAPSE PROCESS**

- So, moving along in recovery, we tip over one small domino.
- No big deal . . .
- . . . that domino hits the next and . . .



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Slide 12

**RELAPSE PROCESS**

- The 1st dominoes seem so small: can easily convince oneself that it's no big deal.
- "I can ignore it and do other things. . ."

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Slide 13

**RELAPSE PROCESS**

- All of a sudden a huge domino falls from behind,
- causing serious pain and injury.

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Slide 14

**RELAPSE PROCESS**

- Need to make the pain go away.
- So, reach for old reliable . . .
- The magical substances that always helped out with pain in the past.

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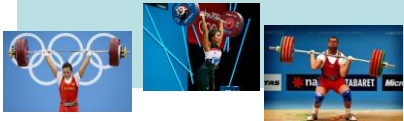
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Slide 15

**RELAPSE PROCESS**

The answer to avoiding relapse?

- Take up weight training so you will be strong enough to force that last domino off your back.



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Slide 16

**RELAPSE PROCESS**

The answer to avoiding relapse?

- 1) Learn how not to tip over the first domino.
- 2) Develop an emergency plan to stop the chain reaction quickly, before the dominoes start getting so big, heavy and unmanageable.

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Slide 17

**RELAPSE PROCESS**

- Don't relapse because of the last problem in the sequence.
- Start drinking and drugging because the entire sequence of problems gets out of control.



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Slide 18

**RELAPSE PROCESS IN  
DETAIL**

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Slide 19

**1<sup>ST</sup> Domino: Getting Stuck In Recovery**

- Many decide that alcohol or drugs is a problem, stop using, and put together some kind of a recovery plan to stay sober.
  - »Initially this works.



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Slide 20

**1<sup>ST</sup> Domino: Getting Stuck In Recovery**

- At some point, there's a problem that we are unwilling or unable to deal with.
- Stop dead in our tracks.
- Get stuck in recovery and don't know what to do/which way to go.



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Slide 21

**2<sup>nd</sup> Domino: Denying That We're Stuck**

Instead of recognizing that we're stuck and asking for help,

- Go into denial and convince ourselves that everything is OK.

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Slide 22

**2<sup>nd</sup> Domino: Denial**



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Slide 23

**2<sup>nd</sup> Domino: Denial**

- Denial makes it seem like the problem is gone, but it isn't.
- It's there.
- It just goes under ground where we can't see it.



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Slide 24

**2<sup>nd</sup> Domino: Denial**

- At some level, know haven't dealt with the problem, but keep investing time and energy in denying it.
- This results in a buildup of pain and stress.



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Slide 25

**3<sup>rd</sup> Domino: Turn to Other Compulsions**

To cope with pain and stress, can resort to other compulsive behaviors:

- Overworking
- Over-eating
- Dieting
- Over-exercising
- Gambling
- Addictive relationships
- Chasing the world's best orgasm.

➢ Feels good in the short run.  
➢ Distracts from problems.  
➢ But . . . the stress and pain comes back.  
➢ May feel good now, but . . . will hurt later.  
➢ A hallmark of all addictive behaviors.

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Slide 26

**4<sup>th</sup> Domino: Experience A Triggering Event**

Something happens.

- An argument, a disappointment, a sudden change in plans . . .
- Often, not a big thing.
- But, something snaps inside.



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Slide 27

**5<sup>th</sup> Domino: Become Dysfunctional On The Inside**

❖ When the trigger goes off, stress goes up and emotions take over.



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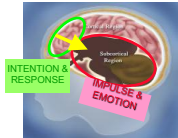
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Slide 28

**5<sup>th</sup> Domino: Become Dysfunctional On The Inside**

- To stay sober need:  
Intellect  
Emotion
- Top Down



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Slide 29

**5<sup>th</sup> Domino: Become Dysfunctional On The Inside**

When:

Intellect  
Emotion



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Slide 30

**5th Domino**



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Slide 31

**5<sup>th</sup> Domino: Become Dysfunctional On The Inside**

When:

Emotion  
Intellect



- Can abandon everything and start trying to *feel good now* at any cost.

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Slide 32

**5<sup>th</sup> Domino: Become Dysfunctional On The Inside**


To Keep:

**Emotion**  

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**Intellect**

1. Remember, "I'm addicted."
2. "Can't use or drink."
3. "Must focus on working a recovery program."




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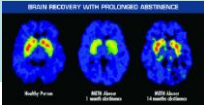
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Slide 33

**5<sup>th</sup> Domino: Cont'd**

- \*\*\*\*\*Relapse almost always grows from the inside out.
- The trigger event makes pain so severe that can't function normally:
  - *Difficulty thinking clearly.*
  - *Swing between emotional overreaction and emotional numbness.*
  - *Memory problems.*
  - *Sleep problems.*
  - *Clumsiness.*
  - *PAWS*




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Slide 34

**6<sup>th</sup> Domino: Become Dysfunctional On The Outside**

- At first this internal dysfunction comes and goes.
- Eventually problems get so bad on the inside, create problems on the outside:
  - Mistakes at work
  - Problems with friends, families and coworkers.
  - Start neglecting recovery program . . .

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Slide 35

**7<sup>th</sup> Domino: Losing Control**

- Don't see the growing pattern of problems.
- And, don't solve, but cover up and put band-aides on deep cuts . . .



The slide features a light blue background. At the top, the title '7<sup>th</sup> Domino: Losing Control' is written in pink. Below it, two bullet points are listed. The first bullet point is followed by a small image of a black cat. The second bullet point is followed by a small image of a box of Band-Aid bandages.

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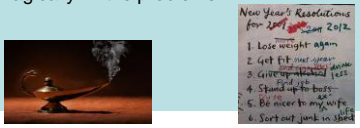
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Slide 36

**7<sup>th</sup> Domino: Losing Control**

OR

- Avoid the problems by getting involved in compulsive activities that will somehow magically fix the problems.



The slide features a light blue background. At the top, the title '7<sup>th</sup> Domino: Losing Control' is written in pink. Below it, the word 'OR' is written in black. Underneath, a single bullet point is listed. To the left of the text is a small image of a scale. To the right is a small image of a handwritten list titled 'New Year's Resolutions for 2011' with six items.

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Slide 37

**7<sup>th</sup> Domino: Losing Control**

- Works for a while but . . .



The slide features a light blue background. At the top, the title '7<sup>th</sup> Domino: Losing Control' is written in pink. Below it, a single bullet point is listed. To the left of the text is a small image of a person cleaning a floor. To the right is a small image of a 'TO-DO LIST' sign with two items: '1. SMILE' and '2. EVERYTHING'.

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Slide 38

**7<sup>th</sup> Domino: Losing Control**

- When finally recognize getting out of control, get scared and angry:  
*"I'm sober! I'm not drinking! I'm working a program! Yet I'm out of control. If this is what sobriety is like - who needs it?"*



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Slide 39

**8<sup>th</sup> Domino: Using Addictive Thinking**



- Go back to addictive thinking.

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Slide 40

**8<sup>th</sup> Domino: Using Addictive Thinking**



*"Sobriety is no good for me, look at how miserable I am."*

- "Stinking Thinking"

*"Sober people really don't understand me, look at how critical they are."*

*"Maybe things would get better if I could talk to some of my old friends..."*

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Slide 41

**9<sup>th</sup> Domino: Go Back to Addictive People, Places and Things**

- Convince oneself not doing these things to drink or use drugs, but . . .  
“...just want to relax.”

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Slide 42

**10<sup>th</sup> Domino: Using Addictive Substances**



- Gets so bad that come to believe have only 3 choices:
  1. Can collapse physically or emotionally from the stress of all the problems.
  2. Can end it all by committing suicide.
  3. Or medicate the pain with alcohol or drugs.

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Slide 43

**10<sup>th</sup> Domino: Using Addictive Substances**



- If these are the only 3 choices, then . . .
- Choice #3, seems pretty reasonable:
- Use alcohol or drugs to make the pain go away . . .

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Slide 44

**Lose Control Over Use**

- Once start using alcohol or drugs, follow one of 2 paths:
- One Path: Brief – A relatively short and low consequence relapse.
  - ✓ Recognize getting into serious trouble.
  - ✓ See losing control
  - ✓ Reach out for help
  - ✓ Get back into recovery.



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Slide 45

**Lose Control Over Use**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Path:
- Long and Painful
  - ✓ Extreme shame and guilt . . .
  - ✓ Refuse to seek help.



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Slide 46

**Lose Control -  
Other Outcomes Of The Relapse Process**

- Some relapse prone people don't drink. They may say:
  - ❖ "I'd rather be dead than drunk . . ."
  - ❖ Attempt or commit suicide.
- Others hang in there until . . .
  - ❖ Collapse from stress, or
  - ❖ Develop a stress-related illness.

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Slide 47

**Lose Control -**  
**Other Outcomes Of The Relapse Process**

- Others use ½ measures . . .
  - ❖ Pull themselves together for a little while . . .
  - ❖ only to have the problems come back later.
  - ❖ **PARTIAL RECOVERY**
  - ❖ Stuck in a figure 8:



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Slide 48

**Talk It Out, Don't Act It Out**

- Most recovering people periodically experience some warning signs.
- You can stop the process BEFORE using substances or collapsing from stress or suffering a meltdown down.
- Relapse is common, but it is not a required part of Recovery!!!

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Slide 49

**Abstinence vs. Recovery**

**2.8x** more likely to be sober @ 2 yrs. If:

1. Have a sponsor
2. Do service work
3. Read literature.
4. Call other members for help

Add SLE [Oxford House]:  
**5.6x**

Miller, L. James, D. Ann, J. Thomas, J. Thomas (2012). Continued 12-step involvement and continuous abstinence at 2 years. Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment 44 (1), 46-51

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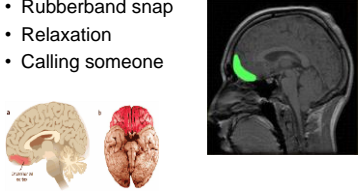
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Slide 50

**Thought Stopping / Interruption**

- Visualization
- Rubberband snap
- Relaxation
- Calling someone



The slide contains three images: a sagittal section of a human brain with the amygdala highlighted in red, a smaller anatomical diagram of the brain, and a sagittal MRI scan of a human head with a green highlight on the brain's surface.

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Slide 51

**Thought Stopping - Internal**

*Visualize*  
On to  
OFF



**Replace with a Pleasurable or Meaningful Thought**

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Slide 52

**Thought Stopping - External**

*Rubberband Snap*

“NO”



**Replace with a Pleasurable or Meaningful Thought**

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Slide 53

**Thought Stopping – Self  
Reliance**

*Relaxation*



**VEGAS Nerve**

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Slide 54

**Thought Stopping – Support  
of Others**

*Calling Someone*



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Slide 55

**The 3 D's of Craving  
Response:**

- **Delay**
- **Distract**
- **Decide**

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Slide 56

**The 3 D's of Craving Response:**

- **Delay** the decision to use.
- **Distract** - Occupy yourself.
- **Decide** - Think it through.

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Slide 57

**The 3 D's of Craving Response:**

- **Delay** the decision to use. Tell yourself that if you still want to have a smoke in an hour you will, but right now you will delay the decision to smoke. By the time the hour is up chances are your craving will have gone.
- **Distract** - Occupy yourself, doing something specific can fill the time with something other than thinking about using.
- **Decide** - Think it through. Think about why you decided to change. Remind yourself of the reasons why you chose cutting down. If possible, keep a list of the reasons somewhere handy so that you can refer to them when you need to.
- When someone is experiencing craving they may only think of the "positive" relief they got from using. Thinking about why you decided to stop helps bring to mind the things you didn't like.

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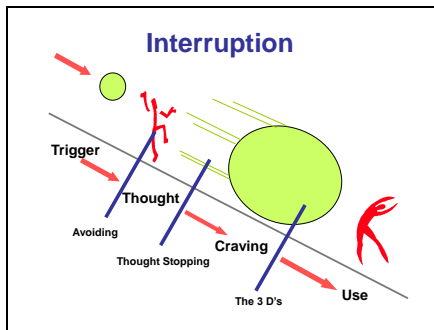
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Slide 58



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Slide 59

**The 3 D's of Craving Response:**

- **Delay**
- **Distract**
- **Decide**

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Slide 60

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