

# HANDLING TOUGH SITUATIONS IN A HEALTHY WAY

## GOALS OF THIS EXERCISE

1. Maintain a program of recovery free from addiction and legal conflicts.
2. Accept responsibility for legal problems without blaming others.
3. Learn to cope with the uncertainty that is associated with legal problems.
4. Identify nonaddictive coping strategies to deal with any outcome of legal problems.
5. Create a plan to cope with each possible legal outcome.
6. Decrease antisocial behaviors and increase prosocial behaviors.

## ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR WHICH THIS EXERCISE MAY BE USEFUL

- Antisocial Behavior

## SUGGESTIONS FOR PROCESSING THIS EXERCISE WITH THE CLIENT

The "Handling Tough Situations in a Healthy Way" activity is designed for the client who is having difficulty coping with current legal issues (pending or resolved) or legal issues that have been left unresolved. It can be used as an adjunct activity to basic problem-solving strategies or to a cost/benefit analysis.

A big part of recovery from addictions and a healthy coping skill is taking responsibility for past and current behaviors. If you are working a 12-Step program, this is also part of your Step work. Handling legal problems without resorting to old negative coping patterns is a vital part of your recovery. Sometimes the outcomes of legal issues are not in our hands, and we must learn to deal with the possibility of serious consequences (e.g., prison time), without returning to addictive behaviors. Other times the consequences of legal situations are known—fines, child support/alimony, loss of a driver’s license, and so on. Whether the outcome is known or unknown, you may feel anxiety, worry, depression, confusion, guilt, shame, fear, and a host of other emotions. Handling pending, current, or unresolved legal situations in healthy ways is possible by using new skills. The goal of this exercise is to help you look at the legal issues you face, explore your feelings about them, identify some techniques to help cope with those legal issues, and begin to plan to maintain your recovery no matter what happens.

1. List the legal charges you have pending, your known current legal issues, and the legal issues that have not been resolved.

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2. What are the known consequences for the items you’ve listed in question 1 (e.g., jail, criminal record, stigma, court-ordered treatment, probation, parole, etc.)?

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3. What are your worries and fears about your pending legal issues or the legal issues you have not resolved?

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4. With whom could you consult to get more information and insight regarding what you are facing (e.g., probation, attorney, police, court official, etc.)?

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5. For each legal issue that you have pending or unresolved, what would be the best and worst possible outcome? For all these outcomes, what is a strategy to deal with each?

Legal Issue	Best Outcome	Worst Outcome	Strategy

6. How can you begin to assume responsibility for your legal problems? Name one action you can take for each legal problem.

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7. How does failing to address these unresolved legal issues put you at risk for relapse?

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8. List five ways you can show you're taking responsibility for your life in spite of legal uncertainties.

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9. Write a beginning plan for how you will cope with possible painful consequences of future legal problems without relapsing.

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10. How would you benefit from living without the stress of legal problems?

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11. Talk with people who've had legal problems and resolved them without returning to addictive behaviors. Ask them how they were able to do it and list three things they did that could work for you in dealing with your current legal issues.

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Be sure to bring this handout to your next therapy session, and be prepared to discuss questions, thoughts, and feelings you may have had in completing it.