

Recovery Tips After Residential Treatment

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After spending time at a residential program, the transition back to the real world can be a difficult one. When you think about all the elements that were working while you were in treatment, you will need to continue to create these things at home. A residential program does not "fix" us for life, but teaches us what we need to do for ourselves. Here is a list of what works in residential programs, and what you can continue to create:

- **Willingness**-Admitting that you need help is hard, but it is a first step toward recovery. It takes willingness to propel us into action. If you find yourself with the "what's the use?" attitude, pray for willingness—it will come.
- **Accountability**-Plan meals with others. Get an accountability coach or another friend in recovery. Call each other every day to check in. Have someone in your life that you HAVE to tell all the sneaky stuff to. Trying to do it alone got you into treatment; learning to "do it differently" will keep you from going back.
- **Structure**-Follow your meal plan even when you don't feel like it. Set up a regular recovery schedule to follow. Plan ahead for triggering situations.
- **Meetings and Support groups**-Go to meetings even when you're not in the mood and feel ashamed. Everyone who is there has been where you are now.
- **Support**-Reaching out breaks the shame and isolation. Get a list of five or ten people you can call when you are in trouble. Allow yourself to feel vulnerable with another person. Remember how you feel when someone tells you they are hurting. Giving support is a gift. Allow yourself to RECEIVE.
- **Feelings**-Separate eating disorder behaviors from stress. Be willing to feel all feelings, even when they feel awful. Feelings won't kill you, but an eating disorder might. Be willing to sit with discomfort by taking one minute at a time. Breathe, don't run. Running from our feelings, just takes us in a circle right back where we started.

- **Therapy & Treatment Team**-Make treatment a continued priority. Without dealing with the issues that come up, you could relapse. If you can't afford therapy, find people who are willing to work on a sliding scale. Get a part-time job just to pay for it. How much is your LIFE worth to you?
- **Emotional Needs**-Usually we are using an eating disorder to fill a need. Find out what your "hunger" is really about and then find a way to get the need met. For example, if it's a boyfriend you crave, ask yourself: What would the boyfriend do for me that would make me feel better? The answer could be nurturing, in which case you'd want to focus on comforting yourself. Or ask yourself, "What do I want?" If the answer is to be thinner, then dig deeper to ask what that really means. If your answer is "I would like myself better," then you need to work on self-esteem and self-acceptance and separate it from the weight issue.
- **Boundaries**-Many times our eating disorder is a protection to keep people at a distance. Take an assertiveness class. Setting limits and saying no can feel terrifying at first, but the more you practice, the easier it gets.
- **Spirituality**-Find purpose, do things that help you find spirit, hope, and connection. It's too easy to get distracted by work, media, and material things. What really matters is love and life.
- **Service**-Volunteer, get outside of self, and help others with eating disorders.
- **Fun**-Make plans for the weekend! Allow yourself to have fun. Staying home and isolating is a breeding ground for an eating disorder.
- **Creativity**-Do something where you feel you shine—but allow yourself to suck at it too. Let go of perfection.

Recovery is one of the hardest things you will ever do in your lifetime, but well worth the effort.