

The Losing Argument

If you decide to stop drinking or using but at some point end up moving toward using substances, your brain has given you permission by using a process called relapse justification. Thoughts about using start an argument inside your head—your rational self versus your substance-dependent self. You feel as though you are in a fight, and you must come up with many reasons to stay abstinent. Your mind is looking for an excuse to use again. You are looking for a relapse justification. The argument inside you is part of a series of events leading to substance use. How often in the past has your substance dependence lost this argument?

Thoughts Become Cravings

Craving does not always occur in a straightforward, easily recognized form. Often the thought of using passes through your head with little or no effect. But it's important to identify these thoughts and try to eliminate them. It takes effort to identify and stop a thought. However, allowing yourself to continue thinking about substance use is choosing to relapse. The further the thoughts are allowed to go, the more likely you are to relapse.

The “Automatic” Process

During addiction, triggers, thoughts, cravings, and use seem to run together. However, the usual sequence goes like this:

TRIGGER ⇒ THOUGHT ⇒ CRAVING ⇒ USE

Thought Stopping

The only way to ensure that a thought won't lead to a relapse is to stop the thought before it leads to craving. Stopping the thought when it first begins prevents it from building into an overpowering craving. It is important to do it as soon as you realize you are thinking about using.