

JOHNSON INSTITUTE



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A Guide to Help Teenagers Stop Using Chemicals

# SAYING GOOD-BYE TO ALCOHOL/DRUGS



## Introduction

Saying good-bye to harmful relationships is important, especially if they've been meaningful relationships. In order to move on, it's important that a person feel and express the emotions that result from a significant loss. Many teenagers develop a meaningful relationship with alcohol/drugs. For those who become harmfully involved or dependent on them, a necessary step in stopping the usage is to actually grieve the loss of the chemicals.

By going through the exercises in this guide you have an opportunity to take an honest look at how your alcohol/drug use has harmed your relationships with your family, your friends, and even with yourself. The guide will help you understand how alcohol/drugs have become the number one relationship in your life. Then, it will help you work through your feelings about giving them up.

The instructions for using this guide are few: take your time, be specific, complete every section before moving on to the next one. Use extra paper if you need more space to write. Take the risk of being completely honest with yourself. You'll find that you **can** break away from a harmful relationship. You **can** say good-bye to alcohol/drugs.

You'll notice that we use "Alcohol/Drugs" in the title of this guide. We used it because many people mistakenly think that alcohol isn't a drug. Of course, it **is** a drug—just as much as cocaine, marijuana, "uppers," "downers," or any other mood-altering chemical is. Too often people talk about "alcohol or drugs" or "alcohol **and** drugs" as if alcohol were somehow different from drugs and in a category by itself. We also sometimes use the term "chemicals," because it covers all those mood-altering substances and because it's short and simple.

# Breaking Away

It's time to take a good look at this friendship

you've been in — your friendship with alcohol/drugs.

Maybe it's been more like a love affair. Whichever

it's been, it won't be easy for you to take a hard,

honest look at it and say good-bye. After all,

if it's like a friendship or a love affair it

must be very important. You bet it's

important. The problem is that this

relationship is killing you! No, that's

no exaggeration. It's the truth.

Take a good look. This friendship has caused

you problems with your family, your friends, your

school, maybe even with the cops or the courts.

It's taught you how not to be a real live person.

It's taught you how to avoid, ignore, numb,

and distort what's real. Maybe it's caused you

to feel so bad about who you are that you've

tried to hurt yourself. Or maybe it's put you in

situations where you got hurt, or where others

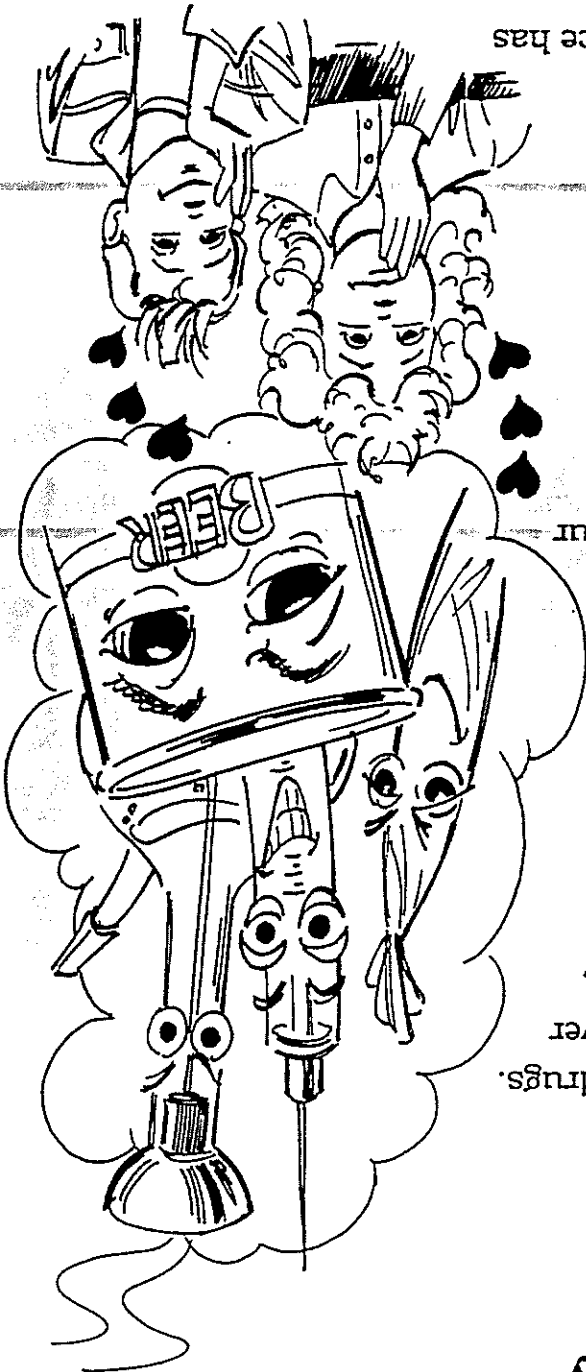
got hurt.

Whatever this relationship has brought, the price has

been too high. The fact that you're reading this means

that someone obviously thinks you're not taking very good

care of yourself.



So, let's get on with it. It's time to learn how to leave this love affair and how to feel good about yourself.

Now, before you start looking for loopholes,

listen! Once this love affair with alcohol/drugs grabs you, that's it! It locks you up in a

prison of loneliness and despair. So maybe you're figuring you'll lay off for a while or just not use as much, but

that won't work. That's the thing about this relationship: it's out to destroy

you. We know it's really a disease because it has all the earmarks of

a disease: it progresses (gets worse); it has clear symptoms; and it can

kill you if you don't break completely out of its grip.

Sure, some people think this should be easy.

After all, they say, it's not a parent, a boyfriend,

a girlfriend, or some other significant human being

you need to say good-bye to. But you know what?

This is probably one of the most painful and difficult breakups you'll ever have to face.



I WAS \_\_\_\_\_ years old the first time I used this drug.

The first drug I used other than alcohol was (name it) \_\_\_\_\_.

I drank about (give the amount) \_\_\_\_\_.

My first drink was (name it) \_\_\_\_\_.

The first time I drank alcohol I was \_\_\_\_\_ years old.

start.

First off, it's important to look at this relationship you've been having with alcohol/drugs. To do this it's time to answer some questions. Ready? Let's

There's no way to do this without pain, but this guide can help you leave this harmful relationship with the least amount of pain.

The following questions will help you look at your "love affair" with alcohol/ drugs, identify your feelings, see your behaviors, and help you say good-bye to a relationship that has meant a great deal to you.

Saying good-bye to anything or anyone we've been attached to — especially to a good friend — is painful. It hurts to lose someone or something we love. It causes us real grief. And dealing with grief isn't just a simple act; it's a whole process — a painful, slow process. That means you have to work through a whole bunch of feelings and behaviors in order to be healed.



The reasons I tried alcohol were:  
(I was curious. Other kids were doing it.)

The reasons I tried other drugs were:  
(All my friends were using. I was afraid they'd call me chicken.)

The people I used with or who thought using was okay for me were:

The people who got upset with me because I used were:

Parents \_\_\_\_\_

Brothers/sisters \_\_\_\_\_

Friends \_\_\_\_\_

Boyfriend/girlfriend \_\_\_\_\_

Teachers \_\_\_\_\_

Classmates \_\_\_\_\_

Coach \_\_\_\_\_

Boss/employer \_\_\_\_\_

Who else? \_\_\_\_\_



The reasons I kept using were:

**My favorite places to use alcohol/drugs are:**  
(Parties, rock concerts, school)

**When I don't have alcohol/drugs to use I feel:**  
(Anxious, frustrated, depressed)

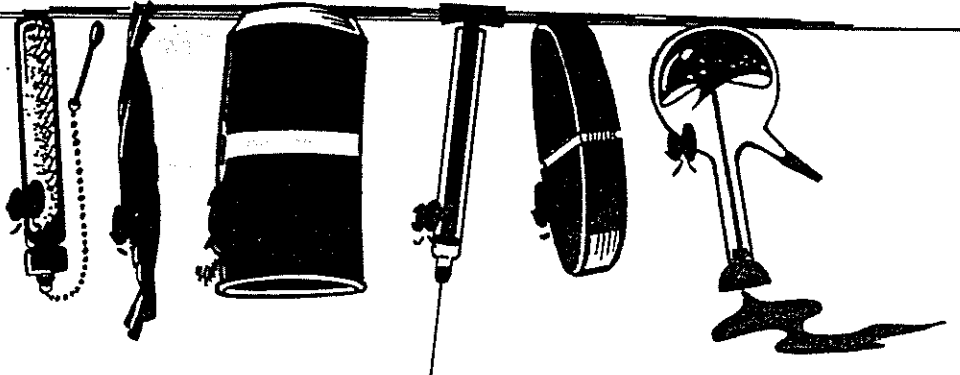
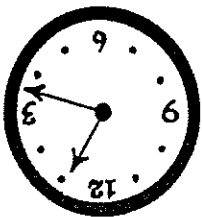
**When I use alcohol/drugs I feel:**  
(Sad, glad, excited, brave)



My worst memory about using is the time I:

My best memory about using is the time I:

My favorite times to use are:



How my alcohol/drug use has harmed my relationship with God or the Higher Power.

How my alcohol/drug use has harmed the way I feel about myself.

How my alcohol/drug use has harmed my relationships with my friends.

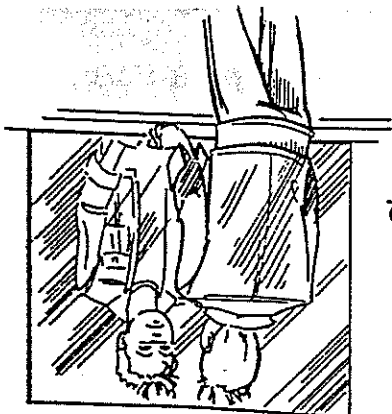
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dad
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mom
- \_\_\_\_\_ Brothers/sisters
- \_\_\_\_\_ Grandparents
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other family members

How my alcohol/drug use has harmed my relationship with my family.

Some activities I can do easily without alcohol/drugs are:

Some activities that seem easier to do when I use are:

Some activities that I have either quit doing or can't do because of my alcohol/drug use.



As we mentioned earlier, grief is a process, and there are certain behaviors and feelings of yours that you'll have to examine, experience, and let go of in order to be healed.



# ON WAY!

You've just finished looking back. No doubt you did this with a lot of thought, because this relationship has been very important to you, so it deserves a lot of thinking and remembering. But now it's time to move forward, to look at right now. You're thinking about giving up this very important relationship. Parts of you think this might be a good idea, but other parts of you scream out against it.

Let's look at these one by one. But before we do, remember two things: First, grieving takes time. So some of these stages will fade out, but then come back. That's perfectly normal. Second, it's important to talk about them with someone you trust.

7. Acceptance

6. Surrender

5. Depression

4. Guilt

3. Anger

2. Bargaining

1. Denial

To help you understand this process, we'll look at its seven stages:

Write down the reasons why other persons think your relationship with alcohol/drugs has been a problem.

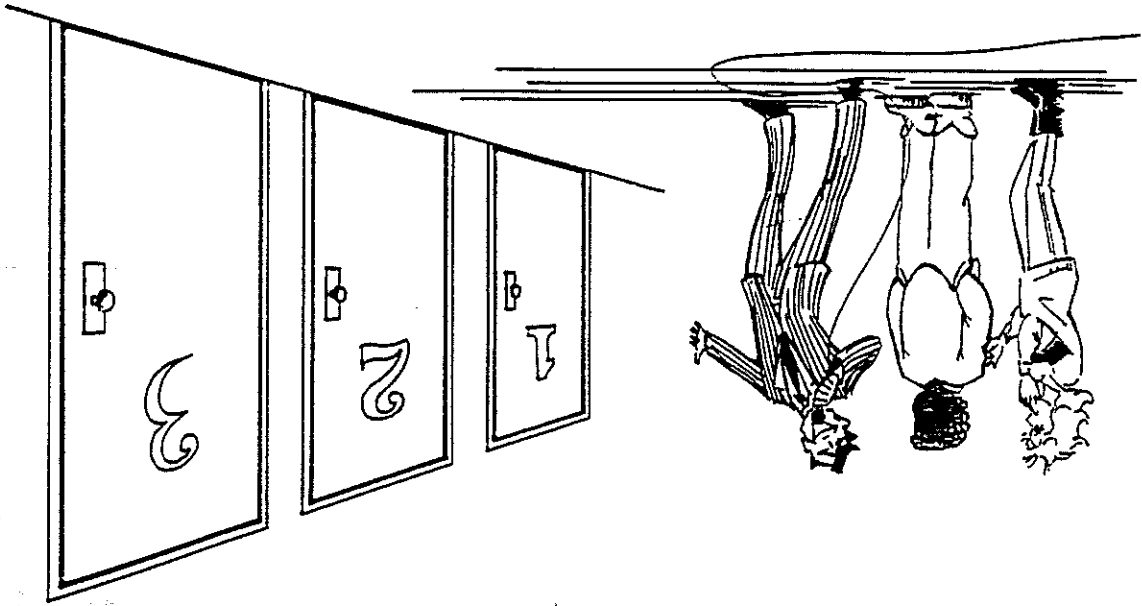
This means that at this stage you don't believe your relationship with alcohol/drugs has caused you any problems. Or you think you can "take charge" of your using and learn to handle it responsibly. But others disagree with you. Write down your reasons for believing your relationship with alcohol/drugs hasn't been a problem.

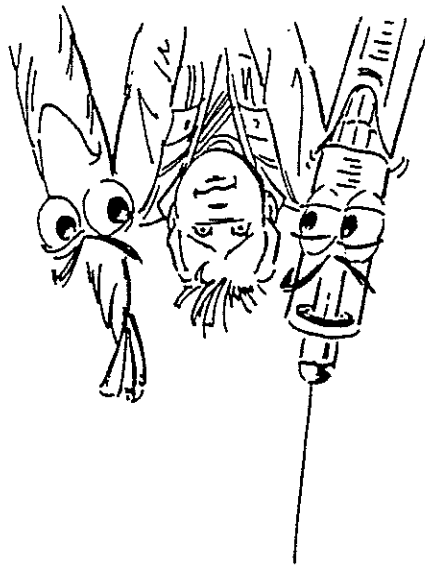
1. Denial

## 2. Bargaining

You're really saying, "Let's make a deal."  
What deals are you willing to make? Sometimes we  
try to make deals with our parents, friends, God,  
and even with ourselves. Does this sound familiar?  
"Gee, Mom, if you let me have one more chance,  
I promise I'll never . . . ." Or, "Dear God, if you'll just  
get me out of this mess, I'll never take drugs again . . . ."

Now write down the deals you've made to get out  
of trouble caused by using alcohol/drugs, and who  
you tried to make them with.





You say, "But I don't want to have this disease" or "I don't want to quit" or "I'm only a teenager" or "It's not fair."

Put down in writing the anger you're feeling because you have to give up your relationship with alcohol/drugs. Try to focus on who the anger is directed at, and how it feels to you right now. But if you can't or don't want to write about the anger you're feeling right now, then draw something that expresses it.

### 3. Anger



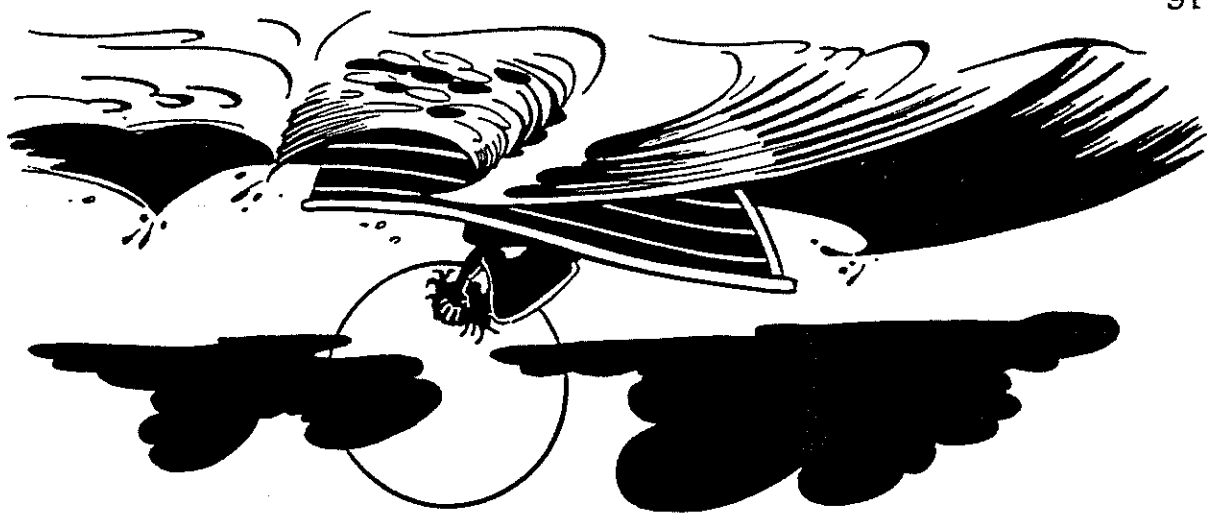
Write down your "If onlys" and all the things you're feeling guilty about.

This is a perfectly natural feeling to be having, but it is just a feeling. If you talk to someone you trust whenever you feel like this, you'll feel a lot better.

"If only" feeling. "If only I weren't such a bad person . . ." "If only I had really listened . . ." "I've treated people so badly. How can I face them?" "If only I'd have . . ."

4. Guilt





## 5. Depression

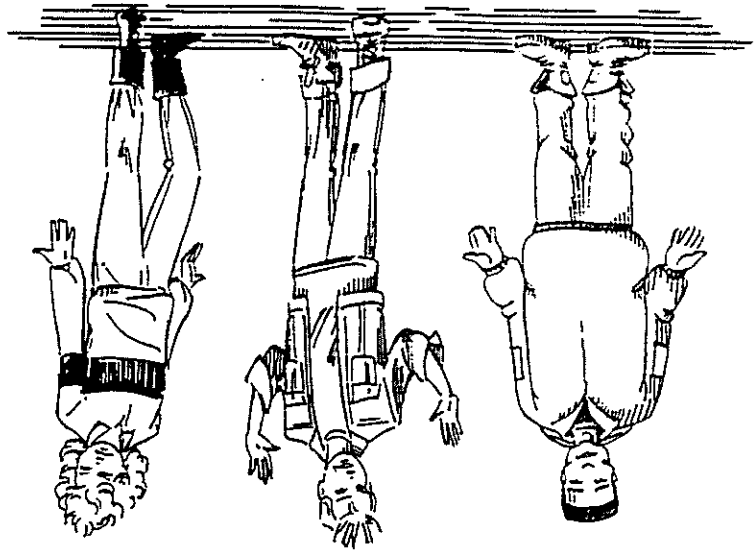
You say, "I just don't know how I can live without the stuff." "I feel so sad, so hopeless."

This depression usually happens right after you deal with your guilt and right before you "let go" (surrender). It's like finally really understanding that now is the time to face just what alcohol/drugs have done to you and to those you care about.

Listen carefully, now. Depression is a very important stage of your grieving. You need to feel sad and hopeless. And you need to share your feelings with someone you trust and feel comfortable with. Another thing: it's perfectly okay to feel depressed.

Who would you feel comfortable sharing these feelings with? How can you get in touch with this person?

Write down or draw your depressed feelings.

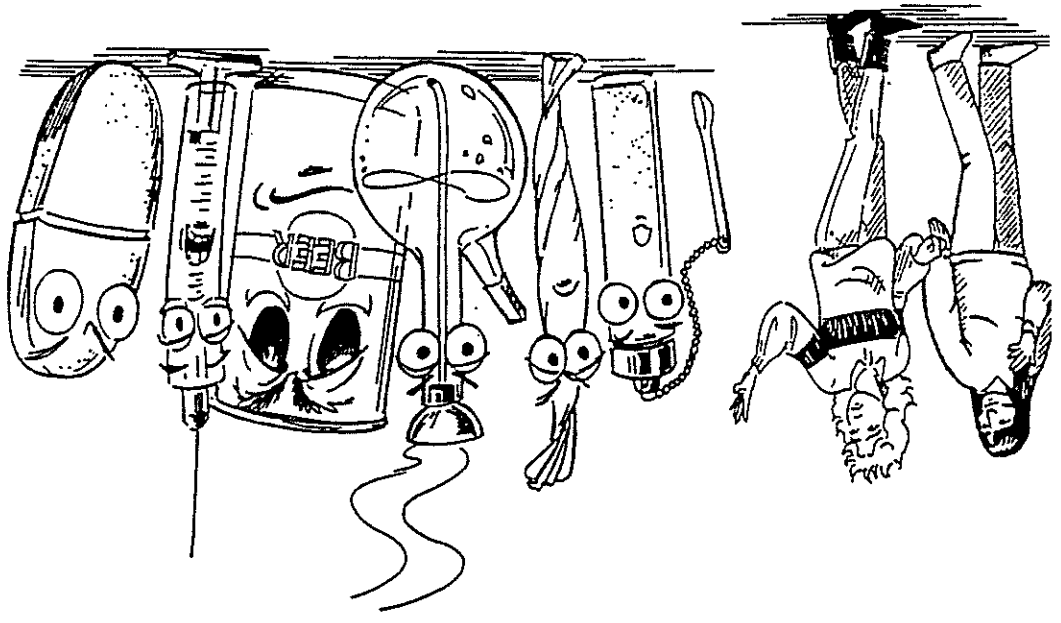


surrendering.

Write down how you're feeling now, plus anything you can think of that may have helped you come to this very important stage of

talked over with someone?  
 have helped you to arrive at this stage. Perhaps a memory, or something you  
 and having the courage to reach out for help. Try to think of the things that  
 It doesn't. It means "letting go." It's knowing you can't solve a problem alone,  
 what?" You may think that surrendering means "giving in" or "copping out."  
 You say, "Okay, okay, I admit I do have a problem and it scares me. Now

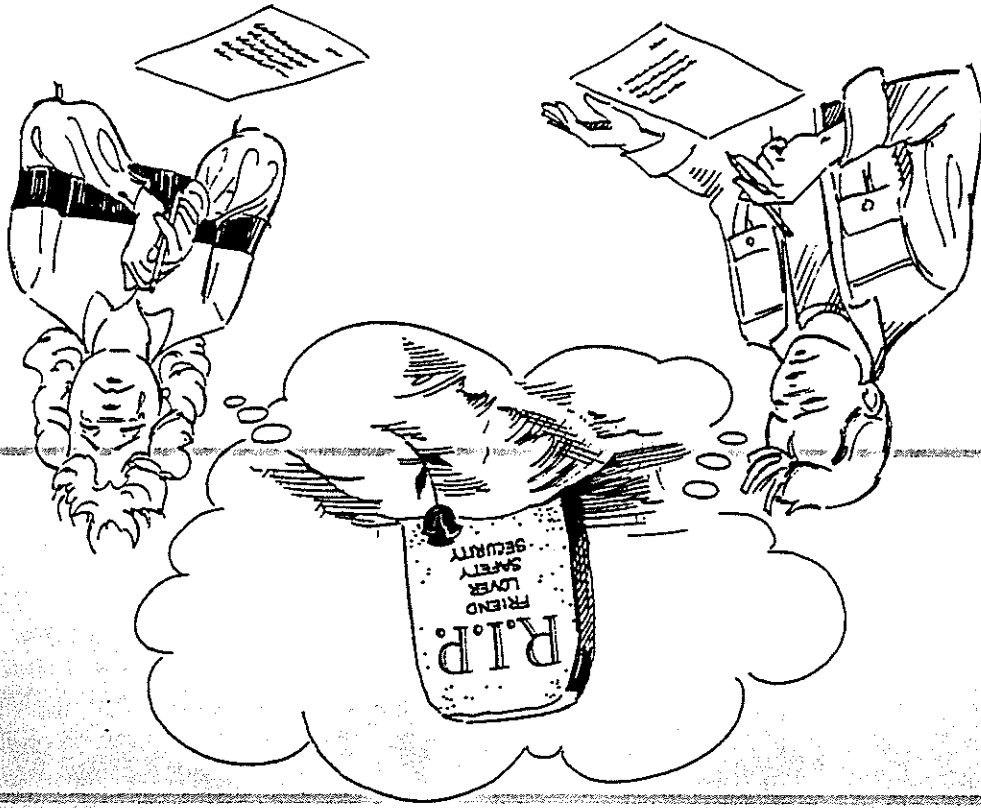
## 6. Surrender



Admitting you have a problem and accepting you have a problem are two different things. Acceptance means you own this problem. It's yours. You are responsible for this problem and only you can choose to do something about it. At this point you say, "Yes, I am harmfully involved with alcohol/drugs," or "Yes, I am chemically dependent, and this relationship has to go. I'm going to take action now."

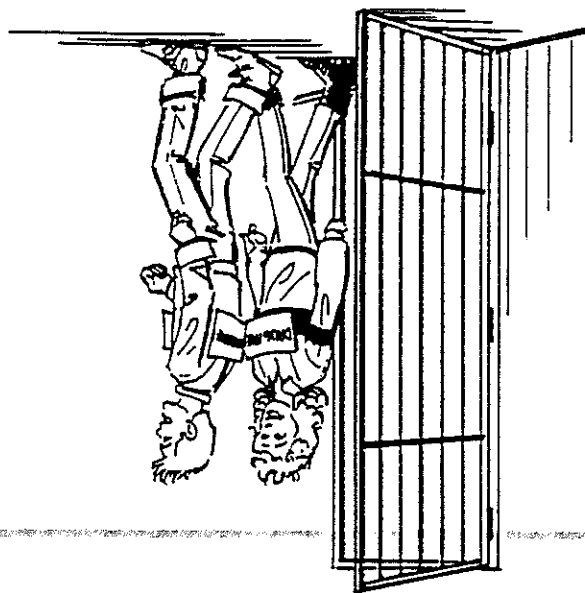
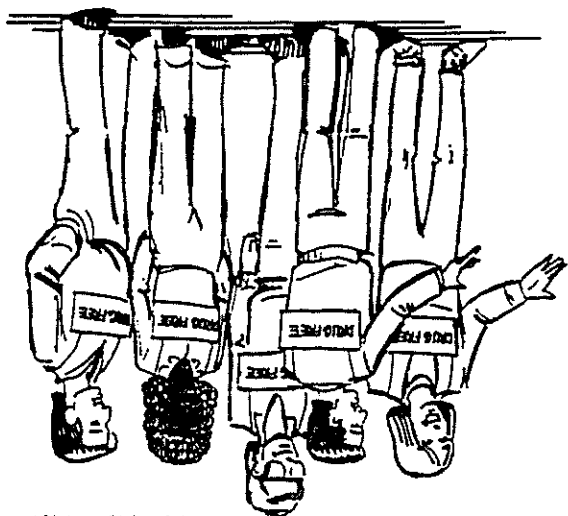
Write down or draw something to express your acceptance of where you are right now in your relationship with alcohol/drugs.

7. Acceptance



After looking at the past and at the present, it's time to say good-bye to alcohol/drugs. There are lots of ways you can do this. For instance, you can draw a scene in which you're having a funeral and burying your special relationship with alcohol/drugs. Or you can visualize yourself placing these "friends" in a box and storing them away forever in your imaginary attic. Whatever way you choose, it's easier to say good-bye if you write a good-bye letter. Feel free to add any drawings, words, or symbols as part of this farewell. Go ahead and write this as though you were saying good-bye to an important friend. After all, this relationship has been very important to you.

**Good-bye Letter to Alcohol/Drugs**



Read your good-bye letter to at least one other person who you really trust and respect. This helps make it real.

Well, it's done. How do you feel?

Be good to yourself by sharing your loss with others. You need and deserve love and support.

Talk with a counselor, parent, friend, teacher, or anyone you trust. They can help you when you feel the sadness, loneliness, or fear of this loss.

You'll soon feel better about yourself, and free from the prison you've lived in. Remember, you're not alone in this. Millions of people are harmfully involved with alcohol/drugs, millions more are chemically dependent. You can meet lots of young people just like yourself at Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous or other self-help groups. The phone numbers of these groups are in your telephone book. So even if you're nervous, go for it!

