

GUIDELINES FOR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Disruptive Behavior and the Miracle of Change

What is disruptive behavior? Webster's dictionary defines disruptive as causing disruption; alternatively, produced by disruption. The definition of disruption is the fact or state of being disruptive. Webster defines behavior as a matter of behaving; conduct; manners; the carriage of oneself with respect of proprietary morals. If we add these two definitions together, we find that in essence we have a disruption caused by one's own moral respects. As recovering addicts and alcoholics, we have learned that we must employ certain restraints on ourselves in order to produce the miracle of change. Change is any variation or alternation in form, state, quality or essence. With the willingness of change established we are now able to analyze and ascertain our recovery program. Many of us have chosen the use of AA or NA programs to teach us that principles are more important than personalities. Some of us have chosen alternative methods of recovery such as the use of a psychiatrist or the church. What is important here is the realization that we are only human and therefore capable of emotional morals. We must constantly remind ourselves to put principles over personalities.

In an Oxford House environment, we learn that we must put our behaviors and emotions aside so the benefit resides within the house. The principles of Oxford House are constructed on a democratic basis. The welfare of the house must always be first. In a democratic environment, we must put human emotion and opinions aside and concentrate on the principles that the house is built on. This is the basis of our recovery. This is why we learn to employ human morals such as humility, openness, and truth in our everyday lives. The individual personal conflicts that erupt within the house are not dangerous unless the group conscious of the house is jeopardized. If these matters cannot be solved, then the alternative is a behavioral contract. The contract is not meant to be a punishment, but a tool to enable the person to correct behaviors. The contract is a simple set of rules in order to obtain a positive result. Its presence also makes a statement, saying, "hey, we care" to the individual. The Oxford House lifestyle, in general, is a supporting factor in our recovery. Many of us would not be able to survive the perils of addiction if not for Oxford House. In conclusion, this article was written as a guide, not as a resentment or rule. It is merely presented to you, the reader, so that you may raise a question and be able to discuss its contents with your fellow housemates.

OXFORD HOUSE BOUNDARIES

"We have no bosses in Oxford House"

IT IS O.K. TO:

1. Be patient and tolerant- each of us are at our own level of growth; practice acceptance – "Live and let Live"
2. Share positive attitudes and feelings toward others.
3. Recognize the achievements and growth in others.
4. Share your program and LISTEN to others.
5. Have personal quiet time and privacy.
6. Laugh at your own mistakes.
7. Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

IT IS NOT O.K. TO:

1. Verbally attack another person, either by raising your voice or making sarcastic remarks toward that person.
2. Put another person down; expression of inappropriate criticism toward a person's moral behavior, appearance, clothes, friends etc., is not acceptable.
3. Take someone else's inventory, unless you are concerned that the person is exhibiting relapse behavior; relapse concerns all of us.
4. Shame or frighten any of us by crossing the boundaries we have set for ourselves.
5. Place blame on someone else for your behavior or feelings. We must take responsibility for our own actions and feelings.
6. Throw objects, slam doors, stomp around, call names, or physically attack in anger. Raging out of control frightens and traumatizes everyone around you, and is not acceptable.
7. Isolate yourself or others.
8. Hold resentments toward house members, which cause communication breaks and/or tension, and disruptive behavior in house members. If the persons directly involved cannot resolve personality conflicts, they should be brought to the house as a whole.
9. Attempt to manipulate or control others to meet your expectations, through gossip, aggressiveness, or self-justification.
10. Spank, hit or yell at children. They are precious and valuable people too and deserve our mutual respect. If a parent cannot contain a disruptive child within ten minutes, the parent must take the child to their respective room or to a less populated area until the child has calmed down.

"Oxford House provides the addicted individual the opportunity to change their behaviors."

Guidelines for Expulsion From an Oxford House

(A compilation from several Oxford House sources)

It is the mission of the Chapter to ensure that each Oxford House is providing a “safe haven” for recovery. The primary vehicle for ensuring a safe haven for recovery is by enforcing the importance of living up to Oxford House Charters, granted to member houses by Oxford House, Inc.

In keeping with Oxford House Tradition, the following acts are grounds for immediate expulsion:

1. A relapse into the use of alcohol or drugs
2. The failure to pay any fees (rent, fines, etc.) owed
3. The exhibition of disruptive behavior

For the purpose of general rules of expulsion, the following definition of “disruptive behavior” is used:

Disruptive behavior includes participating in any criminal activity, such as drug trafficking, prostitution, shoplifting, assault, and theft within the house or any other activity that may threaten the standing of the Oxford House in the community. In addition, violence, any threat of violence, or destruction of property is considered disruptive behavior.

Exhibition of any part of the above definition of disruptive behavior by members of chartered Oxford Houses, should, without question, result in immediate expulsion.

Suggested Guidelines for Expulsion

1. Members who relapse or refuse to pay rent, or are guilty of the above definition of disruptive behavior must be expelled as quickly as the house deems appropriate (a majority vote of all house members is needed for expulsion). In the case of behavioral problems, houses should institute systems of fines, probations, or warnings.

If there are repeated behavior offenses and the house, by democratic vote, deems the behavioral acts of the member not conducive to recovery in the Oxford tradition, then dismissal procedures could take place. These procedures could include giving up to a two-week notice. Unused rent is always returned to members who are expelled for whatever reason.

2. Any house member who feels he/she is being unfairly asked to leave an Oxford House may, within the two-week period prior to leaving, appeal to the Chapter Housing Service Committee to mediate the dispute. The Chapter Housing Service Committee will then suggest a solution to the full committee for a vote.

It should be emphasized that if at all possible, internal conflicts should be worked out at the House level and brought to the Chapter Housing Service Committee as a last resort.

Disruptive Behavior Versus Behavioral Problems

The Scribner English Dictionary defines disruptive as to break or to break apart. Behavior, as the most general word, applies to our actions in the presence of others. Problem is defined as a difficult matter to be settled or a question set forth for solution or discussion.

It seems each house decides, based on the healthiness of the recovery in the house, what constitutes a behavioral problem and what is disruptive.

Many Chapters and State Associations have established guidelines for disruptive behavior that constitute possible expulsion, but some individuals in a house still make up their own self-serving rules.

A behavioral problem connected to the process of recovery can be as mundane as a result of an incomplete chore or as significant as isolation; in the midst of the psychological trauma of the Fourth Step; a personality conflict with another member; an unhealthy relationship; and any part of our old behaviors.

Change is a vital part of a healthy recovery. Change does not imply the other individual, but you. Each of us is at our own level of growth and acceptance – “Live and Let Live”. The one personality defect that we can control is our attitude. We often hear the old adage of the drinking of life from a half empty or half full glass. Shifting the focus on someone else’s behavior leaves us void of honesty about ourselves. If you take the “me” out of blame all you have is bla, bla, bla. The only inventory we should be concerned with is our own.

Oxford House is intended to act as a surrogate family and a support system, rather than a treatment program or a dictatorial entity. We have no bosses in Oxford House. It does not mean that someone is not an important part of the family if for some reason their behavior does not coincide with yours Oxford House should be a safe haven. We must always put principles before personalities. The welfare of the entire house and the principles of our Traditions should come first. Many of us choose to use a 12-step program. This teaches us that service to other alcoholics and addicts is a vital part of our own recovery. What greater opportunity could we have than helping a roommate explore solutions to their behavioral problems? We have seen many individuals turn their lives around while living in an Oxford House.

Suggested Guidelines for Behavior Modification

Many houses use fines, contracts and/or revocation of certain privileges when someone displays repeated behaviors that could be construed as disruptive to the house as a whole.

An example of revoking special privileges might be that someone who hasn’t cleaned up after themselves in the kitchen or laundry area would lose the privilege to use the laundry or kitchen area for one week. Fines could be for failure to complete a chore or a fee for late rent. A contract might be used after warnings or previous discussion about a certain behavior that is disrupting the serenity of the house or is putting the individual in jeopardy of relapse.

The members of the house should write out the offending behaviors and the conditions required to correct it. The contract is intended as a tool to aid the offender, not as a punishment.

Definition of Relapse

Relapse can come in different forms – the easiest one to deal with is the “for sure” relapse when a member comes in obviously intoxicated or high on drugs and admits relapse. Because there is no denial to deal with, the other members have the time to concentrate on getting help for that resident. However, there are more difficult types of relapse. Many relapses can only be discerned by looking at behavior changes – late payment of rent, lapse in doing chores, argumentative or isolating behaviors, are all warning signs. Remember to keep principles above personalities and think with your head and not your heart.

Another form of relapse is misusing prescription or over the counter drugs. Drugs must be taken according to prescriptions or directions and residents who are getting prescriptions should inform the doctor of their addict status.

Another form of relapse is when a member is using and others know about it and do not blow the whistle. In this case, all who are using and all who knew about it are considered a relapse.

Regarding Contracts for Residents:

Oxford House is a membership organization. A recovering individual applies for *membership* in an Oxford House. As part of his/her membership, the individual agrees to abide by the democratically established rules of the House and share equally in the expenses of maintaining the House.

The Membership Application Form is the only form required for the safety and protection of every House. The Membership Application Form has been tested in court and found to be enforceable. All members of Oxford Houses should have filled out and signed this form when they applied to a House for membership.

Membership Applications are part of the permanent record that individual Houses must keep. The Application Form is the same for all Oxford Houses.

Individual Houses are free to place a member "On Contract" if the House deems that the individual member needs a more structured environment or set of rules. Contracts are sometimes useful when dealing with behavioral problems.

- Contracts may include mandatory attendance at meetings, specify the number of meetings, or specify other actions that a member must take or meet in order to maintain membership in the House.
- A House must vote to initiate a contract and document its terms and purpose in the minutes of the House meeting.
- Failure to comply with contract terms is valid grounds for dismissal.
- Contracts are a matter between the House and its members.

Houses and Chapters are free to modify or devise new forms, which they may find useful or wish to use. Oxford House Outreach Services always welcomes copies of any special forms or suggestions that could improve existing forms.

Q. When a member is expelled and owes money to the House, can the House keep the member's unused Equal Expense Share (EES) paid in advance to cover unpaid bills?

A. No, by law unused rent must be returned to the expelled member. Fines and other penalties imposed by House vote *prior* to the member being expelled may be considered to be expenses.

Q. Can a House keep an expelled member's personal belongings to cover unpaid rent or other bills?

A. NO, a House may not keep a member's personal effects to cover unpaid rent or any other bills.

-If a Member is evicted and/or leaves personal effects in the House, the House is obligated to keep them in a safe place for a reasonable amount of time.

-The House must notify the member or contact person listed on the Application Form by certified mail (return receipt requested) if and when the House intends to dispose of personal property. Indicate when the House plans to act (minimum two weeks' notice).

-*Warning:* If a House sells a member's property, the member is entitled to the cash proceeds.

-If you must pack-up a member's personal effects, do it with a witness and document what you have done and why in the minutes of the next House meeting.

Conflict Resolution in Oxford House

You are in your room watching TV; all of a sudden you hear screaming and yelling coming from the living room. Your heart starts beating fast because you know you are the President of your house and will be expected to handle this situation. You never liked conflict so how do you deal with this?

1. Don't try to fix it yourself. Call a meeting immediately. There is power in the group conscience.
2. Let the house know you are going to mediate this situation.
3. Ask the individuals to stop speaking to each other and begin addressing you, the mediator.
4. Lay the ground rules. They are as follows: each person has five uninterrupted minutes to speak to the group about what their issue is.
5. At this point, the mediator should summarize what the problem is. Make sure what you have stated is correct with that individual.
6. Ask the members of the house to share their experience, strength and hope about the situation.
7. The house as a whole should come up with a game plan on how to resolve this dispute. Keep in mind that everyone has positive aspects to their personality. Everyone should share something positive about each individual in the conflict.
8. Always remember – **“get out of the problem and into the solution”**.

Violence and threats of violence are grounds for immediate eviction.

Forgiveness

Very few people know how to apologize, while fewer still know how to accept an apology. Since we are human and make mistakes, an important skill to know is how to apologize. Four rules are recommended:

1. Do it as soon as possible. The longer you wait the harder it is because the more you can imagine ways your apology might be turned against you.
2. Be specific about the behavior you are apologizing for, not like a Washington politician: "If I did anything wrong..." rather, "When you... when I... I did not think... etc." Take time describing the specific behavior.
3. Tell your feelings about the event and your feelings now. "I am embarrassed to think about how thoughtless that was..."
4. Tell how it is not like your usual behavior, so you end by affirming yourself. Secondly, when accepting an apology, do not say, "I am glad you finally see your mistake", or "it's about time", or "I am still hurting..." and other shoot-from-the-hip statements that aggravate the tension. So, if you can honestly do so, either simply say, "OK, let's get on with our work (life, relationship, whatever)" or better, "I am sorry for my part also".

A good definition of forgiveness, by psychologist Robert Enright is:

"Giving up the resentment to which you are entitled, and offering to the persons who hurt you friendlier attitudes to which they are not entitled."

Those who refuse to forgive carry the "ghost" of the hurtful person and give away their own power to this memory. Without doubt, those with whom one chooses to remain angry will continue to control one, particularly when one denies this is so. Those who have not resolved conflicts with family members will carry that garbage into their current relationships even though they may be blind to the fact. I have seen it repeatedly. Whatever is repressed is bound to be repeated. Resentment limits one's emotional, physical and spiritual development.

Oxford House Member Contract

For Disruptive/Relapse Behavior or Probation

House Name: Oxford House - _____ Member Under Contract: _____

Reason for Contract (Check One): Disruptive Behavior and/or Relapse Patterns Probation Contract

Date: _____ Length of Contract (Indicate # of days and start/end dates): _____

(If Probation Contract, skip this section and detail contract terms.)

This contract represents our concern and responsibility as Oxford House members. It is designed to help you help yourself. We have observed the following behaviors and/or patterns that are disrupting this Oxford House.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The house is asking that you modify your behavior in the following ways in order to best facilitate your recovery and the recovery of everyone in the house. The terms of this contract are the following (be specific):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

I, _____, acknowledge and understand my house's expectations as outlined in this contract. I am fully aware that if I fail to comply with these terms, any time during the length of this contract, I am subject to immediate expulsion from this Oxford House, as well as possible future Oxford House membership.

Date

Signature

We, your fellow Oxford House members, in an effort to support your recovery and uphold the principles of Oxford House, acknowledge the observed behaviors and contract terms above. In the case of a disruptive/relapse behavior contract, our hope is that you will comply with the terms of this contract, as we are prepared to vote to expel you from our house if you fail to do so. In the case of a probation contract, we hope you understand that your probation period is the time in which this Oxford House expects you to show us, by complying with this contract, that you are willing to live according to Oxford House principles and remain a member of our house.

President: _____	Secretary: _____
Treasurer: _____	Comptroller: _____
Coordinator: _____	HSC Representative: _____
Member: _____	Member: _____
Member: _____	Member: _____