

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Disruptive behavior: member will be placed on contract or expelled by majority vote whether at regular, special or emergency meeting.

Disruptive behavior includes but is not limited to: physical or verbal aggression toward residents or visitors; repeated infractions of household rules; unstable behavior; "old using behavior" i.e. stealing, lying, cheating, being in another residents room without permission, not performing chores, etc; any violation of a disciplinary contract agreement; unknown whereabouts for an unreasonable period; etc. Generally, disruptive behavior is defined as "conduct counter-productive to a sober lifestyle" to themselves or others. Ultimately, behavior can only be judged disruptive by a majority of house members' votes.

Definitions 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 this resident. However, there are more difficult types of relapse - many relapses can only be discerned by looking at behavior change - 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 his/her 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. (These Policies were created and adopted by the North Carolina State Association)

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 action 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 houses 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 drinking of life from a half empty or a half full cup. 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 blah, blah, blah. The only inventory we should be concerned with is our own.

Oxford is intended to act as a surrogate family and a support system, neither a treatment program nor 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 you. Oxford House should be a safe haven. We must always put principles before personality. The welfare of the entire house and the principles of our tradition 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 that helping a roommate explore solutions to their behavioral problem? We have seen many individuals turn their lives around while living in an Oxford House.

Suggested Guidelines for Behavior Modification

Many houses use a contract, fines, and revocation of certain privileges or probation when some one displays repeated behaviors that could be construed as disruptive to the house as a whole.

An example of revoking special privileges might be for someone who doesn't clean up after themselves in the kitchen or laundry area would lose the use of the kitchen or laundry areas for one week. Fines could be for non-completion of a chore or a late fee for tardy 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 individual under contract writes the means by which they will take to correct it. The contract is intended as a tool to aid the offender, not as a punishment. (These Policies were created and adopted by Oxford Houses of Washington State)

Sample 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 charters granted to member houses by Oxford House, Inc.

In keeping with the Oxford House, Inc. tradition, Chapter One, Washington, DC acknowledges that 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, shop-lifting, assault, and theft within the house or any other activity, which may threaten the standing of the Oxford House in the community. In addition, violence or any threat of violence or destruction of property are considered disruptive behavior.

Exhibitions 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 51 per cent 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 behavioral offenses and the house, by democratic vote, deems the behavioral acts of the member conducive to recovery in the Oxford tradition, then dismissal procedures could take place. These procedures could include giving a two-week notice and refund of security deposit. 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 only as a last resort. (These guidelines were created and adopted by Chapter One - District of Columbia)

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 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 (per the House Manual a heavy confrontation is one of the three reasons for an emergency meeting). There is power in the group conscience. If a meeting cannot be called immediately, diffuse the situation and call a special meeting to be held within 24 hours.
2. Let the house know you are going to mediate this situation.
3. Ask the individuals to stop speaking to each other and to begin addressing you, the mediator.
4. Lay the ground rules 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 this situation.
7. The house as a whole should come up with a game plan on how to resolve this dispute, keeping 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".

VIOLENT BEHAVIOR IS GROUNDS FOR EXPULSION.