

# Suggested Guidelines for Expulsion and Disruptive Behavior

(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, shoplifting, 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 and threat of violence or destruction of property is considered disruptive behavior.**

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

## **Suggested Guidelines for Expulsion:**

*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% vote of all house members is needed for expulsion). In the case of behavioral problems, houses should institute system of fines, probations, or warnings. If there are repeated behavioral 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. Unused rent is always returned to members who are expelled for whatever reason.*

## **Disruptive Behavior Versus behavioral problems**

The Scribner English Dictionary defines disruptive as to break or 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 other 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 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 a 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 about is our own.

Oxford is intended to act as a surrogate family and a support system; it is not a treatment program nor a dictatorial entity. We have no bosses in the 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 personality. The welfare of the entire house and the principles of our tradition should come first. Many of us choose 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 someone 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 kitchen or laundry areas for one week. Fines could be for non-completion of a chore or a late fee tardy rent. A contract might be used after warnings or previous discussion about 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 to correct it. The contract is intended as a tool to aid the offender, not as a punishment.

## **Definitions of Relapse:**

*Relapse comes in different forms...*

The "For Sure" Relapse ~ When a member comes in obviously intoxicated or high on drugs and admits relapse. This is the easiest one to deal with because there is no denial to deal with it and the other members have the time to concentrate on getting help for this resident.

Behavioral Change Relapse ~ This type of relapse can only be disconcerted by looking at certain warning signs such as late payment of rent, lapse in doing chores and argumentative or isolating behaviors are all warning signs. This is one of the more difficult types of relapse. *Remember to keep principles above personalities and think with your **head**, not your **heart**.*

Prescription Drug Relapse ~ Misuse of prescription or over the counter drugs. Drugs must be taken according to prescriptions or directions and residents getting prescriptions should inform the doctor of her addictive status.

Keeping Information from the House ~ 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.

## **Definitions of Disruptive Behavior**

*Disruptive behavior in the house is probably the major issue for houses to contend with on an on-going basis. People coming together, each with a history of addiction and subsequent recovery traditions and lifestyles, contribute to the potential for disruptive behavior. However, it must be clear that you know the difference between "disruptive" behaviors and not use this as an excuse to evict a person.*

### **The broad area includes:**

- *Establishing an atmosphere which prevents disruptive behavior from occurring.*
- *Setting and reinforcing house rules and expectations.*
- *Responding to and managing behaviors that are disruptive to the house.*
- *Managing internal disputes among house members.*

### **Suggestions for Preventing Disruptive Behavior in a House:**

*One thing that helps is to validate the way someone is feeling in a house meeting and let them know that the feeling is normal.*

*Low self-esteem is the basis of much house dysfunction. Like most people, it is hard to accept criticism, so the criticism must be given tactfully but firm. Try and get to the root of the problem. Don't get into the pattern of being passive about real problems and then become aggressive.*

*It is very important for a house to be consistent. People need to know the house means what it says. While everyone deserves a chance, once the rules are understood, there should be no surprises. A house must always stand by a decision made.*