

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.