

DOWNWARD SPIRAL:

THE GAME YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO PLAY

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This manual is part of the TCU treatment readiness training program.

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Preface

Downward Spiral is a game that counselors can use with their clients in a group setting to stimulate realistic examinations of past, present, and future situations. It was designed to be used early in treatment, (although after clients have had time to adjust), to encourage motivation and openness to treatment. Combined with group discussions and guidance from the counselor, the game may facilitate the recognition of a need for personal change. This game is part of the TCU treatment readiness training program. This program, which has its roots in the NIDA-sponsored Drug Abuse Treatment Assessment and Research (DATAR) and Cognitive Enhancements for Treatment of Probationers (CETOP) projects, is designed to enhance motivation, self-efficacy, and personal resources for making the most out of drug abuse treatment. Additional information on the TCU treatment readiness training program is presented in a manual edited by Dees and Dansereau (1997).

The Game

Downward Spiral depicts realistic consequences that could occur to an individual who continues to abuse drugs. In addition to learning about health and financial/legal risks associated with continued drug abuse, players also learn how drug abuse affects family members and one's sense of self-worth and personal accomplishments.

Field Testing

Counselors and researchers have known for years that a client's motivation and engagement is crucial for personal change to occur. Yet, there remains a need for new techniques and strategies that have been carefully evaluated. *Downward Spiral* was developed to address these needs. The game has strong conceptual ties with leading research in the addictions, and is the result of field testing with students, clients, counselors, and scientists.

The Manual in Brief

The manual provides detailed instructions and essential materials for building all of the game components. Additional materials, such as paper, dice, pencils, etc. may also be needed. Chapter 1 provides background information on the rationale behind using a gameboard and the field research that went into the development of *Downward Spiral*. Chapter 2 provides the rules for how to play the game, and Chapter 3 provides rules for setting up the *Full Gameboard* version. This is the version of the game that we use and have tested in both college and treatment settings. We recommend its use because it allows engaging game play similar to other board games such as Monopoly™. Chapter 4 provides the *By the Book* version of the game, which requires less resources to setup and can essentially be played directly out of the book. The Appendices contain the main components of the game such as game cards and the gameboard.

Footnote: Monopoly™ is a trademark for Hasbro, Inc.

Additional Manuals

We hope you find the *Downward Spiral* to be a useful counterpart to your other counseling strategies. We also have developed a manual for the college version of the game that focuses more directly on alcohol abuse (though “harder” drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and heroin are also included). Another promising activity, that we are developing a manual for, is the *Tower of Strengths* activity. This activity allows individuals to examine personal strengths they currently have and can apply to treatment, and other strengths they would like to develop further. It is complemented by the *Weekly Planner* activity, which asks individuals to select motivational quotes to help develop their strengths and get the most out of treatment. Other activities for motivating clients early in treatment can be found in a manual developed for counselors as part of a National Institute on Drug Abuse sponsored grant (see Dees & Dansereau, 1997, for more information).

The researchers at the Institute of Behavioral Research at Texas Christian University have developed an additional set of manuals that have been designed to improve drug abuse treatment. These manuals include a visual representation strategy for exploring personal issues called *Node-Link Mapping (Mapping New Roads to Recovery: Cognitive Enhancements to Counseling)*; manuals that address AIDS/HIV information, health, and communication issues (*Time Out! For Me: An Assertiveness/Sexuality Workshop Specially Designed for Women; Time Out! For Men: A Communications Skills/Sexuality Workshop for Men; Approaches to HIV/AIDS Education in Drug Treatment*), and the development of social support networks and recovery coping skills (*Straight Ahead: Transition Skills for Recovery*). Copies of these materials are available through Lighthouse Institute, a nonprofit division of Chestnut Health Systems in Bloomington, Illinois 61701. To order or for more information call (309) 827-6026, or toll-free 1-888-547-8271, or visit their Web Site at www.chestnut.org/LI/Bookstore/index.html.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Introduction

The allure associated with drugs has existed for centuries. Thousands of people experiment with drugs every day. Too often, drugs can become the focal point of a person's existence. They can become more important to people than friends, family, health, or their sense of well being. Many times a person does not recognize the accumulating consequences of continued drug use until something drastic takes place. This manual describes a game called *Downward Spiral* that was developed to help individuals view the dangers associated with continued drug use more realistically. The game simulates what can happen to a person's health/sanity, social support network, self-concept, and financial/legal situation if he or she were to continue abusing drugs.

Downward Spiral may be used as a prevention or treatment intervention. As a preventative technique, it will familiarize individuals with negative aspects of drug use, potentially decreasing the desire to experiment. It may also help individuals who decide to use drugs to recognize and stop a destructive pattern sooner. Because problem recognition and motivation for change are important first steps toward recovery, the game may be used in treatment to help motivate individuals to examine the negative aspects of their drug use more completely, facilitating the recognition that they do indeed have a problem.

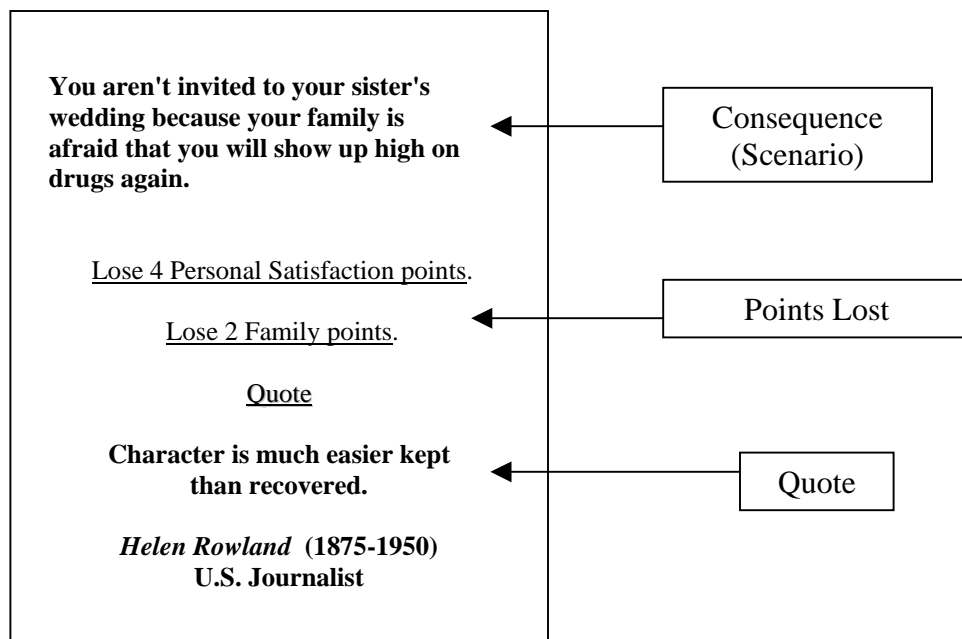
The version of *Downward Spiral* described in this manual includes consequences associated with alcohol, marijuana, and "harder" drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin. However, as will be seen, it can be tailored to specific populations (e.g., those with alcohol as their primary problem).

LET THE GAME BEGIN!!

The next sections give a brief review of the game and the rationale and research behind its development. If you would prefer to learn how to play the game in more detail first, please turn to Chapter 2. To learn how to set up the game, turn to Chapter 3.

Downward Spiral: The Crux of the Game

Downward Spiral is a board game in which each individual takes on the role of someone who has decided to continue abusing drugs. In doing so, participants experience the consequences that can occur to their health, social support system, self-esteem, and financial/legal situations. The object is to outlast other players or recover. Players begin the game with a job, \$200 in cash, and health, social support, and self concept points. Players roll 3 dice and move around the board. The square that the player lands on determines what type of consequence card he or she receives. Most cards have a realistic scenario, a cost (e.g., points lost), and a corresponding quote or fact. For example, a person could land on a square and receive the following card:



The card is read to the group and the player who received the card indicates the number of points lost on their score sheet.

Other aspects of the game include:

- ◆ Loss of possessions
- ◆ Jail time
- ◆ An opportunity to earn back points by remembering what happened to other players, or by remembering facts or quotes
- ◆ Post-game discussion of who won? and why?
- ◆ Group discussion of insights that occurred during the game

Why Use a Board Game?

This section outlines some of the potential benefits of games such as *Downward Spiral* as prevention and treatment implementations. The use of board games for therapeutic purposes is by no means a new idea, as many counselors and clinicians have used a wide range of conventional board games (e.g., Parcheesi™, Monopoly™) to involve clients, or have informally created their own games to address particular treatment issues. However, there appears to be very little systematic research and development on therapeutically useful games. We have attempted to remedy this situation with the *Downward Spiral*.

Perhaps one of the biggest advantages of games is that they are naturally engaging and involving. They have the ability to draw people in, to capture their attention, and to influence their thinking. To the extent that they can simulate real life, they provide people with an opportunity to prepare for and reflect upon aspects of their own life. We felt that a board game activity could be developed to take advantage of the naturally engaging aspects of games, and that the game's content could be used to motivate personal change.

The board game approach was also appealing for other reasons. First, we felt that an important benefit of games was that they provided a less confrontational means for delivering information. This was seen as particularly important because anytime one attempts to persuade another to change, there is the danger that the person will be resistant, or worse, become even more extreme in his or her behavior in an attempt to reestablish a sense of freedom or personal control. In fact, it has been shown that a dogmatic message that confronts the use of alcohol directly can actually increase intentions to drink (Bensley & Wu, 1991). We felt that because individuals are more likely to get involved in the concrete aspects of a game (e.g., how to win, what is going to happen next, etc.), resistance to more serious messages (e.g., cumulative effects of substance abuse) may be reduced. In a sense, the game could facilitate the delivery of key information through the "side door."

Footnote:

Parcheesi™ is a trademark for the Milton Bradley Company.
Monopoly™ is a trademark for Hasbro, Inc.

We were also concerned that an intervention that provided factual or statistical information alone would not be persuasive. For example, the link between smoking and lung cancer has been clearly documented. Tell this to smokers and, after restraining from choking you, they will tell you that they have known this information for years.

We suggest that the reason this factual information does not influence people to change is because most people decide whether or not to change based on their own personal experiences. Most smokers feel terrible when they stop smoking suddenly. They feel more relaxed, calm, and less irritable when they do smoke. This experience-based information is salient, accessible, and important to smokers. The knowledge that smoking causes lung cancer is less accessible and often ignored. The crux of *Downward Spiral* lies in the different consequences or drug-related scenarios that occur to players throughout the game. We felt it was important to make these scenarios concrete and realistic so that individuals would either recognize that similar things had happened in their own lives, or that these events could take place in the future.

We designed the game to convey other more subtle messages. For example, the gameboard itself was designed to give the sense of moving in a downward spiral. Also, even though the game is heavily weighted with negative consequences, we felt it was important to include positive events as well. One type of positive (or neutral) event that we included in the game was the safe square, where nothing bad happens. To simulate the progression of addictive disease, we included fewer and fewer of these squares as players get further into the spiral. Other positive events were included with chance cards, in which either good or bad things can happen. Some of the good events symbolize positive things that could occur by avoiding drug use. We also wanted to avoid a total sense of hopelessness. We accomplished this by making recovery through treatment one possible consequence. Thus, in the game, or in life, one can still get out of the downward spiral.

Another important aspect of the game was the inclusion of opportunity squares. These squares provide an opportunity for players to earn back points by remembering something that occurred to another player, or by remembering a quote or fact. This facet was included to encourage players to attend to facts, quotes, and scenarios that occurred to others during the game.

The score sheet was developed to provide a memorable, quantifiable, visual history of the events that take place during the game. At a glance,

players can see how much damage they have received to their health, social support system, and self-concept as a result of continued drug use. They also see how many possessions they have lost, and the number of times they have gone to jail. Players keep the cards they receive so they can review what occurred in greater detail.

The information players keep track of on their score sheet is particularly important at the conclusion of the game. We have found that it is often worthwhile to stop the game before clear winners and losers have been established. Players can then be asked to engage in a discussion to determine who won, and why. Although they will often want guidance and ask “How should we decide?”, the purpose of this activity is to have them establish their own criteria for winning or losing. When several games are played at once, each group can share their criteria and a discussion can ensue to examine the relative importance of money, family, health, or other criteria that was used to establish who won or lost. Sometimes players will reach the conclusion that there were no winners at all.

This post-game discussion can naturally transition into an examination of any insights or comments that players would like to share with the group. Such after-activity review has been shown to be an important component of experiential learning situations (Kohn, 1991). These comments can be particularly illuminating in determining how clients are processing the information that occurred during the game. It also allows counselors an opportunity to challenge clients’ rationalizations for what happened during the game, which many times reflects what is actually occurring or has occurred in their lives.

These were some of the major considerations that went into the development of the *Downward Spiral*. The next sections describe the research that was conducted to examine its effectiveness.

Where Did the Consequences Come From?



One of our main objectives was to ensure that *Downward Spiral* would provide realistic drug-related consequences. To realize this objective, several hundred scenarios were generated. This process was guided by the professional literature on substance abuse, input from substance abuse researchers and counselors, and observations of group therapy sessions in a substance abuse treatment facility. The consequences were rated for realism and impact by 64 volunteers. The set of consequences were then reduced based on these ratings.

Who Played the Game?



Drug abuse counselors, probationers in a four-month residential treatment facility, and college students played the game, evaluated the drug-related consequences, and provided feedback (see Czuchry, Sia, Dansereau, & Dees, 1997). Based on these evaluations, we modified the set of consequences and some of the practical aspects of the game. For example, all of the game card consequences were phrased as *you* instead of *I*. This allowed for the possibility of including a team leader who could read the cards to individuals who have reading problems.

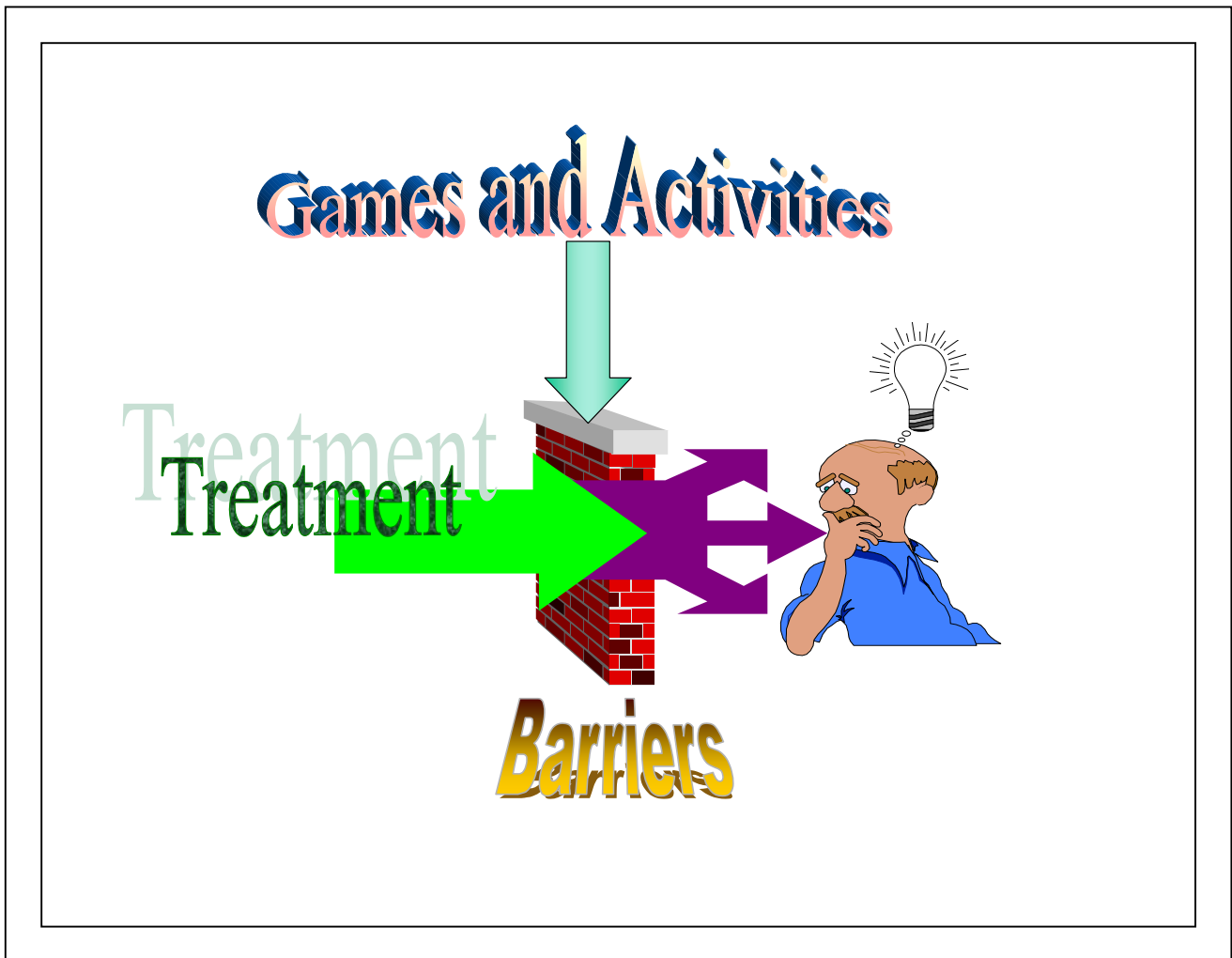
An additional study (Czuchry, Sia, & Dansereau, 1999) examined the impact of the college version of the game on students' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward alcohol-related activities. In this study, college students either played *Downward Spiral*, watched educational videos on substance abuse, or completed a set of questionnaires unrelated to alcohol and drug abuse. The game and the videos were rated as beneficial. They both increased students' intentions to limit alcohol consumption compared to students who served as controls. Individuals in the game group also indicated significantly greater intentions to make changes in their alcohol behavior than students in either the video or control condition.



What is Happening Now?

The results of the first studies indicated that *Downward Spiral* was well received by counselors, addiction researchers, clients, and students. The studies also indicated that the game can influence students' intentions to make personal changes regarding alcohol consumption.

Downward Spiral has been subsequently implemented as part of a 5-year NIDA-sponsored project entitled Cognitive Enhancements for Treatment of Probationers (CETOP). The game is used as part of a set of activities directed at motivating and engaging clients who have been mandated to treatment within the criminal justice setting. In a general sense, the purpose of these activities is to break through barriers to personal change, allowing treatment efforts to have their greatest impact.



The activities developed for the CETOP project address the following (See Dees & Dansereau, 1997, for more information):

- ◆ Building appropriate self-esteem by identifying personal strengths and by developing new ones (e.g., *Tower of Strengths*; See Sia, Czuchry, & Dansereau, 1999; Sia Czuchry, Dansereau, & Blankenship, 1998).
- ◆ Facilitating the recognition of a need for positive personal and situational change (e.g., *Downward Spiral*; See Czuchry, Sia, Dansereau, & Dees, 1997; Czuchry, Sia, Dansereau, 1999).
- ◆ Developing a positive view of treatment and identifying personal actions to take (e.g., *Believe It or Not* and *Personal Action List*).
- ◆ Learning specific strategies that can help clients make the most out of treatment (e.g., *Pegword Memory Technique*).

We are currently investigating the impact that these activities have had on a variety of cognitive and behavioral treatment progress indicators for probationers receiving 4 months of residential drug abuse treatment. Early feedback suggests that the *Downward Spiral* and the other activities are being positively received by the probationers.

Who should play the game?

Although the game targets substance abuse treatment, it has many potential niches. Alcohol and substance abuse is associated with a number of other problematic social issues such as criminal behavior, domestic violence, gang violence, and homelessness. The game may be used as a vehicle to uncover the role that substance abuse may have played in these or other problem areas.

One arena that the game would be very useful is for prevention. By choosing which cards to use, the game can be modified for many different prevention settings (e.g., family counseling, high school, college). We are currently developing a manual for the college version of *Downward Spiral*. In addition, new cards can be created to individualize the game for specific populations.