

## IDENTIFYING AND AVOIDING YOUR TRAPS

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When trying to bring about personal change and growth, some people find the idea of traps helpful. Traps are those things that keep us stuck, that can influence us to repeat unwanted patterns of behavior and that distract us from our goals for change. The poem at the end of this work sheet, which is widely used in 12-step programs, illustrates this idea. A trap can be a physical thing, some object in the environment. For instance, for a person trying to quit drinking, her trap may be an open bottle of wine or a bar up ahead on the side of the road. A trap can be a behavior - a habit or a routine. Let's say a person is depressed and has difficulty leaving his house and getting to class in the morning. He may be in the habit of taking his breakfast into the living room and turning on the T.V., and this may be his trap. He may then find himself laying around and watching T.V. the rest of the day. A trap can also be a way of thinking. A person in a bad relationship may find ways to keep enduring her boyfriend's abusive or hurtful behavior. The trap may be the thought, "If I can get him to realize how much I love him, he will change."

Often our traps bring us both misery and comfort at the same time. They bring comfort in the short term because they keep us in situations that are familiar, and they also keep us from creating change, which can be unfamiliar, uncomfortable or scary at first. However, the traps can bring misery in the longer term, because they keep us from living the life we want to lead. When we fall into our traps, we are often operating on automatic pilot, and we may not realize until later that we have been stuck in a trap.

For those who find this idea helpful, the counseling process can be used to work on identifying and finding ways of avoiding traps. If you'd like to, you can spend some time thinking about and answering the following questions, which will move the process along.

1. What are some of the traps that keep you from achieving your goals, moving forward, and living your life the way you want to? Put a star or check mark next to the traps that you'd most like to work on.

Physical traps - things in my environment:

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Behavioral traps – habits or routines:

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Cognitive traps – ways of thinking about myself, others and the world around me:

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2. What are some of the first things you may notice when you are beginning to approach one of these traps? Are there warning signs that are present ahead of the trap itself? How can you anticipate the trap and see it coming?

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# An Autobiography in Five Chapters

## By Portia Nelson

### Chapter One:

I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I fall in.  
I am lost... I am helpless.  
It's not my fault.  
It takes forever to find a way out.

### Chapter Two:

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I pretend I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe I'm in the same place.  
But it isn't my fault.  
It still takes a long time to get out.

### Chapter Three:

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I fall in.... It's a habit.... But my eyes are open.  
I know where I am.  
It's my fault.  
I get out immediately.

### Chapter Four:

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.

### Chapter Five:

I walk down a different street.