

Drug Desistance & Relapse:

Long-Term Drug Desisters vs Repeat Drug Abusers



Who are considered "Long-Term Drug Desisters"?

These are individuals who have abstained from a drug lifestyle for 5 years and more.



Why is it important to understand what helps long-term drug abstinence?

We want to know what helps this process to find out how we can reduce their chances of relapse in the first 5 years of their return to society.



What helps desisters stay away from drugs?

1 Long-term desisters have sustained motivation & sense of agency:



Desisters start with a **desire to change**



They follow through with concrete, realistic goals & plans



Overtime, their shift in identity gives them a sense of purpose, direction, and confidence.

2 Long-term desisters show more positive shifts in their thinking:



They developed **values** such as being positive and open-minded to learning



They engaged in **self-reflection** to better understand the self



They were able to remind themselves about the **consequences** of relapsing

3 Long-term desisters have greater social capital:



They persisted in avoiding antisocial peers, and...



replaced antisocial peers with prosocial family and peer groups

(e.g. religious groups, halfway-house volunteers)

Prosocial peers keep desisters motivated to abstain from drugs, and aid reintegration back into society!

4 Long-term desisters made positive lifestyle changes:

They solved problems in **positive ways** such as seeking help from prosocial peers



They maintained discipline by being occupied with meaningful activities

They continued to be **watchful** of their drug-taking triggers

How can we help?

Desistance requires a **many-hands approach** that starts from the **self**, and is supported by **others**.



Increase motivation & changes in thinking

E.g. Engage in purposeful conversations with offenders to motivate & encourage them



Enhance social capital

E.g. Encourage offenders to attend family programmes & keep in contact with family members



Facilitate new lifestyle & confidence

E.g. Notice & encourage positive changes made by offenders, however small they might be; Create opportunities to motivate offenders