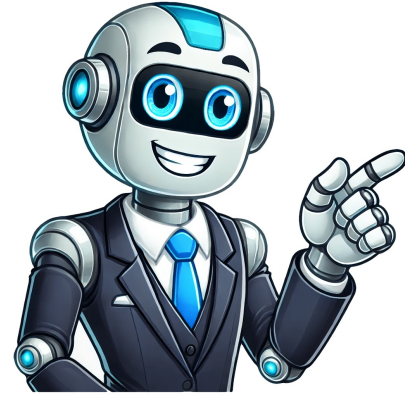


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Stealing has a myriad of negative consequences, including incarceration and a criminal record. While stealing is not yet classified as an addiction, kleptomania is an impulse control disorder involving stealing that may leave you feeling ashamed and guilty. Dealing with your problem is an important first step. Reflect on why you steal and how it makes you feel. Challenge your thoughts when you think about stealing. Recognize your triggers that lead to stealing. Stop, breathe, and think about your behavior when you want to steal. Distract yourself with a different hobby or activity. Meet with a psychologist to talk about behavioral treatment plans. 1 Understand that you deserve help. It is important to know that you are worthy because many individuals with guilt (including shame about stealing) may not believe that they deserve help.[1] This often prevents them from seeking assistance. You do deserve help and understanding, and you are not alone. 2 Define your stealing behaviors. It is important to first identify the specific reasons why you steal in order to begin to change this behavior.[2] Do you steal for an emotional high? Do you feel initial tension, then a thrill of excitement that builds up prior to the theft and relief after it's done? Is this then followed by feeling guilt, shame and remorse? These are some signs that stealing may be a problem for you. Do you steal to escape? When stealing, do you feel different, as if you're not yourself or you're not in touch with reality? This is a fairly common state of feeling for individuals who steal. Advertisement 3 Write out your feelings. After you've discovered what drives your stealing behaviors, try free writing about your need to steal. Don't censor your feelings - everything you think about or feel is important to note.[3] Be sure to name the feelings, such as anger, fear, sadness, loneliness, being creeped out, exposed, vulnerable, etc, that accompany the need to steal. 4 Determine the consequences. Thinking about the consequences of your behaviors can help to reduce impulsivity. If you have been nearly caught, or have been caught (or caught several times), write all of this down. Also write down your own subsequent feelings, such as shame and guilt, and the actions you use to try to cope with these feelings or remorse or disgust, such as drinking too much, cutting yourself, destroying the things you've stolen, or other destructive actions. If you have been caught, how strong were the accompanying feelings? Why do you feel that even being caught isn't enough to overcome the need to steal? Write it all down. EXPERT TIP Julie Krizner Licensed Professional Counselor Julie Krizner is a Licensed Professional Counselor and is the Executive Director at Axiom Family Counseling Services. With over 10 years of professional experience in the mental health field, Julie is trained in trauma, marriage, and family therapy. Her clinics have programs that specialize in addiction and she has extensive knowledge about addiction and medications to assist with overcoming it. Julie is a Certified Advanced Alcohol and Drug Counselor in the state of Pennsylvania. She received her Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Saint Vincent College and a Master's in Mental Health Counseling from Capella University. Assess all addiction angles. Compulsive stealing likely conceals deeper psychological issues requiring examination. Carefully analyze potential root causes like trauma history, warped self-image, introduction of bad peer influences, or impulse control challenges. Pinpointing the source guides appropriate treatment. Advertisement 1 Consider therapy. While it is possible to defeat your addiction to stealing on your own with a great deal of determination, it may also be helpful to consider treatment. The best form of help will be counseling with a psychologist or a psychiatrist. Therapy combined with medication can be effective in treating kleptomania or compulsive stealing. Be reassured that therapy for kleptomania/compulsive stealing can be very successful in helping you to overcome this disorder, but also remember the outcome depends on how badly you want it and how much you are willing to work for it! 2 Understand treatment options. The most common forms of therapy for stealing include: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Psychodynamic treatment, and Group therapy/12-step programs.[4] [5] CBT helps people change their thinking in order to change their feelings and behaviors. DBT is focused on teaching individuals distress tolerance, emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, and mindfulness. Psychodynamic interventions look into your past and upbringing in order to identify the causes of problems and find ways to solve current issues. 12-step programs focus on additions to substances, but there are also 12-step programs for stealing in particular. You can discuss these options with a mental health professional. There are also ways you can explore these types of therapy on your own through self-help measures. For example, CBT involves changing your thoughts in order to change you feelings and behaviors. 3 Explore medication options. Several medications have been indicated in the treatment of kleptomania including Prozac and Revia.[6] Consult a psychiatrist for additional information or to discuss psychotropic options. Advertisement 1 Identify and challenge your thoughts. Changing your thoughts in order to change your feelings and behaviors is a key component of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which is a common type of therapy for treating stealing and kleptomania.[7] Monitor your automatic thoughts, and you can change your stealing behaviors.[8] Think about the thoughts that arise when you are considering stealing something. For example you may think, "I really want that," or, "I will get away with it." [9] Think about who it benefits. Does it only benefit you when you steal? Or your family, friends, or someone else? And in what way does it benefit you or others? If you feel that some of your compulsion to steal is about validating your position or feeling secure within your group of friends or family by "buying" their affection or rewarding their attention with items, then you'll need to start seeing these drives for the insecurity within you that they represent. 2 Train yourself to think differently. Once you've identified your thinking patterns you can begin thinking of alternative thoughts. This includes paying attention to your negative thoughts that reinforce your stealing behaviors, and actively changing your thought process in the moment. For example, if you find yourself thinking, "I really want that ring, so I'll steal it," instead think, "I want that ring, but it is wrong to steal so I will focus on saving my money instead." 3 Reflect on the bigger picture. When you feel stronger about what is compelling you to steal and what you intend to do about it, spend some time reflecting over what you have been doing and where this is headed in all likelihood. Time for reflection is important because it's likely that you feel as if your life lacks purpose, or perhaps you feel as if you have no control over aspects of your life. For some people, stealing is a form of passive rebellion against situations that make them feel powerless. Reflecting on these bigger picture concerns will help you to start developing your own goals for your life and will help you to set boundaries on poor behaviors that don't help you reach your goals. 4 Be prepared to assert yourself and your needs more. If you don't feel strong about standing up for yourself or you feel ignored, picked on or let down all the time, it is easy to use stealing as a form of "revenge" on people whom you perceive have hurt or ignored you. Or, you might be using stealing as a way to sedate your feelings in general. Unfortunately, by not asserting yourself and by not seeing your own self-worth but choosing stealing instead, you risk your future and you let the actions of others lead you into hurting yourself even more. Remind yourself that the only person you hurt for real is you - you might truly upset the people who love you but you're not punishing them; you're punishing yourself. Advertisement 1 Identify your history of stealing. Creating a relapse prevention plan is a crucial component of taking control of your urge to steal, as well as preventing stealing in the future.[10] [11] The first step in relapse prevention planning is to identify the past issues you have had with stealing. You can use the information you wrote down during the writing exercise above in order to begin your relapse prevention plan. Write down a history of your stealing. List as many stealing episodes as possible, starting from when you were a child. Note any situations that were going on during that time or what influenced your decision to steal. Rate the need to steal for each episode. Use a scale of 1 to 10 to show how much you felt compelled to steal on each occasion you've noted. 2 Understand and cope with your triggers. Triggers are thoughts and feelings about a situation that may lead to a behavior. Write down your thoughts and feelings that are associated with stealing. Learn high-risk situations. The key to controlling your impulses is understanding risky situations and avoiding them.[12] What were your feelings when the stealing took place? See if you can identify particular triggers, such as someone being nasty to you, someone yelling at you, feeling down or unloved, being rejected, etc. Note the correlation between what triggered your need to steal and the rating you've given the feeling that you needed to steal. Keep this list, journal or notebook very safe. Remove yourself from triggering situations that might encourage you or make it easy for you to steal. Some examples of these types of triggers include being around friends who steal, or going into stores that you know have low security. Avoid these situations at all cost so you will not be tempted. 3 Adopt a plan to control your impulse. This involves talking to yourself before proceeding any further. [13] Try the following: Stop. Instead of acting on impulse, stop yourself immediately. Take a breath. Stand still and give yourself breathing space. Observe. Think about what is going on. What am I feeling? What am I thinking? What am I reacting to? Pull back. Attempt to look at the situation objectively. Is there another way of thinking about the situation? Project yourself to after the theft when you're holding the item and wondering what to do with it and wondering how to overcome the guilt. Practice what works. Choose for yourself what you would rather do instead of stealing something. Plan to change your behavior every time the craving to steal comes over you. Some examples of what might be helpful include: telling yourself about who you are and what your values are, reminding yourself that you are a good person and a person who is valued, self-calm techniques, and imagining peaceful scenes to calm your racing heart and tension. 4 Continue to monitor your behaviors. Once you have mastered the art of impulse control and have reduced or eliminated your stealing behaviors, you will need to continuously monitor your relapse prevention plan and adjust it accordingly.[14] Turn to the present. Keep a daily account of your current stealing exploits, if any. As before, keep writing the feelings and rate the desire to steal. Balance the writing. Be sure to write down your accomplishments, the things that you're proud of and the things that you're grateful for. Try to make these things become the main focus of your journal keeping over time, in order to help build your self-esteem. Advertisement 1 Distract yourself. Find alternatives to stealing that give you a high or a focus but that don't create more harm in your life.[15] This could include hobbies, activities, volunteering, helping others, making things, growing plants, caring for animals, writing, painting, studying, becoming an activist for a cause you believe in, or many other wonderful alternatives to stealing. Whatever you choose, make choices that are beneficial for you and that aren't simply about swapping one disorder for another (such as sedating yourself with alcohol). 2 Get active. If stealing is filling a void in your life, fill it with activities.[16] Take up sport or exercise, take up a hobby, or start volunteering. Instead of resorting to stealing as a way of filling in your time, use your time more productively and beneficially. This will lift your self-esteem, create renewed energy, and remove boredom. It will stop you from stealing for a lack of better things to do, or a sense of purposelessness. Just keep yourself busy and the rest will follow. 3 Find a job, get an increase in your allowance or pay, or revisit your budget. If you've been stealing out of survival need or a sense of deprivation as well as from emotional triggers, having a more steady, certain stream of income might alleviate your desire or "need" to steal. Moreover, the security and routine of having a job if you don't have one, can restore a sense of responsibility and self-esteem that might be missing in your life. This step may not be relevant to you if you already have enough money, a job, or money isn't the issue, but if a toxic relationship with money is at the heart of your problem, earning your own secure source can be helpful. 4 Find emotional outlets. Use the knowledge you gain from the writing therapy to start tackling the emotions and feelings that are triggering your need to steal. [17] Tackle your anger, your confusion, your sadness, your distress, and so forth. Acknowledge your original feelings and find new ways to deal with them other than through stealing. Make notes of new ways to distract, entertain and amuse yourself. What sorts of new thoughts and actions are you discovering you can use to make yourself feel better? Advertisement 1 Understand stealing versus kleptomania. In order to treat your specific struggle with stealing, it may benefit you to identify whether you engage in stealing behaviors, or if you may have a specific disorder.[18] It is recommended that you seek consultation from a mental health professional. Kleptomania exists in about .3 - 6 % in the general population. In other words, about 1 in 200 people may meet the criteria for kleptomania as a disorder. 11% of people shoplift at least once in their lives. That is, over 1 in 10 people have shoplifted at least once. However, shoplifting once or twice does not constitute a disorder. Kleptomania is an impulse control disorder; it is associated with a "high" when engaging in stealing, followed by guilt after stealing. It is also characterized by an inability to control or stop the stealing despite repeated efforts.[19] Stealing is not considered an addiction according to the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5), which is a reference guide for psychologists and psychiatrists in diagnosing mental disorders. 2 Identify other causes. The symptom of stealing could be part of a different disorder. For example diagnoses such as: Conduct Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Antisocial Personality Disorder, and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, all have criteria that may include stealing-related behaviors. You also deserve assessment for other disorders that may be enabling the kleptomaniac habits, such as dissociative states, stress, anxiety, and mood disorders. 3 Conduct research about stealing. Ask for more information at your local library or bookstore. In the age of the internet, it's easy to find out more information about our health and well-being; just be sure to look on reputable sites, such as government health sites and sites written by doctors and psychologists, with referencing and verified expertise. As well, read posts and forums where people with the same disorder as you share their thoughts, feelings, worries, etc., as this will help you to realize that you're not alone. Advertisement Ask a Question Advertisement Thanks Thanks Advertisement Thanks Helpful 73 Not Helpful 18 Advertisement Notebook or journal for noting down feelings, triggers and solutions - make your own from recycled paper or BUY a cheap one; it must be paid for or genuinely obtained or you're defeating the purpose before you even begin which is very important. This article was co-authored by Trudi Griffin, LPC, MS. Trudi Griffin is a Licensed Professional Counselor based in Wisconsin. She specializes in addictions, mental health problems, and trauma recovery. She has worked as a counselor in both community health settings and private practice. She also works as a writer and researcher, with education, experience, and compassion for people informing her research and writing subjects. She received Bachelor's degrees in Communications and Psychology from the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay. She also earned an MS in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Marquette University. This article has been viewed 513,535 times. Co-authors: 44 Updated: April 12, 2025 Views: 513,535 Categories: Psychological Disorders Print Send fan mail to authors Thanks to all authors for creating a page that has been read 513,535 times. "This article helped me. I started taking things from blessing boxes a while back. I have autism, but I'm learning to control it. My dad and stepmom think taking from the blessing box is stealing from the poor. My New Year's resolution for next year is to stop. I am off to a good start..." -" more Share your story Download Article Stealing is a common problem in society. While some people steal once or twice, other individuals are unable to resist the urge to steal things. Some individuals steal because they do not have the means to purchase items. Some may get a thrill from stealing. Others feel entitled to get what they want without payment. Stealing has a myriad of negative consequences, including incarceration and a criminal record. While stealing is not yet classified as an addiction, kleptomania is an impulse control disorder involving stealing that may leave you feeling ashamed and guilty. Dealing with your problem is an important first step. Reflect on why you steal and how it makes you feel. Challenge your thoughts when you think about stealing. Recognize your triggers that lead to stealing. Stop, breathe, and think about your behavior when you want to steal. 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