



# Your Choice – a manual for recovery

**In this program we shall be looking deeply at our lives with fresh eyes, using exercises and techniques to help us become more self-aware.**

## Introduction

What is “It’s Your Choice recovery”?

It is a programme that looks at addictive behaviour, and most importantly, the thoughts, feelings and emotional states that often fuel addictive behaviour.

We will focus on the following areas:

1. Thoughts, feelings and behaviours
2. Responsibility
3. Cravings and triggers
4. Values and motivation
5. Living a balanced life

### *Thoughts fuel Emotions. Emotions fuel Behaviours*

It all started with a thought. Have you ever heard that expression? Without thoughts we couldn’t really do much, either positive or negative.

Thoughts need to be changed to change behaviour. Changing the behaviour itself is not enough, as they often resurface if the underlying thoughts and feelings are not dealt with.

Changing behaviours and routines is very important for recovery, but there also must be internal work going on.

Just stopping the drug of choice has been done countless times by people trying to overcome their addiction, and yet many will report finding themselves back where they started, sometimes without even consciously knowing how it happened.

With all the best intentions in the world yet here I am again. What happened?

The answer is in the question. It is not being aware. Awareness needs to be established before any real change can happen.

### **Our thinking patterns and how they affect our behaviour**

When living in active addiction, there will come a time when we must face our situation with courage, responsibility and effort. Consistency and momentum are important as we are aiming to change deeply engrained habits. This will take time.

### **To break a habit, we need to make a habit**

This is where consistency and repetition come in as key factors in working through this program. We are forming new, positive habits to replace the old ones.



### **Make your wellbeing your priority**

Schedule time for yourself each day to work through some of the exercises in this program.

We all have areas in our lives that we need to tend to, such as family, work or relationships. Sometimes we can get lost doing everything. Without consciously knowing it, we can neglect our own wellbeing.

Plan what time you can devote to your own wellbeing. Even 30 minutes a day spent reading and practising can make a huge difference. Checking in with yourself in the morning and evening using a journal is always good practise. In the morning we can set ourselves up for the day and in the evening, we can review how our day was and how we are feeling.

### **Be patient**

Be patient with yourself. As you work through the program there will be times when you may forget things, or you may feel frustrated as you see yourself repeating old patterns.

This is perfectly normal and giving yourself a hard time is the last thing you need. Allow yourself time to adjust to a new way of thinking. The most important thing is to carry on doing what you've set out to do.

### **Repetition**

Keep revisiting the exercises and readings that you feel are appropriate to you. Once an exercise has been covered it's not a case of moving onto next, like reading the pages of a book. Absorb all you can from the exercises and most importantly, put them into practice. Build a routine for yourself and repeat, repeat, repeat. If you do, you'll be amazed at the changes you will see in yourself.

Be flexible with your routine, be open minded, adding or taking away whatever you think appropriate, but try to stick to a basic framework for your daily practise.

## **Thoughts, feelings and behaviours**

What we think fuels how we feel and how we feel will determine the way we act.

Many of us lead busy lives. Our minds are often so full of information that we barely have time to reflect, to put things into perspective.

Getting in tune with our internal dialogue gives us a head start in making change. So, let us look at how we can become more aware of our thinking patterns.

### **Becoming aware of the negative self-talk**

Once we become aware of our negative self-talk and how it affects our behaviour, we can begin the process of changing our thought patterns. To get an idea of how our thought patterns work here is a short exercise.



### Brainstorming your beliefs

Look at each of the beliefs on the checklist and ask yourself “how true” is that for me?

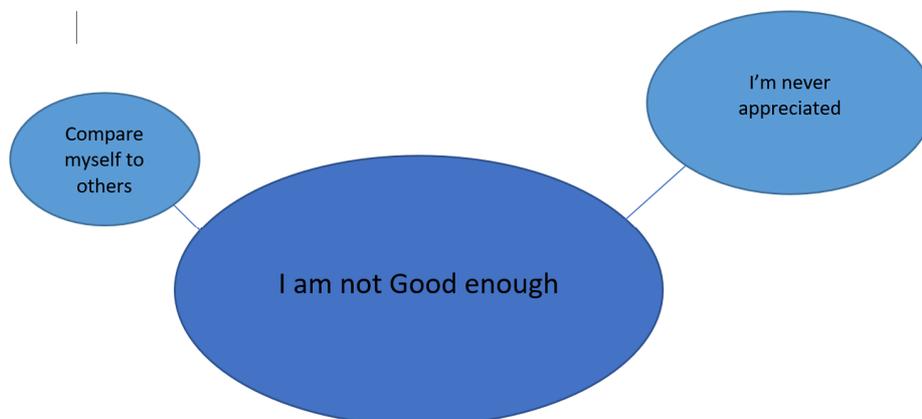
Belief	Score 1 - 100
I am not good enough	
I am unloveable	
The world is a dangerous place	
I am worthless	
I am incapable	
I am misunderstood	
I am abandoned	
I have been betrayed	
I am unattractive	
I am unproductive	
I am incompetent	
I am a failure	
I am a victim	
I am a burden	
I am stupid	
I am always being used	
I am alone	
I am bad	
I am guilty	
I am confused	
I am trapped	
I am powerless	
I am inferior	

Write down each of the beliefs that rate most highly for you in the centre of a new piece of paper.

Note other beliefs that stem from this ‘core’ belief. This should give you a picture your internal dialogue and the thoughts that we are aiming to change.



List them all, radiating out from the belief in a mind map like the one below.



Once we have begun to see what our beliefs are about ourselves and the world, we can begin to realign them. Beliefs can always be changed.

It is only through habit that we re-run them over and over and let them dictate our lives.

From our list we get an overall picture of what our beliefs are and through brainstorming our beliefs we have begun to look at them in more depth.

Our beliefs are programming that we have picked up from over the years and that is constantly being re-run subconsciously. By shining awareness on these belief systems, we begin to bring them into consciousness, and this is where we can begin to work with them and reframe them.

### **What do we mean by reframing?**

This is all about changing our beliefs. They have most likely been around for so long it will take time, so we need to be patient with ourselves. We are now aware. This is a huge step in this process and one to be celebrated. We can add to this new-found awareness through journaling or mindfulness. These practices will help us check in with how we are feeling and what we are thinking.

To begin reframing we can take one of our beliefs and write it down.

“I’m not good enough” for example

We can look at these beliefs as used in the brainstorming exercise and ask:

How valid are they now?

- Are they as true as we “Believe” them to be?
- Is this happening now or is it related to past events/
- Do I truly believe this now or am I running on old programming?

If it is old programming-what new programming do I want?



I am not good enough could replace with - "I believe I am not good enough, but this is not a fact".

- "I know this is old programming"
- "I know it is not true"
- "I can begin to change, I am willing to change, I am changing"
- "I can become good enough, I will become good enough, I am good enough"

After each statement rate how much, you believe it 0-100 as in the brainstorming exercise.

Keep going through the statements until there is noticeable change in how you rate them. Then go through them again.

Whenever you catch yourself in 'old thinking' put this into practice.

### **Positive Thinking**

Look out for tail-enders. For example, "I am improving everyday. BUT..."

Instead, use the following, more positive language.

- Life is good
- I believe in myself
- Today is going to be a good day
- Anything is possible
- I really do believe in myself!!!
- Yes
- The best is yet to come
- I am always succeeding
- I am healthy
- I am important
- I am happy and grateful
- I have unlimited potential
- I will realise my vision
- I am special
- I am perfectly imperfect
- I am more powerful than I know
- Every moment is an opportunity
- I have unique talents waiting to be explored
- I am improving everyday
- I am intelligent
- I am strong
- I am confident
- I am deserving of good things
- I focus on what's good about my life
- I create my reality
- I cherish my life



## Exchanging Vocabulary

Upset feelings are usually caused by the way we are thinking about what is happening, not the events themselves. To change your feelings (and your behaviour), try the following "Exchange Vocabulary."

This idea was given to me by a client, who related it to an exchange list for unhealthy foods. When you first try this new way of thinking, it might not feel right. The more you do it, however, the more natural these realistic beliefs will become.

I think you will like the results but prove it for yourself by giving it a fair try. Good luck.

### Word Exchange Table

Instead of thinking:	Try thinking:
Must	Prefer
Should	Choose To
Have To	Want
Can't	Choose Not To
Ought	Had Better
All	Many
Always	Often
Can't Stand	Don't Like
Awful	Highly Undesirable
Bad Person	Bad Behaviour
I am a Failure	I Failed At

### Statements

Instead of Saying:	Exchange With:
I have to do well	I want to do well
You shouldn't do that	I prefer you not do that
You never help me	You rarely help me
I can't stand my job	I don't like my job
You are a bad boy	That behaviour is undesirable
I'm a loser	I failed at this one task
I need love	I want love, but don't need it



### Emotional Vocabulary Exchange

REBT does *not* endeavour to eliminate emotions. Quite to the contrary! Emotions are very useful and part of the human advantage. When Appropriate!

Instead of Saying:	Exchange With:
Anxious	Concerned
Depressed	Sad
Angry	Annoyed
Guilt	Remorse
Shame	Regret
Hurt	Disappointed
Jealous	Concern for my relationship

### The cost of Avoidance

Complete the following sentences:

The thoughts I'd most like to get rid of are .....

The feelings I'd most like to get rid of are .....

The sensations I'd most like to get rid of are .....

The memories I'd most like to get rid of are .....

Next, take a few minutes to write a list of everything you've tried in order to avoid or get rid of these unpleasant thoughts or feelings. Try to remember every single strategy you have ever used.

Here is a guide to help you:

#### Distraction

List everything you have ever done to distract yourself or take your mind off these painful thoughts, feelings, sensations or memories.

#### Opting out

List all the activities, interests, events, people, or places that you have avoided or withdrawn from, and all the opportunities you have missed out on, because you wanted to avoid feeling bad.

#### Self-compassion journal

Try keeping a daily self-compassion journal for one week (or longer if you like.) Journaling is an effective way to express emotions and has been found to enhance both mental and physical well-being. At some point during the evening when you have a few quiet moments, review the day's events. In your journal, write down anything that you felt bad about, anything you judged yourself for, or any difficult experience that caused you pain. (For instance, perhaps you got angry at a



waitress at lunch because she took forever to bring the check. You made a rude comment and stormed off without leaving a tip. Afterwards, you felt ashamed and embarrassed.) For each event, use mindfulness, a sense of common humanity, and kindness to process the event in a more self-compassionate way.

### **Mindfulness**

This will mainly involve bring awareness to the painful emotions that arose due to your self-judgment or difficult circumstances. Write about how you felt: sad, ashamed, frightened, stressed, and so on. As you write, try to be accepting and non-judgmental of your experience, not belittling it nor making it overly dramatic. (For example, “I was frustrated because she was being so slow. I got angry, over-reacted, and felt foolish afterwards.”)

### **Common humanity**

Write down the ways in which your experience was connected to the larger human experience. This might include acknowledging that being human means being imperfect, and that all people have these sorts of painful experiences. (“Everyone over-reacts sometimes, it’s only human.”) You might also want to think about the various causes and conditions underlying the painful event. (“My frustration was exacerbated by the fact that I was late for my doctor’s appointment across town and there was a lot of traffic that day. If the circumstances had been different my reaction probably would have been different.”)

### **Self-Kindness**

Write yourself some kind, understanding, words of comfort. Let yourself know that you care about yourself, adopting a gentle, reassuring tone. (It’s okay. You messed up but it wasn’t the end of the world. I understand how frustrated you were, and you just lost it. Maybe you can try being extra patient and generous to any wait-staff this week”).

Practicing the three components of self-compassion with this writing exercise will help organise your thoughts and emotions, while helping to encode them in your memory. If you keep a journal regularly, your self-compassion practice will become even stronger and translate more easily into daily life.

## **Responsibility**

In this module we shall be looking at our situation, wherever that may be, and begin taking responsibility to start the process of change.

Often, we may not feel comfortable with this step for several reasons. We may fear change or have feelings of guilt, shame or regret.

First, we shall be looking at these various obstacles and ways we can address them.

For many, guilt and shame can keep them in the cycle of addiction. People will often use their drug of choice to cover uncomfortable feelings instead of processing them. A distinction between guilt and shame can be helpful here as people often get them confused.

When we feel shame, our attention is on ourselves and how others might see us. We feel exposed and that others are looking down on us in some way, seeing us as inferior or inadequate. We can



also have a sense of internal shame when we feel these things about ourselves. Commonly our own sense of shame is accompanied by self-criticism and even self-attacking. We can also mask over these feelings with over self-confidence or humour for example.

Guilt on the other hand is the feeling of responsibility or remorse for some wrong and is where change can begin to happen. It is only when we feel shame alongside it that we become hindered and unable to move forward.

Often, we can become trapped in these ways of thinking without us realising our thought patterns. Awareness of our thinking can help us get a better perspective on how our mind is working in order to change it. One thing you can do about this is stand back and recognize your streams of thought. Thinking itself often becomes a habit and it is easy to fall into patterns without us realising it.

### **Learning to replace shame and self-criticism**

Once we become familiar with our critical voice, we can begin to learn how it works, what brings it about and how to deal with it and change it.

Being understanding toward our self is important and will help combat shame and the inner critic. If your tackling problems of shame and self-criticism it may feel like you are alone, but these are widespread feelings that many people face in daily life. To open and talk about these feelings is a good start and you may come to realise that you are not alone in feeling this way.

Distinguishing between shamed based self-criticism and compassionate self-correction.

<b>Shame based self-attacking</b>	<b>Compassionate self-correction</b>
Focuses on the desire to condemn and punish	Focuses on the desire to improve
Punishes past errors and is often backward looking	Emphasizes growth and enhancement
Is given with anger, frustration, contempt, disappointment	Is forward looking
Concentrates on deficits and fear of exposure	Is given with encouragement, support and kindness
Focuses on global sense of self	Builds on positives, considers learning points
Includes high fear of failure	Focuses on attributes and specific qualities of self
Increases high fear of failure	Emphasises hope for success
Increases chances of withdrawal and isolation	Increases chance of engaging

### **Humility**

Humility gives us a grounding – a starting point from which we can begin to make real changes. When we begin the journey of recovery there may be blocks that we need to deal with.

Humility There are many misconceptions about what humility is. It is sometimes seen as belonging to people with low self-esteem or as defeatist and even a weakness.

True humility is self-confidence on its own terms, a quality of character that stops people from having to compare themselves to others.



Pride is damaging and destructive and cuts us off from the rest of the world and to the knowledge that we could gain from being open minded to new ideas other than our own.

### **Humility and Responsibility**

“Show me someone who is humble enough to accept and take responsibility for his or her own circumstances and courageous enough to take whatever initiative is necessary to creatively work his or her way through or around challenges and I’ll show you supreme power of choice.”

*Steven Covey*

### **Shame and disappointment**

There is now good evidence to show that when we feel shame it’s not so much about us not meeting our standards but rather it’s because we think that in the eyes of others, we will become undesirable.

In shame we feel inadequate. Shame involves being identified with a self we don’t want to be. And we don’t want to be that self because it is identified with certain threats, particularly those of rejection. We experience shame by identifying with our undesired self and many of our efforts to improve ourselves may be to feel accepted. It’s important to acknowledge that we must focus on becoming the self we wish to be for our own wellbeing.

As we become more vulnerable to shame several things can happen.

### **Self-attacking**

here we may have various thoughts such as

‘I should have done better – ‘What’s the matter with me?’ – ‘Why don’t I try harder’

These are usually not just statements but come with feelings of frustration, anger and even contempt.

### **Attack others**

The disappointment we feel toward ourselves can leave us irritable and with others we can often become defensive, offensive or even attack them.

### **Give up**

We might have that heart sinking feeling and have thoughts of ‘There’s nothing I can do’ – we can feel defeated.

*Exercise:*

Distinguishing between shame-based self-criticism and compassionate self-correction.

Now imagine that self-criticism is no longer with you. What would it be like?

Here we could come up with all kinds of ‘Yes buts’ to giving up self-criticism.

*They may include:*

‘Yes, but if I’m not self-critical I might become arrogant and not look at my faults’



'I might become unlikeable'

'I might become lazy; I might not achieve'

You may have come to believe that your self-criticism is helping you – But is it really helping you or hindering you? We can even become self-critical about being self-critical.

Make two columns on a sheet of paper. Head one of them 'HOW MY SELF CRITICISM HELPS ME' and the other 'HOW MY SELF CRITICISM HINDERS ME'

Write down all the advantages of self-criticism in the first column and all the disadvantages in the second one. What you might note when you look at what you've written are reasons why you are holding on to your self-criticism, why you can't give it up.

Advantages of self-criticism	Disadvantages of self-criticism

It is useful to stand back from your self-critical side and ask 'How much is genuinely concerned with my wellbeing and how much does it have my best interests at heart?'

Self-criticism isn't rooted in helping you achieve well-being and it is usually unreliable and based on threat, anger, fear or shame.

Take a piece of paper and write out all the reasons why your own self-criticism is unreliable. Try to really feel how it is threat, anger, fear and shame based and doesn't have any kindness or desire to see you flourish and achieve.

### Developing self-awareness

- Openness and sensitivity for our own distress
- Learning to be more attentive to the changes in our physical feelings, emotions and thoughts

This may reveal, at times, that we experience small cues in our bodies that trigger avoidance or defensive strategies rather than processing our feelings. Going straight to anger, for example, can eliminate the need to process several emotions such as fear, shame, hurt and upset.



Learning to become sensitive to one's own distress would mean slowing down, stepping back and seeing what was behind that anger.

Drugs and alcohol are quite often used as a distraction from painful feelings and many people don't want to become sensitive to their own distress but want to get rid of it not embrace it.

Becoming sensitive to what upsets us can tell us much about ourselves and our behaviours.

Becoming sensitive toward ourselves means learning to be curious and interested in why we react as we do without being critical toward our self.

### **Sympathy**

Is not self-pity, self-pity has elements of contempt and over identifying with a sense of being a victim or being angry with a sense of injustice. To have sympathy is to be genuinely moved by, for example, how awful it is to be depressed or anxious for example. It doesn't mean dwelling on how bad it is, this is very unhelpful. But we can develop compassionate understanding for our pain.

It is also good to reflect on the fact that we can get through these painful times as we have in the past, and to also recognise we have more courage and endurance than we may think we have.

Many people can intellectually recognise how difficult things were for them but never really feel any kindness towards themselves for having these experiences. We can spend much time 'holding ourselves together' or protecting ourselves or just keep going, but never really find the time to process our experiences and the pain we may have felt.

Many of us face our lives as best we can, sometimes it's just a case of just keeping our heads down and keeping going but it's important to see what we can lose by doing this, that we can be putting some of our feelings on hold.

### **Distress and tolerance acceptance**

We might learn to tolerate something in order to change, e.g. Tolerate the pain of training in order to get fit. It is the same with our feelings. It's a coming to terms, letting it be – not fighting or struggling but accepting and tolerating with a kindness towards oneself. The kinder and more supportive we are with ourselves, the more we can develop the courage to tolerate difficult things. Both tolerance and acceptance are totally different from submissive resignation in that you feel you must give in to the inevitable and that you are defeated and powerless to anything else.

This is often associated with feelings of hopelessness and resentment. The spirit of acceptance is in coming to terms with a situation without these feelings. The importance of learning tolerance for painful feelings is clear. However, it is perhaps surprising to discover that some people also need to learn to tolerate and savour positive emotions. For some enjoyment for its own sake can feel wrong. They can't tolerate feeling happy or contented because this triggers fears they will let their guard down and something bad will happen or because they feel it's self-indulgent and they don't deserve it or it might be in conflict with their self-identity...." I'm just not a happy person".



## **Developing a positive relationship with yourself**

### *Being kind to yourself*

Kindness is understanding one's difficulties and being kind and understanding in the face of failure or setbacks rather than harshly judgemental or critical.

### *Common Humanity*

Seeing one's experience as part of the human condition rather than as personal, isolating and shaming...we all face difficulties....

### *Mindful acceptance*

Awareness and acceptance of painful thoughts and feelings-rather than trying to push them away or cover them over....

Kindness and compassion aim to nurture, look after, teach us and guide us through difficult times.

## **Changing critical self-talk**

This exercise should be done over several weeks and will eventually form the blueprint for changing how you relate to yourself long-term. Some people find it useful to work on their inner critic by writing in a journal. Others are more comfortable doing it via internal dialogues. If you are someone who likes to write things down and revisit them later, journaling can be an excellent tool for transformation. If you are someone (like me) who never manages to be consistent with a journal, then do whatever works for you. You can speak aloud to yourself or think silently.

The first step towards changing the way to treat yourself is to notice when you are being self-critical. It may be that – like many of us – your self-critical voice is so common for you that you don't even notice when it is present. Whenever you're feeling bad about something, think about what you've just said to yourself. Try to be as accurate as possible, noting your inner speech verbatim. What words do you use when you're self-critical? Are there key phrases that come up repeatedly? What is the tone of your voice – harsh, cold, angry? Does the voice remind you of any one in your past who was critical of you? You want to be able to get to know the inner self-critic very well, and to become aware of when your inner judge is active. For instance, if you've just eaten half a box of Oreos, does your inner voice say something like "you're so disgusting," "you make me sick," and so on? Really try to get a clear sense of how you talk to yourself.

Make an active effort to soften the self-critical voice, but do so with compassion rather than self-judgment (i.e., don't say "you're such a bitch" to your inner critic!). Say something like "I know you're worried about me and feel unsafe, but you are causing me unnecessary pain. Could you let my inner compassionate self say a few words now?"

Reframe the observations made by your inner critic in a friendly, positive way. If you're having trouble thinking of what words to use, you might want to imagine what a very compassionate friend would say to you in this situation. It might help to use a term of endearment that strengthens expressed feelings of warmth and care (but only if it feels natural rather than schmaltzy.) For instance, you can say something like "Darling, I know you ate that bag of cookies because you're feeling really sad right now and you thought it would cheer you up. But you feel even worse and are not feeling good in your body. I want you to be happy, so why don't you take a long walk so you feel



better?” While engaging in this supportive self-talk, you might want to try gently stroking your arm, or holding your face tenderly in your hands (if no one’s looking). Physical gestures of warmth can tap into the caregiving system even if you’re having trouble calling up emotions of kindness at first, releasing oxytocin that will help change your bio-chemistry. The important thing is that you start acting kindly, and feelings of true warmth and caring will eventually follow.

### **Assertiveness – Top 10 Tips**

Assertiveness is a life skill; useful both inside and outside work. However, the reactions and behaviours we employ now are the result of years of fine tuning. Being assertive doesn’t happen overnight, but the more practice you get, the more skilled you become. And while you may not always get what you want, you will always know you gave it your best. So here are the top ten tips for improving your assertive behaviour:

1. Believe in yourself more – always think positively and feed yourself with positive inner dialogue. Stand in front of a mirror, look yourself in the eye, and tell yourself how wonderful you are!
2. Recognize that you can never change other people. You can only change yourself. A change in your behaviour will give others the opportunity to behave differently towards you.
3. Learn to respond, not react. Start choosing how to behave, based on admitting and accepting the consequences. Accept that you – and only you – have made that choice: nobody has forced you into it.
4. Stop beating yourself up for your decisions and behaviours. Instead, turn every situation into a positive learning opportunity for future behaviour change.
5. Make sure your body language is in step with your words. People tend to believe what they see rather than what they hear.
6. Use the green cross code: Stop Look Listen – then think about how you want to respond. This will ensure you stay in control of you and the situation, and afford others the opportunity to do so as well.
7. Aim for situation resolution, not self-defence. Concentrate on the situation rather than your own feelings, and recognize that the other person is most probably angry about the situation – not with you.
8. Consider and choose your words. Lose the words that signal “I’m a pushover” such as “I’m terribly sorry”, or “I’m afraid”, or “Could you possibly...?” or “Can I just ...?”. Substitute big “I” statements followed by factual descriptions instead of judgments or exaggerations. This will encourage the other person to do the same.
9. Say “no” when you want to. Don’t forget to give yourself all the rights you allow everyone else to have. And if it helps, remember that you are not refusing them personally, you are refusing their request.
10. Take a “can do” attitude. Believe that things don’t just happen to you – but that you can make them happen.

### **Keeping a journal in Recovery**

Journaling has been shown to be an effective tool in the recovery of drug and alcohol addiction. It serves as a form of therapy, and it is inexpensive to do. Keeping a journal in addiction recovery helps to reduce stress, improve mental health and may even be used as a relapse prevention technique. The great thing about journaling is that it tracks the progress of recovery, which serves to increase



motivation. People who have excuses for not keeping a journal should be encouraged to do so and shown how it will benefit them.

Journaling comes in many different forms, but there are specific types that are recommended to people in addiction recovery. The Stream of Consciousness Journal is highly recommended. This type of journal has the individual sit down to write for a specific period. They should write whatever comes into their mind without attempting to edit the work. The aim is to allow the writing to flow without interruptions to adjust grammar, punctuation, etc. Whatever thoughts are on the person's mind or heart should be written down. The Stream of Consciousness journaling is very freeing and allows them to release everything that has been held captive in their thoughts and emotions. Thoughts and feelings will just pour out like a stream of words that flows. The act of writing things down acts as a cathartic release in the same way that crying empties the mind and soul.

### **Therapeutic effects**

The therapeutic effects of writing down your thoughts are profound and they enable you to know and understand yourself better. You will discover what makes you happy, sad, angry, defensive and grateful. The Stream of Consciousness journaling is a great way to help you with self-awareness and self-growth. The addict should remain free and open to allow everything to be released. There are no do's or don'ts; everything should be included whether it is good, bad, ugly, boring, angry or sweet. Very often the act of writing will be fast-paced and mentally healing because pent-up thoughts and emotions are being released quickly. You will feel a physical, mental and emotional relief when this occurs. Journaling will cause you to face their thoughts and feelings and come to terms with difficult issues. Eventually, you will begin to see your emotional growth as you work through problem areas in their life.

If you find yourself stuck, there are questions you should ask yourself to elicit a response. Some of these questions are:

- Describe yourself.
- What do I want to change about myself?
- How am I feeling?
- What do I want to be feeling?
- What would I never change about myself?
- Describe the room.
- Describe the people in your life.
- Describe the aspects in your life that you are pleased with.
- Describe the aspects in your life that you are not pleased with.
- What are your goals for the future?
- How do you see yourself five years from now?

There is no pressure in the Stream of Consciousness journaling. You can pick any word or topic that is on your mind. Find a place where you will be alone without interruption. You can type on a computer or write freehand on paper. You can even get creative and use coloured pens, pencils or paper. You are free to write any way you please. Continue writing until you run out of words. You can change topics whenever you want. Release words, thoughts, emotions, memories, hopes, dreams etc. There is no limit to the stream of consciousness journaling, and there is no limit to the growth and healing that the recovering addict will gain from it.



## Your assertive rights

It is suggested that people have ten assertive rights which include:

- The right to judge our own behaviour, emotions and thoughts and to take responsibility for these.
- The right to be the ultimate judge of our own behaviour. No one has to offer justification for their own behaviour.
- The right to decide if it is our responsibility to find solutions for other people's problems. A person may feel compassion for other people's problems but ultimately, we only have responsibility for our own happiness and wellbeing.
- The right to change our mind. There are so many occurrences in life that it is only natural to change our mind from time to time.
- The right to just not know
- The right to make mistakes and be accountable for the outcome. We do not need to allow other people to use our mistakes as a weapon against us.
- The right not to depend on the good will of other people before taking any action. Not everyone is going to be happy with the decisions we make but this does not mean we should not make these decisions.
- The right to not always make logical choices. Sometimes we will make choices based based on a "hunch" or because it just feels right. Its ok to make illogical choices.
- The right to not understand something. Every has different levels of knowledge and we are all forever learning from each other.
- The right to not have an opinion on everything. It is fine to say that you do not care about something and shouldn't feel that we must have an opinion on something.

## Cravings and triggers

By Portia Nelson

I

I walk down the street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk

I fall in.

I am lost... I am helpless.

It isn't my fault.

It takes me forever to find a way out.

II

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 am in the same place  
but, it isn't my fault.

It still takes a long time to get out.

III

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I see it is there.

I still fall in... it's a habit.

my eyes are open

I know where I am.

It is my fault.

I get out immediately.

IV

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I walk around it.

V

I walk down another street.

Cravings are uncomfortable and when during them, we may feel that they will not go away until we have given in to the behaviour. The truth is that this only strengthens them, making them occur more frequently and with more intensity. In short, the more we feed our cravings the bigger they become.

Experiencing pleasure and pain comes with having a body. We enjoy pleasurable feelings such as a pleasant view or relaxing listening to our favourite music, and such activities are very beneficial to us. However, we can get so caught in chasing pleasure that it creates difficulties and we can easily be lured by the craving for pleasurable experiences.

So many of us consciously or unconsciously seek to excite our senses. We have a feeling or rush of excitement; we tell ourselves we want it and act on that impulse. The irony is that once we act on our impulses, the feeling of pleasure is already waning and we are already looking for our next fix.

If we are struggling with an addiction, we may have the strong desire and determination to stop using. Yet, if we are not aware of what is going on in the mind, we can be picking up in seconds as



soon as we are retriggered. Before we know it, we are in a cycle of thinking, perhaps obsessively, of using, of how to get it, and the next thing we know, we are in a relapse.

Cravings and urges will pass! And when we don't give into them, the less intense they will be and will occur less frequently. It is here we begin the process of repairing our brains habitual pleasure seeking.

Ever felt like you are being controlled by your behaviours, feeling like you are doing something against your will?

Sometimes we can try too hard, becoming frustrated and angry with ourselves when cravings arise. This will only make things harder for us. We can look at other coping methods when uncomfortable feelings arise.

Cravings are the brain sending out signals to the body communicating that it wants the reward it has become so accustomed to.

Cravings can come about when least expected or more commonly arise when internal or external triggers remind us of pleasurable feeling in some way. These can be very subtle and deceptive, so becoming very aware is crucial for us to notice them.

If a trigger does arise, try to become aware of what is going on for you in that moment. Are you in a stressful situation? (external)

Are you in a place that reminds you of something? (external)

How are you thinking? Are you worried, sad, bored etc...(internal)?

### **Brainstorming and planning**

Things in life will often come up that may trigger us unexpectedly. It's always good to have forward thinking in place in case such incidents arise.

For example, you may be going to an event where people may be drinking such as a party or some other social function.

It's always good to have a plan here in case you should feel an urge to want to drink. In very early recovery it's probably best to avoid such gatherings until you feel safe enough, but of course we don't want to avoid having a social life because other people around us may be drinking.

To keep yourself safe you could implement some of these actions:

Take a friend with you who is aware of your current situation, it's always good to have support.

Be assertive in telling others that you don't drink, you don't have to go into detail as to why.

Only stay for as long as you feel comfortable, plan an exit strategy, let your friend know about this.

Keep reminding yourself of what has happened to you in the past when it comes to giving in. It's always good to remember where your using has taken you. We often just remember "The good old times" with no regard for the horror stories.



Brainstorm scenarios amongst you as a group. Sharing past examples and how you have coped with them or discuss up and coming events that you may be concerned about. Share ideas and coping strategies.

Awareness of Triggers

Associative cravings

### **External triggers**

People that may influence cravings

Dealers, Family members, Friends, Co-workers, Spouse or Partners, neighbours...

*Places*

Public toilets, Bathroom, bars, clubs, streets, places where you would score...

*Things*

Paraphernalia, money, pay day, programs on T.V, certain sights, smells can be associative...

*Situations*

Social circle, parties, using/drinking friends, after an argument...

### **Internal triggers/Emotions**

Fear, jealousy, anxiety, shame, guilt, depression, loneliness, being put down, anger, hate, boredom, insecurity, neglect, nervousness,

*Using tools to resist a craving*

Learn a healthy distraction...sometimes known as avoidance but could also be used to redirect your attention.

Getting into a new environment...change of social circle etc...

*Going for a walk*

Finding an enjoyable activity? What is it you want to do that you have never done before...?

Play on computer, do some cleaning, join the gym...

Try to consistent but also balanced and open to new activities and pass-times...

Forgetting negative Consequences

Each time we get the craving or urge to use/ behave it is partly based on information from the reward system which suddenly tells us it would be a really good idea to use etc...and temporarily wipes out our awareness of negative consequences.

We may hold on to the hope that "this time" we will really get what we are looking for-this one will really hit the mark, or we will recreate that first time. But there is never a point where we know we have had enough.



## Values and motivation

Knowing what our values are helps motivate us. Having no clear direction or anything to work towards can leave us feeling unmotivated and more likely to slip into old patterns of behaviour.

Addiction consumes every area of our life and most of energy is centred around our addictive behaviour. Once we stop the behaviour, we may feel a void yet we still have all that energy. This is essentially a good thing if we have something to channel it towards. If we don't, that feeling of being bored or unmotivated will surface and it is most likely we will do what we are used to doing to fill that void.

Having something to work towards sparks motivation within us, motivation is closely linked to responsibility as we must rise above our immediate impulses so that we can express the type of person we want to be.

Instead of using the term 'bored' we could replace it with 'unsure'. And this is ok so long as we are willing to explore areas that may motivate us and give time and commitment to working on these areas.

These may be things you were interested in before addiction but have lost touch with, or they may be things you have not done before. Whatever the case now is the time to re-focus your attention and energy toward more healthy and productive activities.

As mentioned above we may be unsure of what to work towards, this is where our values come in as we begin to look at what we value in life we can start to put things into perspective and shape what motivates us.

### **What do we value?**

In this exercise we shall be looking at what we value, the most important things in our lives.

- What are your priorities in life? What is it that really motivates you?
- Where do drugs and alcohol come in.

In addition, if we were to write a list of our values, our drug of choice would most definitely come out at the top. This might seem difficult to swallow for some but if it were not true why else would we spend some so much time consumed by our addictive behaviour?

- What is it you value about our addiction?
- What does it do for you?
- What does it not do for you?

Having answered these questions, it is always good to remember your answers. They point towards areas in your life that may need more attention.

- Things like lack of confidence
- It helps with painful memories
- It helps with Stress & anxiety



What other ways of addressing these areas could you put into place instead of using?

Your values are the beliefs that define what is most important to you. They guide each of your choices in life. For example, someone who values family might try to spend extra time at home, while someone who values success in their career may do the opposite.

Understanding your values will help you recognize areas in your life that need attention, and what to prioritize in the future.

Select about 3 that are most important to you at this point in time. You can always come back to the list and work on other areas, just be wary of taking on too much at once.

Love	Adventure
Honesty	Peace
Wealth	Stability
Humour	Variety
Family	Calmness
Morals	Relaxation
Loyalty	Freedom
Success	Wisdom
Reason	Creativity
Independence	Friends
Knowledge	Responsibility
Achievement	Free time

### Making changes

Once we have come to see what we value we must put into action the changes we want to make. We must begin working towards our values and a good way to do this is to create a plan of action.

- Identify the value
- The changes I want to make are?
- How important is it that I make this change?
- The most important reasons I want to make these changes are?
- The steps I plan to take to make these changes are?

(Resources) The ways other people/organisations can help me are?

I will assess my progress in this area on..... (Date).....

Further actions needed



## Values check list

Once we have established our values and have begun to assess and plan what we need to work towards, we can begin to look at steps to do this.

Value	Obstacles	Steps to take	Other options
Example: family	My using behaviour, arguing	Get clean...  by attending meetings....  Seeking help from G.P and other relevant services....  Talk openly about feelings with friends and family	Set yourself target dates-  Review your progress-  Keep doing the stuff that is working for you-  Be consistent no matter if it feels like you aren't getting anywhere-
Leisure time	Too tied up with other things,  unhealthy routine	Plan your day and week ahead...  Make sure you have "ME" time to work on the things you value	Keep a journal  Keep a diary to help you manage your time

As with all the modules in this program it is important to keep up momentum. We should visit our list frequently and more importantly carry out the actions on it.

As we re-visit our list, we can begin to tick off the tasks we have completed and make note of any further actions we intend to take.

Repeating this process and being consistent, we shall notice things change. We have begun the process of change by putting things into action.

## Living a balanced life

Getting balance back into our lives may seem quite strange after focusing so much of attention on our addictive behaviour. We often become stuck in routines of what seem like quite harmless behaviours but if we give too much attention to one area it becomes easy for us to neglect others. For example, we may enjoy a certain activity such as watching T.V, this in moderation is fine but it's all too easy to fall into a routine of watching it into the early hours and not get a good night's sleep. This could be true of any activity if not balanced with something else.



We need to look at different areas of our life such as:

- Health (physical & mental)
- Social
- Creative
- Ambition/Goals
- Relaxation

It is important to start with our basic needs such as eating, sleeping, resting and our general health. You cannot accomplish anything if you are not looking after your basic needs.

Set aside time each day to do something you enjoy such as walking, listening to music or exercising.

Relaxation and stress management, this could be time alone reading, meditation or yoga, playing an instrument, painting, writing or some other creative activity.

Having something to work towards, setting yourself small goals for each day or week is a good idea. We don't have to be rigid with what we have set ourselves as you may often be surprised where one small goal may lead you. It may lead you toward something you least expected and this opens us up to discovery so long as we are open and receptive to it.

We may wish to join a group of some sort depending on our interests. This keeps our social circle open and keeps in line with what we value if we are amongst like-minded people, which is important if we wish to follow our core values.

### **Benefits of routine in early recovery**

A routine gives helps to give you structure and helps form new healthy habits in place of old ones. We often been caught up in routines of unhealthy habits and first we should become familiar with our old routines and habits and what may trigger them.

#### *Boredom*

Is a common relapse trigger it is good to have a plan for your day to day living, giving you less time to feel bored?

#### *Loneliness*

Is another dangerous emotion for people in recovery. A routine can ensure that you regularly spend time with other likeminded people.

A routine breaks thing up into well-ordered patterns so that they appear more manageable.

If you are faced with all the things you need to do without a plan you can easily become overwhelmed.

A routine means that people get things done. If people don't have scheduled activities, they are more likely to procrastinate.

Don't become too obsessed with your routine. Some people can to put their routines ahead of their basic needs which is not living the balanced life we are aiming for.



If we become too strict about our routine it can prevent us from trying new things. This is a mistake as it is new things that make life interesting and make for change in our lives.

Some may use these routines as another means to avoid reality and to deal with things.

There are things that people can do to help them establish a routine in early recovery such as:

- Creating a daily or weekly plan
- Try to avoid gaps where you have nothing to do and are likely to get bored
- Be willing to make changes in your routine, don't become a slave to it

It may take some time before you decide on things you want to do...therefore it is a good idea to regularly reschedule new activities, experiment and try new things.

A routine in early recovery should be all about balance.

- Elements of Daily Routine
- The time you get up in the morning
- The time you go to bed
- Your exercise routine
- Daily meditation/relaxation
- Times you eat meals
- Time devoted to socialising
- Time devoted to hobbies
- Work routine
- Time devoted to spiritual pursuits such as walking in nature/creativity
- Regular attendance at some type of recovery group
- Routine for cleaning
- Personal hygiene routine
- Time devoted each day to learning new things or reading something inspirational
- Making time to keep a daily journal
- Keeping an eye on things

Am I keeping an eye on these? How am I....

- Thinking?
- Feeling?
- Behaving?
- Spiritually engaging?
- Physically?

By examining these 5 things you get a clearer picture of any imbalances it is then obvious what you need to do to achieve a more balanced lifestyle.

Ask yourself – Am I thinking, feeling, behaving ok?

If not, how can I work on these?

How am I doing spiritually? (this doesn't mean religious in any way, it could be music, reading, painting, creativity, engaging with nature etc...) What could I engage in to nurture myself?



How am I doing physically? Am I eating enough, resting enough, exercising etc...?

What we eat, how much we rest, how much stress we have and our moods can affect our brain chemistry. For example, not getting enough exercise can contribute to depression and leave us feeling lethargic.

Ask yourself – Am I thinking and feeling physically well? Is my diet and mood enough not to affect how I feel and think?

**Basic Human Needs**

Basic Human Need	Example	How well is this need currently being met? 1-10	How will you better meet this need in the future?
The need to feel understood and connected. To give and receive attention.	Sharing ideas, feelings, dreams with others		
Taking account of the mind, body connection	Exercise, nutrition, sleep		
Having a sense of control	An appropriate sense of control in your life, and letting go of things outside of your control		
The need for creativity and stimulation	New challenges, expanding your horizons		
The need for purpose and goals	Making plans, having a sense of purpose		

Humility, on the other hand, opens our eyes to all the wonderful things in our lives. Humility teaches us that no one makes it on their own.