

Reaction to Response

Deep Dives · The Recovery Files

Building the Space Between What Happens to You and What You Do About It
From Impulse to Intention — The Recovery Files

Reaction · Automatic, impulsive, survival-driven · Response · Intentional, chosen, values-driven

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Each reading is followed by its check-in questions and exercises, in the same order as the app. Your scored results are shown in the app.

PART 1 OF 5 · READING

What Is the Difference Between Reacting and Responding?

There is a moment — a fraction of a second, a sliver of time so brief you may not even know it exists — between the thing that happens to you and the thing you do about it. In that sliver lives the entire difference between a life driven by impulse and a life guided by intention. Between a recovery that white-knuckles through crises and a recovery that grows through them. Between the person you have been and the person you are becoming. That sliver is the space between reaction and response, and learning to inhabit it is one of the most transformative skills you will ever develop. A reaction is automatic. It is the immediate, unfiltered, survival-driven behavior that erupts when you are triggered, threatened, hurt, frightened, or overwhelmed. It bypasses the thinking brain entirely and is generated by the oldest, most primitive structures in your nervous system — the amygdala and the limbic system — which evolved to protect you from predators, not to navigate difficult conversations with your spouse. A reaction does not consider consequences. It does not weigh options. It does not assess context. It fires first and asks questions never. It is pure impulse disguised as strength, decisiveness, or honesty. A response is intentional. It is the behavior that emerges when you notice the trigger, feel the activation, and pause — even for a single breath — before choosing what to do next. A response passes through the prefrontal cortex, the part of your brain responsible for judgment, planning, empathy, and impulse control. It considers the situation. It weighs the options. It accounts for relationships, consequences, values, and goals. It may still involve anger, assertiveness, boundary-setting, or confrontation — responding does not mean being passive. But it involves choice. And choice is the defining feature of recovery. For people with substance use disorders, this distinction is not academic. It is existential. Addiction itself is a disorder of reactivity — the automatic, reflexive reaching for a chemical solution to an internal state that feels intolerable. When the craving hits, the addict reacts. When the pain becomes unbearable, the addict reacts. When the shame, the boredom, the loneliness, the rage, the emptiness flood in, the addict reacts — with the only tool that has ever reliably changed the internal weather quickly. Using substances is the ultimate reaction: the immediate, unthinking deployment of a solution that has devastating long-term consequences but provides instantaneous short-term relief. Recovery, then, is fundamentally a process of transforming from a reactor into a responder. It is not simply about removing the substance — it is about building the internal architecture that allows you to encounter the triggers, feel the activation, endure the discomfort, and choose a different action. Every time you feel a craving and call your sponsor instead of using, you are responding rather than reacting. Every time you feel anger and take a walk instead of throwing a punch, you are responding rather than reacting. Every time you feel the pull of isolation and go to a meeting instead of retreating, you are responding rather than reacting. These are not small victories. They are the practice of an entirely new way of being human. The goal is not to eliminate reactions. You are a biological organism with a nervous system that was designed to react — and in genuine emergencies, that reactivity saves your life. The goal is to reduce the territory that reactivity controls. To reclaim, inch by inch, the space between stimulus and response, so that more and more of your life is governed by choice rather than impulse. Viktor Frankl, who survived the concentration camps, wrote that between stimulus and response there is a space, and in that space is our freedom and

our growth. The work of this intensive is to help you find that space, expand it, and learn to live inside it.

Reflection Questions

1. When you honestly assess your daily life, are you primarily a reactor or a responder? What percentage of your interactions are governed by impulse versus intention?

2. Can you identify a recent situation where you reacted automatically and later wished you had responded differently? What was the trigger, and what did the reaction cost you?

3. How does the idea that "addiction is a disorder of reactivity" land for you? Can you trace the connection between your reactive patterns and your substance use?

4. The reading describes a "sacred space" between stimulus and response. Have you ever experienced that space — even briefly? What made it possible?

5. If you could respond intentionally in the situations where you currently react automatically, how would your relationships, recovery, and self-image change?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Reactivity Patterns

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I frequently say or do things in the heat of the moment that I later regret

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. When I feel criticized, threatened, or disrespected, I fire back immediately without thinking
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. My first impulse in conflict is to attack, defend, or shut down — and I usually follow that impulse
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I often escalate situations by reacting to the intensity of my emotion rather than the reality of the situation
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I have difficulty stopping myself once I am emotionally activated — the reaction feels automatic and unstoppable
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I make important decisions when I am angry, afraid, or hurt and they usually turn out badly
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. People around me describe me as reactive, explosive, unpredictable, or "walking on eggshells" with me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I interpret neutral situations as threatening and respond as if I am under attack when I am not
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 1: Reaction Autopsy

Slowing a fast moment down, frame by frame

An autopsy, not a trial

A reaction happens in seconds, which is why it feels like it came from nowhere. It didn't. There was a trigger, a body signal, a story, a feeling, and an urge, in that order, before the behavior. Taking one reaction apart piece by piece shows you where the chain can be broken next time. The goal is understanding, not punishment — shame makes the next reaction more likely, not less.

Frame 1: The Scene

When and where did it happen? Who was there?

What happened, in facts only — what a camera would have recorded, without my interpretation:

What state was I already in before it started?

☐ Hungry ☐ Angry already ☐ Lonely ☐ Tired ☐ In pain ☐ Stressed ☐ Craving ☐ Poor sleep last night

Frames 2-5: The Chain

The trigger — the exact moment, word, look, or tone that set it off:

The first thing I noticed in my body (heat, clenched jaw, tight chest, racing heart...):

The story my mind told in that second ("They think I'm stupid." "Here we go again." "I'm being attacked."):

The feelings underneath:

☐ Anger ☐ Fear ☐ Hurt ☐ Shame ☐ Embarrassment ☐ Jealousy ☐ Helplessness ☐ Rejection ☐ Frustration ☐ Panic ☐ Disgust ☐ Loneliness

How activated was I at the peak?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Calm 10 = Out of control

The urge — what did I want to do in that moment?

Frame 6: What I Did

☐ Yelled or snapped ☐ Said something cruel ☐ Slammed, threw, or hit something ☐ Stormed off ☐ Shut down or went silent ☐ Sent a text or email I regret ☐ Made a sudden decision ☐ Sarcasm or passive-aggression ☐ Got defensive or blamed ☐ Craved or used ☐ Isolated

In my own words, what I said and did:

Frame 7: The Aftermath

What did the reaction get me in the first few minutes? (Relief, feeling powerful, making them stop...)

What did it cost later — hours, days, or weeks after?

How did I feel about myself afterward? What did I do with that feeling?

Findings

Looking back over the frames, where was the earliest point I could have paused?

Did this moment echo something older — a person, a time in my life, a familiar feeling?

What outcome did I actually want in that situation?

If this exact scene happened again tomorrow, what one thing would I do differently, and at which frame?

Is there repair to make? (Exercise 7 walks through it.)

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

Why We React: The Neuroscience of Survival and Addiction

Your reactive patterns are not character defects. They are neurological adaptations — wiring that your brain developed to keep you alive in environments where survival required instant action. Understanding the neuroscience of reactivity is not about excusing harmful behavior, but about replacing shame with clarity. You cannot change what you do not understand, and most people who struggle with reactivity do not understand that their brain is doing exactly what it was designed to do — it is simply doing it in contexts where survival-mode responses create more danger than they prevent. The amygdala — a small, almond-shaped structure deep in your brain — is your threat detection center. It constantly scans your environment for anything that resembles a previous threat, and when it detects one, it triggers the fight-flight-freeze response in milliseconds — long before your conscious, thinking brain has even registered what happened. This is why reactions feel automatic and unstoppable: by the time you are aware that you are reacting, the reaction is already in progress. Your amygdala has already flooded your bloodstream with cortisol and adrenaline, redirected blood flow to your large muscle groups, accelerated your heart rate, and narrowed your attention to the perceived threat. You are physiologically mobilized for combat before your rational mind even knows what is happening. This system works beautifully when the threat is a bear charging at you in the forest. It works terribly when the "threat" is your partner asking why you forgot to call, your boss giving you critical feedback, a family member questioning your recovery, or a stranger cutting you off in traffic. The amygdala cannot distinguish between a physical threat to your life and a psychological threat to your ego, your identity, or your emotional safety. It responds to all perceived threats with the same intensity. This is why you may feel full-body rage over a comment that, upon reflection, was actually quite mild — your amygdala flagged it as a threat and mobilized a war response before your prefrontal cortex could intervene with a more measured assessment. For people who experienced childhood trauma, neglect, abuse, or chaotic environments, this system is even more sensitized. When you grow up in environments where threats are frequent, unpredictable, and genuinely dangerous, your amygdala calibrates itself to a hair-trigger setting. It learns to detect threats earlier, react faster, and respond with more intensity — because in your original environment, that hair-trigger sensitivity kept you safe. But this calibration persists into adulthood and into recovery, long after the original threat environment has changed. Your nervous system is still running the threat-detection software from your childhood, scanning a different environment with old parameters, and generating alarm signals that are disproportionate to the actual danger present. Substance use adds another layer of neurological complexity. Most substances of abuse directly affect the brain's reward and stress response systems. Chronic substance use dysregulates the prefrontal cortex — weakening the very brain region responsible for impulse control, judgment, and deliberate response — while simultaneously sensitizing the amygdala and stress response pathways. This means that active addiction literally makes you more reactive and less capable of responding. Your alarm system gets louder while your volume control gets weaker. In early recovery, this dysregulation does not immediately correct itself. The prefrontal cortex takes time to heal and strengthen. Meanwhile, the emotional intensity of early recovery — the grief, the shame, the anxiety, the vulnerability —

creates constant activation of the stress response system. This is why early recovery is often marked by such extreme reactivity: the braking system is still rebuilding while the accelerator is being floored. Understanding this is not an excuse for reactive behavior — it is the foundation for self-compassion and patient, persistent practice. The critical piece of neuroscience for recovery is neuroplasticity — the brain's capacity to rewire itself based on experience and practice. Every time you pause before reacting, every time you choose a different response, every time you tolerate discomfort without automatically discharging it, you are building new neural pathways. You are literally strengthening the prefrontal cortex and creating new connections between your threat detection system and your deliberate response system. This rewiring is not instantaneous — it is slow, gradual, and requires repetition. But it is real. The brain you have today is not the brain you will have in six months if you practice. The space between stimulus and response can be expanded. The gap between trigger and behavior can be widened. You are not condemned to your reactive patterns — you are building the neural infrastructure to transcend them.

Reflection Questions

1. Does understanding the neuroscience of reactivity change how you view your own reactive behavior? Does it reduce shame, increase understanding, or both?

2. Can you identify the "hair-trigger" settings in your nervous system? What experiences calibrated your threat detection to its current sensitivity level?

3. How did substance use affect your reactivity? Did it dampen it, amplify it, or redirect it? What happened to your reactivity when you stopped using?

4. The reading describes neuroplasticity as the basis for hope. Do you believe your brain can rewire? What evidence have you already seen that change is possible?

5. What does it mean to you that building response capacity is literally building new brain architecture? Does thinking of it as brain training rather than willpower change your approach?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Trigger Awareness & Recognition

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I can identify the specific situations, people, or topics that consistently trigger reactive behavior in me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am aware of the physical warning signs in my body that indicate I am becoming emotionally activated

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I understand the connection between my past experiences — especially trauma — and my current reactive patterns

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I can recognize when I am being triggered by something in the present that is actually rooted in something from the past

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I understand my personal hierarchy of triggers — I know which ones produce mild activation and which ones produce full-blown reactivity

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am aware of how substances previously dulled my trigger sensitivity and how recovery has made my triggers more intense

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I can distinguish between real threats that require immediate action and perceived threats that activate old survival patterns

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I notice when fatigue, hunger, stress, or loneliness lower my threshold for reactive behavior

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 2: Early Warning System Body Map

Your body knows before your mind does

The body is the smoke detector

Your nervous system starts reacting before you have a single conscious thought. Heat in the face, a tight chest, a clenched jaw — these arrive first, and by the time you notice you are angry, the reaction may already be underway. Learning your own early signals gives you a head start. The earlier you catch them, the more room you have to pause.

Body signals and your health

This map is about stress signals. New or severe chest pain, trouble breathing, fainting, or sudden weakness are medical symptoms — call 911 or get medical care instead of treating them as emotions.

Pick a Reaction to Map

Bring to mind a recent time you reacted strongly. What happened? (Keep it to a moderate one, not your worst.)

Replay it slowly with your eyes closed for 30 seconds. Notice what your body does now, as you remember. Then mark what you notice below.

The Map

Head and face

☐ Heat or flushing ☐ Pressure ☐ Headache ☐ Eyes narrowing ☐ Tunnel vision ☐ Ringing ears

Jaw, mouth, and throat

☐ Clenched jaw ☐ Grinding teeth ☐ Tight throat ☐ Dry mouth ☐ Voice getting louder ☐ Lump in throat

Chest and breathing

☐ Racing heart ☐ Pounding heart ☐ Tight chest ☐ Shallow breathing ☐ Holding breath ☐ Fast breathing

Neck, shoulders, and back

☐ Shoulders rising ☐ Stiff neck ☐ Leaning forward ☐ Bracing

Stomach and gut

☐ Knot ☐ Churning ☐ Nausea ☐ Sinking feeling ☐ Butterflies ☐ Burning

Arms and hands

☐ Fists ☐ Shaking ☐ Sweaty palms ☐ Tingling ☐ Urge to hit or throw ☐ Pointing

Legs and feet

☐ Restless ☐ Urge to pace ☐ Urge to leave ☐ Heavy or frozen ☐ Shaky knees ☐ Bouncing leg

Whole body

☐ Hot all over ☐ Cold ☐ Numb ☐ Buzzing or electric ☐ Far away or unreal ☐ Exhausted suddenly

Anything else I notice that is not listed:

Green, Yellow, Red

Signals arrive in stages. Sort yours by when they show up. Yellow is the most important — it is the last stage where pausing is still easy.

GREEN — calm baseline. What does my body feel like when I am settled?

YELLOW — the first signs I am getting activated (my early warning):

ORANGE — building fast; still possible to step away:

RED — the point where I usually react. What does my body do right before I say or do the thing?

When I notice YELLOW, the one thing I will do:

Three Noticing Practices

Over the next week, catch your body three times — even in small irritations. Write what you noticed and how early you caught it.

Practice 1: what happened, what my body did, and at which stage I noticed it:

Practice 2: what happened, what my body did, and at which stage I noticed it:

Practice 3: what happened, what my body did, and at which stage I noticed it:

1. Which signal shows up first for you most reliably? That is your personal alarm.

2. Did substances used to quiet these signals before you noticed them? What is it like to feel them now?

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 3: Personal Trigger Inventory

Knowing what sets you off, before it does

Triggers are information

A trigger is anything that fires your alarm system faster than your thinking brain can keep up. Many were set long ago, when reacting fast kept you safe. They are not character flaws, and you are not responsible for having them. You are responsible for knowing them — because a trigger you have named and planned for has much less power than one that catches you by surprise.

If this stirs up trauma

Some triggers connect to traumatic experiences. You do not need to write details of trauma here — naming the trigger is enough. If listing triggers brings on panic, flashbacks, or feeling unsafe,

stop, ground yourself, and work on this with a counselor. In crisis, call or text 988.

People

Specific people, or types of people — authority figures, a parent, an ex, someone who reminds me of someone.

My triggers in this category:

How strongly do these set me off, on average?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Barely 10 = Instantly

What I usually do when one of these fires:

Where this sensitivity may have come from:

Words, tone, and looks

Being interrupted, a certain tone of voice, eye-rolling, being laughed at, "calm down," "you always."

My triggers in this category:

How strongly do these set me off, on average?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Barely 10 = Instantly

What I usually do when one of these fires:

Where this sensitivity may have come from:

Situations

Being criticized, being kept waiting, feeling ignored, being told no, losing, money problems, traffic.

My triggers in this category:

How strongly do these set me off, on average?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Barely 10 = Instantly

What I usually do when one of these fires:

Where this sensitivity may have come from:

Places and times

Home at a certain hour, work, family events, holidays, anniversaries, payday, Friday night.

My triggers in this category:

How strongly do these set me off, on average?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Barely 10 = Instantly

What I usually do when one of these fires:

Where this sensitivity may have come from:

Internal states

Hunger, fatigue, pain, loneliness, boredom, shame, cravings, feeling like a failure.

My triggers in this category:

How strongly do these set me off, on average?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Barely 10 = Instantly

What I usually do when one of these fires:

Where this sensitivity may have come from:

Memories and reminders

Songs, smells, news stories, dates, places that bring back something painful.

My triggers in this category:

How strongly do these set me off, on average?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Barely 10 = Instantly

What I usually do when one of these fires:

Where this sensitivity may have come from:

Substance-Related Triggers

People, places, things, feelings, and times connected to my using:

Which of these still produce cravings? Which produce anger or irritability?

My Top Five

My five most powerful triggers, strongest first:

1. / 2. / 3. / 4. / 5.

Which of these can I reasonably avoid or reduce for now? How?

Which ones will I have to face? What is my plan for the next time each one fires?

Who should know my top triggers so they can support me? (Not so they can walk on eggshells — so they understand.)

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 6: Survival Brain vs. Wise Brain

Letting both voices speak, and choosing who drives

Two voices, one head

Your survival brain is fast, loud, and certain. Its job is to keep you alive, and it treats criticism, rejection, and cravings like threats to your life. Your wise brain is slower and quieter. It can see consequences, other people's point of view, and what you actually want. Both are part of you. The survival brain is not the enemy — it just should not be the one driving. This exercise gives both voices the page.

Set the Scene

A situation that reliably sets off my survival brain (past or likely to happen):

What my survival brain usually tells me in moments like this:

☐ "Hit back before they hit you." ☐ "You're being disrespected." ☐ "Get out now." ☐ "Nobody cares about you." ☐ "You can't handle this." ☐ "One drink will fix it." ☐ "They always do this." ☐ "If you back down, you lose." ☐ "Shut down, don't show anything."

Round 1

SURVIVAL BRAIN says:

What it is trying to protect me from:

WISE BRAIN answers (kind, calm, and honest — not dismissive):

Round 2

SURVIVAL BRAIN says:

What it is trying to protect me from:

WISE BRAIN answers (kind, calm, and honest — not dismissive):

Round 3

SURVIVAL BRAIN says:

What it is trying to protect me from:

WISE BRAIN answers (kind, calm, and honest — not dismissive):

Choosing Who Drives

Write a short thank-you to your survival brain for what it has protected you from over the years:

What the wise brain will do in this situation next time — specific actions:

Three wise-brain phrases I can say to myself when the survival brain gets loud:

1. / 2. / 3.

1. Whose voice does your survival brain sound like? Did you learn its scripts from someone?

2. What helps your wise brain come back online fastest — breathing, time, a person, a place?

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

The Cost of Living on Autopilot: What Reactivity Takes from You

Reactivity feels powerful. In the moment, the surge of adrenaline, the rush of anger, the sharp retort, the slamming door, the dramatic exit — all of it feels like strength, like decisiveness, like standing your ground. But reactivity is not power. It is the absence of power. It is the experience of being controlled by your own nervous system — a puppet yanked by the strings of whatever trigger happened to fire in the last three seconds. Real power is the ability to choose. And reactive people do not choose. They are chosen for — by their amygdala, by their conditioning, by their unprocessed trauma, by their substance-damaged neurology. Understanding what reactivity actually costs you is essential for motivating the difficult, daily work of building response capacity. The relational cost is usually the most visible and the most devastating. Reactive people destroy relationships — not because they are bad people, but because the people around them cannot sustain the impact of constant, unpredictable emotional explosions. Partners walk on eggshells, never knowing which version of you they will encounter. Children become hypervigilant, learning to read your moods with the same precision you used to read the moods of whoever raised you. Friends withdraw, tired of the drama that follows you like weather. Colleagues distrust you because your reactions make you unreliable — not in your skills, but in your temperament. Over time, reactivity creates exactly the isolation it fears: it drives away the very connections that could help regulate the emotional storms that produce the reactivity in the first place. The internal cost is equally significant but less visible. Reactive people live in a state of chronic physiological activation — the stress response system never fully stands down because the next trigger could come at any moment. This produces the familiar constellation of symptoms: chronic fatigue from a nervous system that never rests, insomnia from a brain that cannot stop scanning for threats, digestive problems from chronically elevated cortisol, muscle tension from perpetual readiness to fight or flee, and immune suppression from a body that prioritizes survival over maintenance. You are not imagining that you feel exhausted, achy, and sick. Your body is paying the biological tax of living in perpetual emergency mode. The psychological cost includes chronic shame — the particular, corrosive shame of knowing that you behave in ways that are disproportionate, hurtful, and counterproductive but feeling unable to stop. This shame cycle is itself a trigger: you react, you feel shame about reacting, the shame activates your threat system, and you react to the shame with more reactive behavior. The cycle feeds itself, generating a self-image built around the belief that you are fundamentally out of control, dangerous, or defective. This shame-reactivity cycle is one of the primary engines of relapse, because the substance offered the one thing that nothing else could: reliable, immediate relief from the unbearable experience of being a person who cannot control their own behavior. The recovery cost is direct and measurable. Reactivity in recovery manifests as impulsive decisions to leave treatment, combative relationships with counselors and peers, explosive reactions to routine suggestions, inability to sit with the discomfort that recovery requires, and ultimately, reactive relapse — the moment when the craving triggers a reaction so fast and so powerful that the person has used before the thinking brain even registers what happened. Many relapses are not carefully planned or slowly considered — they are reactions. The trigger fires, the craving erupts, and the hand reaches for the substance with the same automatic, unthinking

speed that it once reached for the phone to fire off a text in anger. Reactivity and relapse share the same neural architecture. The opportunity cost is perhaps the most painful to contemplate. Every reaction represents a response that was not given. Every explosion represents a conversation that was not had. Every impulsive decision represents a thoughtful choice that was not made. Reactivity does not just cause damage — it forecloses possibility. The life you could be building, the relationships you could be deepening, the recovery you could be strengthening, the person you could be becoming — all of it is diminished every time you surrender your power of choice to the automatic firing of your threat response system. The cost of reactivity is not just what it destroys. It is what it prevents from being built.

Reflection Questions

1. What has reactivity cost you in your most important relationships? Be specific about the damage — not in general terms, but in concrete incidents and their lasting impact.

2. Can you identify the shame-reactivity cycle in your own experience — reacting, feeling shame, reacting to the shame? How has this cycle contributed to your substance use?

3. What opportunities have been lost because of reactive behavior — relationships not built, conversations not had, choices not made? What is the opportunity cost of your reactivity?

4. The reading describes reactivity as "feeling powerful" while actually being powerless. Does this paradox resonate with your experience? When you react, do you feel in control or out of control?

5. If the cost of reactivity includes increased relapse risk, what does that tell you about the urgency of this work? Is learning to respond optional or essential for your recovery?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5**Recovery Integration**

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I understand that my reactive patterns developed as survival mechanisms and I approach them with curiosity rather than self-condemnation

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I recognize that recovery has made me more emotionally sensitive and that this sensitivity requires new response skills

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can see the direct connection between my reactive behavior and my substance use — both were attempts to manage intolerable internal states

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I use recovery tools — calling a sponsor, going to a meeting, journaling, prayer — when I notice myself becoming reactive

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am honest with my support network about my reactive patterns rather than hiding or minimizing them

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I understand that building response capacity is not about suppressing emotion but about choosing how to express it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I treat lapses into reactivity as learning opportunities rather than evidence of failure

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I believe that genuine transformation from reactor to responder is possible for me, not just for other people

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE**Exercise 7: Repair Skills Workshop**

What to do after you react anyway

Rupture and repair

You will still react sometimes. Everyone does. What protects relationships is not never rupturing — it is repairing well and quickly. A good repair can leave trust stronger than before the rupture. A bad one — defensive, vague, or full of excuses — makes things worse. Repair is a skill, and like any skill it can be learned.

When repair is not safe or wise

You do not owe repair to someone who is abusive or dangerous toward you. If the relationship involves harm or threats, talk with a counselor or sponsor before reaching out. If your reactions

have included violence or threats, a counselor can help you plan repair safely — and the other person may not want contact, which must be respected.

The Seven Steps of a Repair

1. Cool down first

Repair from a calm place. If you are still activated, you will end up re-arguing instead of repairing.

2. Own it specifically

"I raised my voice and called you selfish" — not "I'm sorry about earlier."

3. Name the impact

Say how it likely affected them: "That probably felt humiliating, especially in front of the kids."

4. No "but"

Anything after "but" erases the apology. Your reasons can be explained another time, if they ask.

5. Ask, and listen

"Is there anything you need from me?" Then listen without defending yourself.

6. Commit to something concrete

What you will do differently: "Next time I feel that heat, I'll take a time-out instead."

7. Follow through

Repair is proven by changed behavior over time, not by the words on the day.

Old Apology Habits

Which of these have I used? (be honest)

- ☐ "I'm sorry if you were offended" ☐ "I'm sorry, but..." ☐ "You made me do it" ☐ Apologizing just to end the conversation ☐ Gifts instead of words ☐ Acting like nothing happened ☐ Over-apologizing until they comfort me ☐ Beating myself up in front of them ☐ Promising it will never happen again

What those habits have done to my relationships:

Draft a Repair

Who I reacted toward, and what happened:

Step 2 — what I did, specifically:

Step 3 — how it likely affected them:

Step 5 — what I will ask them:

Step 6 — my concrete commitment:

The full repair, written as I would say it (read it back — does it contain a 'but?'):

When and how I will offer it:

Repair With Myself

After a reaction, the inner critic often starts in. Shame does not prevent the next reaction; it adds fuel to it. Self-repair is owning it without self-attack.

What I say to myself after I react (the harsh version):

What I will say instead ("I reacted. I can see why. I am learning. Here is what I will do next."):

After the repair: how did it go, and what did I learn?

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 10: Reaction-Recovery Connection Map

Seeing how reactivity and using were doing the same job

The same job, done two ways

Reacting and using often do the same work: they get rid of a feeling that seems unbearable, fast. The explosion discharges it. The drink or drug numbs it. That is why reactivity so often rises when substances are removed — the feelings are still there, and the old exit is closed. This map connects your reactive patterns to your using and to the new responses that can do the job without the damage.

Connection 1

A reactive pattern of mine:

The feeling it helps me get rid of or avoid:

How using used to handle that same feeling:

What it cost, both ways:

The response that can handle that feeling in recovery (a skill, a person, a practice):

Connection 2

A reactive pattern of mine:

The feeling it helps me get rid of or avoid:

How using used to handle that same feeling:

What it cost, both ways:

The response that can handle that feeling in recovery (a skill, a person, a practice):

Connection 3

A reactive pattern of mine:

The feeling it helps me get rid of or avoid:

How using used to handle that same feeling:

What it cost, both ways:

The response that can handle that feeling in recovery (a skill, a person, a practice):

Where I Am on the Path

Most of the time right now, I catch my reactions:

☐ Not at all yet ☐ After they happen ☐ While they are happening ☐ As they start ☐ Before they start

Evidence I am already changing (be specific — times I paused, repaired, or rode out a craving):

How much of my life feels governed by reaction right now?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = None 10 = All of it

My Response Plan Going Forward

In the next 30 days, the one skill I will practice every day:

In 90 days, where I want to be — and how someone close to me would notice:

The people who will support this and help me see my progress:

Identity statement: "I am becoming someone who, when triggered, _____. I do this because _____."

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

The Sacred Pause: Building the Space Between Stimulus and Response

The entire journey from reactor to responder can be reduced to a single skill: the ability to pause. Not the ability to be calm — that comes later, and sometimes not at all. Not the ability to feel nothing — that is suppression, not regulation. Simply the ability to notice that you have been triggered and to create the smallest possible gap between the trigger and your behavior. That gap — even if it is one second, one breath, one moment of awareness — is where everything changes. It is the crack in the wall of reactivity through which the light of choice enters. The pause is sacred because it is the moment where your humanity asserts itself over your biology. Your amygdala fires in 12 milliseconds. Your prefrontal cortex needs 500 milliseconds to come online and offer a reasoned assessment. The pause is the bridge that spans that 488-millisecond gap — the time needed for your thinking brain to catch up with your survival brain and offer an alternative to the automatic reaction. Without the pause, the amygdala rules unopposed. With the pause — even the briefest one — the prefrontal cortex gets a vote. And the more you practice the pause, the stronger that vote becomes. Building pause capacity begins with awareness — specifically, body awareness. Your body knows you are triggered before your mind does. The flushing heat in your face. The tightening in your chest. The clenching of your jaw. The acceleration of your heartbeat. The narrowing of your vision. The tensing of your fists. These physical signals are your early warning system — they tell you that your amygdala has detected a threat and is mobilizing a response. If you can learn to recognize these signals as they occur — not after the reaction, but during the activation — you have the raw material for a pause. Body awareness is quite literally the foundation upon which all response capacity is built. The mechanics of the pause are deceptively simple. When you notice the physical signals of activation, you interrupt the automatic sequence with a deliberate action: a deep breath, a conscious relaxation of your hands, a mental note to yourself ("I am triggered"), a physical step backward, a brief closing of the eyes. None of these actions are dramatic. None of them are impressive. But each one disrupts the momentum of the reaction long enough for the prefrontal cortex to begin its work. The breath alone activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which directly counteracts the fight-flight-freeze response. A single conscious breath can begin to downshift your entire nervous system from combat mode to assessment mode. The pause does not require you to know what to do next. This is a critical point that many people miss. They believe that pausing is only useful if they have a fully formed, wise, articulate response ready to deploy. This is backward. The purpose of the pause is not to generate the perfect response — it is to prevent the automatic reaction. The response will come. The thinking brain, once given the chance to engage, will begin to assess the situation, consider options, and generate alternatives. The pause creates the space; the response fills it. Your only job in the moment of activation is to not react. What comes next will develop from that not-reacting. The practice of pause deepens over time. In the beginning, you may only catch yourself after the reaction has already occurred — recognizing in hindsight that you reacted rather than responded. This is not failure. This is the first stage of awareness. Over time, with practice, the recognition moves earlier in the sequence: you catch yourself mid-reaction, then at the start of the reaction, then just before the reaction, and eventually, in the moment of activation itself — the moment when the trigger fires and the

body begins to mobilize but the behavior has not yet launched. This progression is not linear. There will be days when you pause beautifully and days when you react as if you had never practiced at all. The question is not whether you achieve perfect pause capacity — the question is whether you are developing the practice, returning to it after lapses, and gradually expanding the territory of choice in your life. For people in recovery, the pause has a specific and urgent application: it is the mechanism by which you interrupt the craving-to-use sequence. A craving is a trigger. Using is a reaction. Between the two is a space — the same sacred pause — in which you can choose to call someone, go to a meeting, pray, write, or simply wait. Research consistently shows that cravings, if not acted upon, peak and then diminish. The pause is what allows you to ride the wave of craving rather than be crushed by it. Every craving you survive by pausing rather than reacting strengthens the neural pathways of response and weakens the neural pathways of automatic reaction. You are not just staying sober. You are rewiring your brain.

Reflection Questions

1. What are your body's specific early warning signals that you are becoming activated? Can you name at least three physical sensations that precede your reactive behavior?

2. Have you ever successfully paused in a moment of high activation? What made it possible? What happened as a result?

3. The reading says "the pause does not require you to know what to do next." How does this change your understanding of what pausing involves? Does it feel more achievable?

4. Where are you in the progression of awareness — catching yourself after reactions, during reactions, at the start, or before they begin? Where would you like to be in six months?

5. How does the application of the pause to cravings and urges change your understanding of relapse prevention? Can you see craving as a trigger and using as a reaction that can be interrupted?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Pause Capacity & Self-Regulation

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I am able to notice the space between a triggering event and my behavioral response — even if that space is very small

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have developed strategies for creating pause when I feel emotionally activated — breathing, stepping away, counting

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can tolerate the physical discomfort of intense emotion without needing to immediately discharge it through action

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I am able to slow down my thinking when emotions speed up, allowing me to consider options before acting

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I practice some form of mindfulness, meditation, or body awareness that supports self-regulation

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I can recognize when I am too activated to engage constructively and can communicate that to others without blaming

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have improved in my ability to pause before reacting since entering recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am patient with the process of building pause capacity and understand it takes practice over time

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 5: Pause Practice Builder

Building the space between trigger and action

Practice when calm, use when activated

Nobody learns a new skill in the middle of an emergency. When you are at a 9 out of 10, you will do whatever you have practiced most. That is why the pause has to be rehearsed on small things and in calm moments first, until it becomes a habit your body reaches for on its own. Pick a few tools, practice them daily, and build up.

The Pause Menu

Long exhale breathing

Breathe in through your nose for a count of four, then out slowly through your mouth for a count of six to eight. A longer out-breath signals the nervous system to settle. Three to five rounds.

How well might this work for me?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Not at all 10 = Perfectly

STOP

Stop what you are doing. Take one breath. Observe what is happening in your body, your thoughts, and the room. Proceed with one deliberate choice.

How well might this work for me?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Not at all 10 = Perfectly

Name it

Silently label what is happening: "I am getting angry." "My chest is tight." "This is a trigger." Putting words to a feeling helps the thinking brain come back online.

How well might this work for me?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Not at all 10 = Perfectly

5-4-3-2-1 grounding

Name five things you see, four you can touch, three you hear, two you smell, and one you taste. It pulls attention out of the story and into the present.

How well might this work for me?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Not at all 10 = Perfectly

Step away with a script

Leave the room without slamming the door on the relationship: "I need twenty minutes to calm down. I am coming back to finish this." Then actually come back.

How well might this work for me?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Not at all 10 = Perfectly

The delay rule

No texts, emails, posts, or big decisions while activated. Write the message if you need to, then wait — overnight if you can — and reread it before sending.

How well might this work for me?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Not at all 10 = Perfectly

Move

A brisk walk, pushups, stairs, shaking out your hands. Stress chemicals prepare the body to move; moving uses them up.

How well might this work for me?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Not at all 10 = Perfectly

A pause phrase

A short sentence you say to yourself every time: "Slow is smooth." "Not now — later." "Respond, don't react." "What outcome do I want?"

How well might this work for me?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Not at all 10 = Perfectly

My three chosen pause tools, and when each fits best:

1. / 2. / 3.

Seven Days of Practice

Once a day, practice one pause tool on purpose — ideally when you are calm or mildly irritated, not furious. Record it briefly.

Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Day 4

Day 5

Day 6

Day 7

A Time-Out Agreement

If you often react with a partner or family member, agree on a time-out plan together while things are calm. A time-out is not storming off or the silent treatment. It is a planned break with a

promise to return.

Who I would make this agreement with:

The signal or words either of us can use ("I need a time-out"):

How long the break lasts, and what each of us does during it (no drinking or using, no texting about the argument):

How and when we come back to the conversation:

Reflection

1. Which tool actually lowered your activation the most this week? By how much?

2. When did you try to pause and could not? What was different about those moments?

3. What gets in the way of pausing for you — pride, fear of looking weak, the urge to win, speed?

YOUR EXERCISE**Exercise 8: Daily Reaction-Response Check-In**

Seven days of watching the pattern change

Progress, not perfection

Change in reactivity is gradual and easy to miss. You might still react, but a little later, a little less, or catch it sooner. A short evening check-in makes that progress visible. The progression usually goes: noticing after the reaction, then during it, then at the start, then before it begins. Every stage is progress.

☐ Day 1 ☐ Day 2 ☐ Day 3 ☐ Day 4 ☐ Day 5 ☐ Day 6 ☐ Day 7

0 of 7 days started

Day 1

The most activating moment today:

Peak activation

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Calm 10 = Out of control

When did I catch it?

☐ Before it started ☐ At the first signs ☐ In the middle ☐ Afterward ☐ Did not catch it

What I did:

☐ Paused and responded ☐ Stepped away ☐ Used a breathing or grounding tool ☐ Called someone
☐ Reacted, then repaired ☐ Reacted, no repair yet ☐ Craved or used

Vulnerability factors today:

☐ Hungry ☐ Angry already ☐ Lonely ☐ Tired ☐ In pain ☐ Stressed ☐ Craving ☐ Poor sleep last night

A moment I responded well, even a small one:

Repair I still need to make, if any:

End-of-Week Review

1. Look at your peak numbers across the week. What was the pattern? What was going on during your highest days?

2. How did the "when did I catch it" answers change from Day 1 to Day 7?

3. Which vulnerability factor showed up most? What is one change that would reduce it?

4. What was your best response of the week? What made it possible?

5. What will you practice next week?

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

The Art of Responding: Living with Intention in Recovery

If the pause is the foundation, responding is the structure you build upon it. Responding is the art of engaging with life's challenges, conflicts, triggers, and provocations from a place of intention rather than impulse. It does not mean being passive, compliant, or conflict-avoidant. It means being present — fully aware of what is happening, what you are feeling, and what you want to achieve — and acting from that awareness rather than from the reflex of your conditioning. Responding begins with a question that reactive people never ask: "What outcome do I actually want here?" When you are reacting, there is no desired outcome — there is only discharge. You yell because the pressure demands release. You slam the door because the rage needs somewhere to go. You say the cruelest thing you can think of because the hurt wants to be transferred to someone else. None of these actions are directed toward a desired outcome. They are the behavioral equivalent of a pressure valve blowing — energy escaping in the direction of least resistance. Responding replaces this undirected discharge with a directed intention. "What do I want to happen in this conversation? What relationship do I want to have with this person tomorrow? What kind of recovery do I want to build? What action right now serves my actual goals rather than my momentary impulse?" Responding involves a set of concrete skills that can be learned, practiced, and strengthened. The first is emotional labeling — the ability to name what you are feeling with specificity and honesty. "I am angry" is a start, but "I am feeling disrespected, and underneath the anger is hurt, and underneath the hurt is the fear that I don't matter" is a response-level of emotional awareness. The more precisely you can name your internal experience, the more effectively you can choose how to express it. Emotional labeling also engages the prefrontal cortex, which further dampens the amygdala's alarm signal. Naming is itself a form of responding. The second skill is perspective-taking — the ability to consider the other person's experience, intention, and context before reacting to their behavior. This does not mean excusing harmful behavior or minimizing your own experience. It means asking, "Is there another way to interpret what just happened?" before concluding that the most threatening interpretation is the correct one. Reactive people default to the worst interpretation of every ambiguous situation because the amygdala is programmed to assume the worst. Responding involves deliberately generating alternative interpretations and holding them alongside the threat interpretation long enough to assess which is most accurate. The third skill is proportional expression — the ability to match the intensity of your response to the actual severity of the situation rather than to the intensity of your emotional activation. Many reactive situations involve a disproportionate response — the partner who made an innocent comment receives a response appropriate to a major betrayal, the coworker who made a minor mistake receives a response appropriate to sabotage, the child who spilled milk receives a response appropriate to willful destruction. Proportional expression requires the pause, the emotional labeling, and the perspective-taking to work in concert: you notice the activation, you name the emotion, you consider the context, and then you calibrate your response to the situation rather than to your sensation. The fourth skill is repair. No matter how committed you are to responding, you will still react — sometimes spectacularly. The capacity to repair is what distinguishes the person who is growing from the person who is stuck. Repair involves recognizing that a reaction occurred,

taking responsibility for the impact without minimizing or justifying, expressing the underlying emotion that drove the reaction, and committing to a specific different action in the future. Repair is not apology as performance — "I'm sorry, okay?" — it is genuine accountability that demonstrates understanding of what happened and what you intend to do differently. Repair capacity is itself a response skill — it is the intentional choice to address damage rather than ignore it, defend it, or hope it goes away. The fifth skill — and perhaps the most important for recovery — is responding to internal states with the same intentionality you bring to external situations. When a craving arises, you respond rather than react. When shame floods you, you respond rather than react. When loneliness overwhelms you, you respond rather than react. When the voice of addiction whispers that one drink won't hurt, you respond rather than react. The tools of response — naming, pausing, considering, choosing — apply not only to interactions with others but to the ongoing interaction with yourself. Recovery is, at its deepest level, the practice of responding to your own internal experience with wisdom, compassion, and intentional action rather than with the automatic, reflexive, devastating reactions that addiction requires. Transformation from reactor to responder is not a destination you arrive at. It is a direction you travel. There will be days when you respond with grace and clarity. There will be days when you react with all the intensity and destructiveness of your worst moments. The question is not whether you will react — you are human, and you will. The question is whether you will return to the practice after the lapse, recommit to the direction, and continue building the life that response makes possible. That life — a life of choice, of presence, of intentional engagement with the beautiful, painful, complicated experience of being alive and sober — is the reward of this work. It is worth every difficult moment of practice.

Reflection Questions

1. When you react, is there ever a "desired outcome" — or is it purely about discharge? What would change if you began every difficult situation by asking, "What outcome do I actually want?"

2. Of the response skills described — emotional labeling, perspective-taking, proportional expression, repair, and responding to internal states — which is your greatest strength? Which needs the most development?

3. Describe a recent situation where you responded rather than reacted. What skills did you use? How did the outcome differ from what a reaction would have produced?

4. The reading describes repair as a response skill. How do you currently handle situations where you have reacted? Do you repair, defend, ignore, or minimize?

5. Write a personal vision statement for the responder you are becoming: "I am building a life where I..." Be specific about what responsive living looks like for you.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Intentional Response Skills

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I am able to choose how I respond to difficult situations rather than being controlled by my first impulse

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I can express anger, frustration, or hurt without aggression, withdrawal, or passive-aggressive behavior

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I consider the consequences of my response before acting — not just the short-term relief but the long-term impact

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I can respond to criticism or feedback without becoming defensive, dismissive, or retaliatory

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I use "I" statements and express my experience rather than attacking, blaming, or accusing others

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I can stay engaged in difficult conversations without shutting down, storming off, or escalating

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have repair skills — I can recognize when I have reacted rather than responded and make amends

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I respond to cravings and urges with intentional action rather than automatic surrender

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 4: The Rewrite

Reaction to Response

Rehearsal builds the new path

Athletes and first responders rehearse so that under pressure the right move comes automatically. The brain learns from rehearsal almost the way it learns from real life. Rewriting a past reaction as a response — in detail, in your own words — starts laying down the route you want your brain to take next time. You cannot change what happened. You can change what you practice.

Rewrite 1

THE ORIGINAL

What happened:

How I reacted (words, tone, actions):

What it cost:

REWIND

What I was really feeling underneath:

What I needed in that moment (respect, to be heard, safety, time, fairness...):

The outcome I actually wanted:

THE RESPONSE

How I paused (what I did in the first ten seconds):

What I said instead — write the actual words:

What would likely have happened next?

Rewrite 2

THE ORIGINAL

What happened:

How I reacted (words, tone, actions):

What it cost:

REWIND

What I was really feeling underneath:

What I needed in that moment (respect, to be heard, safety, time, fairness...):

The outcome I actually wanted:

THE RESPONSE

How I paused (what I did in the first ten seconds):

What I said instead — write the actual words:

What would likely have happened next?

Rewrite 3

THE ORIGINAL

What happened:

How I reacted (words, tone, actions):

What it cost:

REWIND

What I was really feeling underneath:

What I needed in that moment (respect, to be heard, safety, time, fairness...):

The outcome I actually wanted:

THE RESPONSE

How I paused (what I did in the first ten seconds):

What I said instead — write the actual words:

What would likely have happened next?

Rehearse One Ahead of Time

A situation coming up that is likely to trigger me (a visit, a meeting, a conversation):

The reaction I am most at risk of:

My warning signs to watch for during it:

My response script — the words I will use, and my exit line if I need to step away:

Who I will check in with before and after:

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 9: Craving Response Plan

The craving is the trigger. Using is the reaction. There is room in between.

Riding the wave

A craving feels like it will keep building until you give in. It won't. Cravings rise, peak, and fall — often within about half an hour — especially if you do not feed them with attention or bargaining. Every craving you ride out without using weakens the automatic link between trigger and use. This plan is your response, written in advance, so you do not have to think clearly in the moment you are least able to.

If a craving becomes a relapse

After a period of not using, tolerance drops, and using the amount you used to can cause overdose. If you use: do not use alone, keep naloxone (Narcan) nearby if opioids could be involved, and call 911 for any sign of overdose. Tell someone as soon as you can — a slip is a reason to reach out, not to hide. If you are thinking about suicide, call or text 988.

Know Your Cravings

My most common craving triggers (people, places, feelings, times):

The first signs a craving is starting — in my body and in my thinking:

The thoughts that usually come with a craving:

- ☐ "Just this once" ☐ "I deserve it" ☐ "Nobody would know" ☐ "I can't stand this feeling" ☐ "I've already blown it" ☐ "I can control it now" ☐ "After the day I've had..." ☐ "What's the point?"

The First Five Minutes

The first physical thing I will do (leave the place, drink water, breathe, move):

What I will tell myself — play the tape all the way forward: "If I use, the next hour looks like ___, tomorrow looks like ___."

My pause phrase:

The Next Thirty Minutes

Things I can do to ride the wave (walk, shower, eat, meeting, call, a task that uses my hands, an online meeting):

Safe places I can go right now:

How confident am I that I could ride out a strong craving with this plan?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

0 = Not at all 10 = Completely

My People

People I will call or text, in order, with their numbers:

1. / 2. / 3.

What I will say when I reach out (so I don't have to think of it in the moment):

My counselor or treatment program contact:

After the Craving Passes

How I will mark that I got through it (tell someone, write it down, a small reward that isn't risky):

What I will look at afterward, so the next one is easier (what triggered it, what worked):

If I slip, my plan for the first 24 hours:
