

F.E.A.R. in Recovery

Deep Dives · The Recovery Files

Decoding the Acronyms & Facing the Common Fears

From Fear to Courage — The Recovery Files

Fear-Driven · Avoiding, numbing, running · Courage-Driven · Facing, feeling, rising

In this workbook

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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 3 · READING

Understanding FEAR: The Invisible Engine of Addiction

Fear is the single most powerful emotion driving substance use disorder — and the single most underestimated obstacle in early recovery. It is the invisible engine running in the background of almost every decision an addicted person makes, from the first use to the last relapse.

Understanding fear is not optional in recovery. It is foundational.

Fear in addiction operates on multiple levels simultaneously. On the surface level, there are the obvious fears: fear of withdrawal, fear of getting caught, fear of consequences. But underneath these surface fears lies a much deeper landscape of terror that most people in active addiction cannot even name. Fear of being truly known. Fear of being fundamentally broken. Fear of a life without the one thing that reliably made the world feel bearable.

The relationship between fear and substances is paradoxical. Substances initially appear to be the solution to fear. That first drink, that first hit — it worked. The fear quieted. And so a deadly bargain was struck: "This substance can manage my fear." But over time, the substance that managed fear became the primary source of fear.

In recovery, fear does not simply disappear because substances are removed. In many cases, fear intensifies. The chemical buffer is gone. And suddenly, every fear that was being medicated — sometimes for years or decades — comes flooding back with compound interest. This is why early recovery is so terrifying, and why so many people return to use: not because recovery is not working, but because fear becomes unbearable without the old solution.

The recovery community has developed numerous acronyms for FEAR — and there is wisdom in each of them. They represent different facets of the same fundamental challenge. Some describe what fear does (False Evidence Appearing Real). Some describe what fear drives us to do (F*** Everything And Run). Some point toward the solution (Face Everything And Rise). Together, they create a comprehensive map of how fear operates in the life of someone in recovery — and how it can be addressed.

The first step in addressing fear is simply acknowledging its presence. Most people in early recovery have spent so long running from fear that they cannot even recognize it. They call it stress, frustration, boredom, anger — anything but what it actually is. Naming fear as fear is itself an act of courage, because it means you have stopped running long enough to look at what has been chasing you.

Reflection Questions

1. Before reading this, did you think of yourself as a "fearful" person? Has your understanding shifted?

2. How did substances initially help manage your fear? At what point did the substance become a greater source of fear?

3. What fears intensified when you entered recovery? Were you prepared for this?

4. Which FEAR acronym resonates most with you right now, and why?

5. If fear is the "invisible engine" of your addiction, what would happen if you could see it clearly?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 6

Fear Awareness & Recognition

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

1. I can identify when fear is influencing my decisions before I act on it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am aware of the specific fears that drove my substance use

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can distinguish between rational and irrational fears

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I recognize when I am making excuses to avoid something I fear

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I notice physical sensations in my body when fear is present

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I can name my fears specifically rather than feeling vague dread

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I understand how fear was both cause and consequence of my addiction
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am aware some of my strongest opinions are actually fear in disguise
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 6

Fear-Substance Connection

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

1. I used substances to numb or escape fear and anxiety
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. Fear of withdrawal kept me from seeking help
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I fear I cannot cope with life without substances
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I fear I am fundamentally broken and recovery will not work
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. Fear of being "found out" causes me significant distress
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I fear who I will be without substances
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. Fear of boredom in sobriety threatens my motivation
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I have relapsed because fear became overwhelming
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Types of Fear Inventory

15 Common Fears — Naming What Drives You

The Power of Naming

A fear you cannot name controls you. A fear you CAN name you can begin to face. This inventory walks you through 15 common fears in recovery.

Fear of Failure

The belief that if you try and fail, the failure defines you.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

Fear of failure keeps people from fully committing. The truth: relapse is data, not destiny.

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "I am afraid of failing at..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

What would you attempt if you knew you could not fail? What stops you from attempting it anyway?

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Loneliness

The terror of being alone — emotionally fundamentally alone.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

Substances were companions. The fear of loneliness without that companion can feel overwhelming.

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "What I fear most about being alone is..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

Is there a difference between being alone and being lonely?

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Intimacy

Intimacy means "into me, see." The fear that if someone truly sees you, they will leave.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

Addiction thrives in secrecy. Intimacy is its opposite.

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "If someone really saw the real me, they would..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

What parts of yourself are you hiding from people closest to you?

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Risk

The paralysis of needing certainty before taking action.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

Recovery itself is the biggest risk many have taken. Fear of risk can keep people in familiar misery.

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "The risk I am most afraid to take is..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

What is the biggest risk of NOT taking the risk? Staying has consequences too.

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Pain

The fear of emotional, physical, or spiritual pain — and the belief you cannot survive it without something.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

The central paradox: we use substances to avoid pain, which creates more pain. Recovery asks you to walk through pain without anesthetic.

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "The pain I am most afraid of feeling is..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

You have survived every painful experience you have ever had. What does that suggest?

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Abandonment

The deep fear that people will leave — that you are not enough to keep anyone around.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

Many experienced abandonment long before substances. The substance became the one thing that "never left."

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "I am afraid of being abandoned by..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

Has your fear of abandonment caused you to push people away — creating the outcome you feared?

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Rejection

The fear you will be evaluated and found wanting.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

Fear of rejection keeps people from asking for help and being honest. Recovery says "some might reject you, and you will survive it."

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "The rejection I fear most is..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

How many opportunities have you missed because you pre-rejected yourself?

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Looking Stupid

The fear that speaking up will expose you as ignorant or foolish.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

This keeps people silent in settings designed to help them. The "stupid" thing you fear saying is often the most courageous.

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "I am afraid people will think I am stupid if I..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

Think of someone whose honesty moved you. Did they sound stupid — or brave?

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of What Others Think

Living as a hostage to other people's potential opinions.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

"What will people think?" kept many using. Recovery requires caring more about survival than reputation.

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "I am afraid people will think I am..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

"What others think of me is none of my business." How does that land?

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Punishment

The fear you will be punished for your mistakes or simply for being who you are.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

Many carry enormous guilt and shame. Fear of punishment can prevent honest inventory work.

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "I am afraid of being punished for..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

Is there a difference between consequences and punishment?

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Poverty

The fear of not having enough — money or deeper sense of scarcity.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

Addiction creates real financial devastation. But the deeper fear is "I am not enough."

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "My deepest fear about money is..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

How much is about actual financial danger vs. deeper sense of "not enough"?

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Exploitation

The fear that people will take advantage of you.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

Many have been exploited and have exploited others. Fear can prevent vulnerable relationships recovery requires.

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "I am afraid of being taken advantage of because..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

Is it possible to trust with discernment — open without being naive?

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Missing Out

The fear that by choosing recovery, you are missing the "big moment."

RECOVERY CONNECTION

FOMO is real in recovery. Truth: addiction causes you to miss the real chances.

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "I am afraid by being in recovery, I am missing..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

Make a list of everything addiction caused you to miss. Compare it to what recovery asks you to "miss."

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Fear

Being afraid of being afraid — dreading fear itself so much you arrange life to avoid it.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

Fear of fear creates a prison within a prison. Recovery teaches fear is survivable — uncomfortable, but not fatal.

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "What I fear most about experiencing fear is..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

What if fear is information, not danger? How would that change your experience?

Your response to the challenge:

Fear of Letting Go of Fear

The fear that without fear, you will be unprotected. Fear has been your constant companion.

RECOVERY CONNECTION

Some have been afraid so long that fear is their identity. Letting go means stepping into the unknown.

Rate this fear (1-5):

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Complete: "I am afraid to let go of fear because..."

Where did this fear come from?

CHALLENGE

What would it look like to retrain the guard dog rather than eliminate it?

Your response to the challenge:

YOUR EXERCISE

Personal Fear Map

Where your fears live, what they make you do, and what they cost

A Map, Not a Verdict

Fear rarely shows up with a name tag. It shows up as a tight chest, a canceled plan, a sudden reason to drink. Mapping your fears lets you spot them earlier and choose what to do next.

YOUR HIGHEST-RATED FEARS FROM THE INVENTORY

Rate fears in the Types of Fear Inventory and your top five will appear here. You can also map fears without it.

Fear 1

Name this fear in one sentence:

I am afraid that...

Where do I feel it in my body?

Chest, stomach, jaw, shoulders...

What thoughts does it produce?

The stories it tells me...

What does it make me do? (avoid, control, people-please, lash out, isolate, use)

What is this fear trying to protect me from?

What has this fear cost me in relationships, work, health, and recovery?

When do I first remember feeling this fear?

Fear 2

Name this fear in one sentence:

I am afraid that...

Where do I feel it in my body?

Chest, stomach, jaw, shoulders...

What thoughts does it produce?

The stories it tells me...

What does it make me do? (avoid, control, people-please, lash out, isolate, use)

What is this fear trying to protect me from?

What has this fear cost me in relationships, work, health, and recovery?

When do I first remember feeling this fear?

Fear 3

Name this fear in one sentence:

I am afraid that...

Where do I feel it in my body?

Chest, stomach, jaw, shoulders...

What thoughts does it produce?

The stories it tells me...

What does it make me do? (avoid, control, people-please, lash out, isolate, use)

What is this fear trying to protect me from?

What has this fear cost me in relationships, work, health, and recovery?

When do I first remember feeling this fear?

Reading the Map

What do my mapped fears have in common? Is there one core fear underneath them?

How did drinking or using help me manage these fears?

Which fear is my earliest warning sign that my recovery is under strain?

Who will I show this map to (sponsor, counselor, trusted peer)?

PART 2 OF 3 · READING

Decoding the FEAR Acronyms

The recovery community has produced more acronyms for FEAR than for any other emotion — and that is not an accident. Fear is the emotion most central to addiction, and the acronyms represent the collective wisdom of millions of people who have wrestled with it.

The acronyms fall into several categories. First, there are the DIAGNOSTIC acronyms — the ones that help you recognize fear's disguises. "False Evidence Appearing Real" and "False Expectations Appearing Real" teach you that fear is a perception problem. Your brain takes incomplete data and builds a worst-case scenario that feels like a certainty.

Second, there are the BEHAVIORAL acronyms — the ones that describe what fear drives you to DO. "Finding Excuses And Reasons" describes fear in its most seductive disguise: rationalization. "F*** Everything And Run" captures fear at its most primal and destructive.

Third, there are the EMOTIONAL acronyms — the ones that address fear's relationship to your inner life. "Feelings Every Alcoholic Rejects" points to the core emotional dysfunction of addiction: the inability or unwillingness to tolerate uncomfortable feelings.

Fourth, there are the SOLUTION acronyms — the ones that point toward a way through. "Face Everything And Rise" is a battle cry. "Face Everything And Respond" teaches the critical difference between reacting and responding. "Fear Expressed Allows Release" reveals the most powerful antidote to fear: speaking it.

Finally, there is "Few Ever Arrive Rejoicing" — a compassion acronym. It reminds you that almost nobody walks into recovery happy about it. You came in pain. And that is exactly how most people arrive.

The goal is not to eliminate fear — that is neither possible nor desirable. The goal is to develop a relationship with fear that is honest, manageable, and no longer requires chemical mediation.

Reflection Questions

1. Which category of FEAR acronyms resonates most — diagnostic, behavioral, emotional, or solution-focused?

2. Choose one acronym from each category that applies to your life right now.

3. Have you been using any of these fear patterns without recognizing them as fear?

4. If you had to pick ONE acronym to work with intensely this week, which would it be?

5. How does understanding fear as multi-faceted change your approach to addressing it?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 6

Fear-Based Avoidance Patterns

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

1. I avoid situations where I might fail or look foolish

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I isolate rather than risk rejection

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I avoid emotional intimacy because it feels too vulnerable

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I procrastinate on important tasks because I fear the outcome

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I avoid honest conversations because I fear conflict

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I stay in my comfort zone even when growth requires leaving it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I avoid recovery activities because of what I might have to face

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I use anger or humor to keep people at a distance

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 6

Fear in Relationships

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

1. I fear if people really knew me, they would reject me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I fear being abandoned by people I care about
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I avoid asking for help because I fear seeming weak
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I fear trusting others because I have been hurt before
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I fear being vulnerable in meetings or with my sponsor
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I fear sober relationships will be unsatisfying
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I fear my past makes me unworthy of love
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I avoid intimacy because letting someone in feels dangerous
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 6

Fear of the Future

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

1. I fear what my life will look like long-term without substances
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I fear I will always feel uncomfortable and uncertain
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I fear making decisions because I might choose wrong
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I fear change even when the current situation is harmful
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I fear success because I do not trust myself to handle it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I worry about the future so much I cannot be present today
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I fear my best days are behind me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I fear facing consequences of my past actions
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE**FEAR Acronyms Deep Dive**

14 Meanings — 14 Windows Into How Fear Operates

Why This Matters

Each FEAR acronym captures a different dimension of how fear operates. Working through all fourteen gives you comprehensive vocabulary for recognizing fear in its many disguises.

Fear Expressed Allows Release

FFear·EExpressed·AAllows·RRelease

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

When you name your fear — speak it out loud — it loses power. Fear expressed becomes fear released. Secrets keep you sick; spoken fears begin to heal.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

In your next meeting or with your sponsor, name ONE fear you have been carrying silently. Notice what happens.

1. What fear have you been carrying silently? What keeps you from expressing it?

2. Describe a time when expressing a fear actually reduced its power.

3. What would regular "fear expression" look like in your recovery routine?

4. Who is safe enough to receive your expressed fears without judgment?

Fighting Ego Against Reality

FFighting·EEgo·AAgainst·RReality

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

Fear emerges when ego collides with reality. The ego says "I should be able to handle this." Reality says "You cannot do this alone." Fear lives in the gap.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

Identify one area where your ego is fighting reality. Where are you insisting things should be different?

1. Where is your ego at war with reality in your recovery?

2. How has "fighting reality" contributed to your substance use?

3. What would surrender (not defeat, but acceptance) look like?

4. What are you refusing to accept, and what is that refusal costing you?

Face Everything And Rise

FFace·EEverything·AAnd·RRise

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

Recovery asks you to be willing to face what you fear — and discover you can survive it, grow from it, and rise through it.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

Identify one fear you have been avoiding. Write down the smallest step to face it this week. Then take it.

1. What have you been avoiding that you need to face? What is the cost of avoidance?

2. Describe a time when you faced something terrifying and survived. How did it change you?

3. What does "rising" look like for YOU personally?

4. If you committed to facing one fear per week for a month, which four would you start with?

Feelings Every Alcoholic Rejects

FFeelings·EEvery·AAlcoholic·RRejects

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

At the core of addiction is inability to tolerate uncomfortable feelings. Recovery requires learning to feel what we have been running from.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

Next time you feel uncomfortable emotion, sit with it for 5 minutes without escape. Just feel it. Notice what happens.

1. Which feelings did you most use substances to escape?

2. What were you taught about emotions growing up? How has that shaped you?

3. How does emotional rejection connect to your relapse risk?

4. What would it mean to sit with ANY feeling without needing to escape it?

False Expectations Appearing Real

FFalse·EExpectations·AAppearing·RReal

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

Most of what we fear never happens. Fear is a projection machine building worst-case scenarios that feel certain. Usually wrong ones.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

Write your three biggest fears about recovery. Ask: "Has this actually happened, or am I predicting it?"

1. List three fears that felt certain but never came true. What does this tell you?

2. What "false expectation" about recovery currently controls your behavior?

3. How much anxiety comes from predicting vs. dealing with what is actually happening?

4. If you could only respond to REAL threats and ignore PREDICTED threats, how would your experience change?

Finding Excuses And Reasons

FFinding·EExcuses·AAnd·RReasons

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

Fear is a master excuse-maker generating sophisticated justifications for avoidance. In recovery, excuses are the language of relapse.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

Identify one thing you "have a good reason" not to do. Ask: "Is this a reason or fear wearing a reason's clothing?"

1. What is your favorite excuse for not fully engaging? What fear is underneath?

2. List the top 5 "reasons" your addiction gave you to keep using. Identify the fear behind each.

3. How do you distinguish between legitimate reason and fear-based excuse?

4. If excuses were removed for one week, what recovery actions would you take?

Frantic Efforts to Appear Recovered

FFrantic·EEfforts·Ato Appear·RRecovered

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

The most dangerous people in early recovery often look the best. Real recovery is messy and honest. Fake recovery is polished and exhausting.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

Ask honestly: "Am I doing recovery, or performing recovery?" Where is the gap between appearance and reality?

1. Where are you performing wellness rather than experiencing it?

2. What are you afraid would happen if people saw the REAL you?

3. How does "appearing recovered" actually prevent real recovery?

4. Write a brutally honest "state of the union" about your recovery right now.

Frantic Efforts to Avoid Reality

FFrantic·EEfforts·Ato Avoid·RReality

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

Addiction is a frantic effort to avoid reality. In recovery, the impulse to flee reality often remains as busyness, distraction, or compulsive behavior.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

For one hour today, turn off all distractions and sit with yourself. Notice what comes up. Write about it.

1. What realities are you currently avoiding? List them honestly.

2. What are your current "reality avoidance" strategies now that substances are removed?

3. What would happen if you stopped running from reality for one full day?

4. How does avoiding reality keep you sick? How does facing it support recovery?

Few Ever Arrive Rejoicing

Few Ever Arrive Rejoicing

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

Nobody walks into recovery happy. Most arrive in pain. The important thing is not how you arrive — it is that you arrived at all.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

Write the story of how you arrived in recovery. Not the polished version — the real one. Then write compassion to that person.

1. How did you arrive in recovery? What was the state of your life at that moment?

2. Do you judge yourself for HOW you got here? How does that affect your recovery?

3. What would it mean to accept that your path — however painful — was YOUR path?

4. What courage did it take to show up? How can you honor that courage today?

False Emotions Appearing Real

False·Emotions·Appearing·Real

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

Not every emotion is telling you truth. Addiction creates "false emotions" — shame spirals disproportionate to the situation, panic with no real source.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

Next time you experience intense emotion, pause: "Is this proportionate to what is actually happening? Or is my brain generating a false alarm?"

1. Identify a recent time when your emotional reaction was disproportionate to the situation.

2. Which emotions do you trust the LEAST to tell you the truth?

3. How has addiction created "false emotions"?

4. What would change if you learned to pause between feeling an emotion and acting on it?

Face Everything And Respond

FFace·EEverything·AAnd·RRespond

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

There is a critical difference between reacting and responding. Recovery teaches you to face everything — but to RESPOND rather than react.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

Identify one situation where you reacted out of fear. Write how you would RESPOND if you could do it again.

1. What is the difference between reacting and responding in YOUR experience?

2. What situations cause you to react rather than respond?

3. What would help you create more space between stimulus and response?

4. Write a personal "response plan" for three situations likely to trigger fear-based reactions.

Fake Everything And Forget

FFake·EEverything·AAnd·RForget

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

"Fake it till you make it" has a shadow version. "Fake everything and forget" is the disease talking. Recovery requires radical honesty.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

Ask yourself: "What am I currently faking?" Write it down. Share it with your sponsor this week.

1. What aspects of your life are you currently "faking"?

2. What is the difference between healthy "fake it" and destructive faking?

3. What do you forget when you are in "fake" mode?

4. If you committed to 100% honesty for one week, what would change?

False Evidence Appearing Real

False·Evidence·Appearing·Real

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

Your fear brain is a corrupt prosecutor — selectively presenting evidence to build a case for fear while hiding evidence that suggests you are safe.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

Choose your biggest fear. Write all evidence supporting it. Then search for evidence AGAINST it. Which pile is bigger?

1. What "false evidence" is your fear brain using? What data is it selecting and ignoring?

2. Think of a time you were certain something terrible would happen — and it did not.

3. How does your addiction use "false evidence" to justify relapse?

4. If you were a defense attorney arguing AGAINST your fear, what counter-evidence would you present?

F*** Everything And Run

F***·Everything·And·Run

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

The most visceral FEAR acronym — the raw voice of the disease in full command. "F*** it, nothing matters." The moment before relapse.

RECOVERY APPLICATION

Write what YOUR "f*** it" moment sounds like. What triggers it? Then write your emergency response plan.

1. Describe your personal "f*** it" moment. What does it feel like? What triggers it?

2. How many times has the "f*** everything and run" impulse led you somewhere better?

3. What is the difference between the "f*** it" voice and your authentic voice?

4. Create an emergency response plan for when this voice shows up. Who do you call? What do you do?

YOUR EXERCISE

Fear vs. Evidence Challenge

False Evidence Appearing Real — testing the stories fear tells

Put the Fear on Trial

Fear speaks in predictions: they will leave, I will fail, I can't handle it. This exercise treats each prediction like a claim in court. What is the actual evidence, for and against?

Some fears are accurate. If a fear is about real danger (an unsafe person, a real relapse risk, a threat to your safety), the evidence will support it. Then the task is not to talk yourself out of it but to act on it and get support.

Fear 1 on Trial

The fear, written as a prediction:

If I ___, then ___ will happen.

How strongly do I believe it right now?

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Evidence that supports this fear (facts, not feelings):

Evidence that does not support it:

The last time I feared something like this, what actually happened?

Worst case, best case, and most likely case:

If the worst case did happen, how would I get through it, and who would help?

A more balanced statement I can hold instead:

How strongly do I believe the original fear now?

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Fear 2 on Trial

The fear, written as a prediction:

If I ___, then ___ will happen.

How strongly do I believe it right now?

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Evidence that supports this fear (facts, not feelings):

Evidence that does not support it:

The last time I feared something like this, what actually happened?

Worst case, best case, and most likely case:

If the worst case did happen, how would I get through it, and who would help?

A more balanced statement I can hold instead:

How strongly do I believe the original fear now?

- ☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Fear 3 on Trial

The fear, written as a prediction:

If I ___, then ___ will happen.

How strongly do I believe it right now?

- ☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Evidence that supports this fear (facts, not feelings):

Evidence that does not support it:

The last time I feared something like this, what actually happened?

Worst case, best case, and most likely case:

If the worst case did happen, how would I get through it, and who would help?

A more balanced statement I can hold instead:

How strongly do I believe the original fear now?

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

What the Trials Showed

What pattern do I notice in the predictions my fear makes?

A question I will ask myself the next time fear makes a prediction:

Is this what is happening, or what I imagine might happen?

YOUR EXERCISE

Letter to Your Fear

Speaking to fear directly, and letting courage answer

Fear Has Been Talking for Years

Most of us have only listened to fear. This exercise turns it around: you talk to it. Thank it for what it tried to do, name what it cost, and tell it what happens now.

Writing to fear can bring up painful memories. If that happens, stop, use a grounding skill, and reach out to someone. You can come back to this later. If you feel unsafe, call or text 988.

Before You Write

Which fear am I writing to?

Fear of rejection, fear of failure, fear of being alone...

If this fear had a voice or a shape, what would it be like?

My Letter to Fear

YOU MIGHT INCLUDE

When you first showed up · How you tried to protect me · What you convinced me of · What you cost me · How you and my drinking or using worked together · What I am no longer willing to do because of you · What role you can still have

Dear Fear,

Courage Writes Back

Now write a reply from your courage, your Higher Power, or yourself one year into recovery. What does that voice want you to know?

Dear me,

After Writing

What did I feel while writing each letter?

What surprised me?

Who could I read these letters to?

PART 3 OF 3 · READING

From Fear to Courage

Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is action in the presence of fear. It is feeling the fear fully and choosing to move forward anyway. The most courageous people in recovery are not those who feel no fear — they are those who feel enormous fear and still show up.

Building courage in recovery works exactly like building a muscle. It starts with small, manageable repetitions. You start by showing up. Then you say your name. Then you admit you are struggling. Then you share a surface-level truth. Then a deeper one. Each small act of courage makes the next one slightly easier. The muscle grows.

The 12-Step program is, at its core, a systematic courage-building program. Step One requires courage to admit powerlessness. Step Four requires courage to look at yourself honestly. Step Five requires courage to share that inventory. Each step asks for a slightly greater act of courage — and each step, when taken, builds the capacity for the next one.

Courage also requires support. You do not have to face your fears alone. Courage in recovery is relational. It means calling your sponsor when you are afraid. It means sharing in a meeting when your voice shakes. The willingness to accept support is itself an act of courage.

There is a beautiful paradox in recovery courage: the things you fear most are often the things that will heal you most. The conversation you are avoiding is the one that will free you. The feeling you are suppressing is the one that needs to be felt. Fear is often a compass pointing directly at your next area of growth — if you are willing to follow it rather than flee from it.

The goal is not to become fearless. The goal is to become fear-capable: someone who can feel fear, name it, share it, and take values-aligned action despite its presence. That is the courage of recovery.

Reflection Questions

1. What is the most courageous thing you have done in your recovery so far?

2. Where is your "courage muscle" strongest? Where is it weakest?

3. Can you identify a fear that is actually a compass — pointing toward something you need to face?

4. Who in your recovery community demonstrates the courage you aspire to?

5. Write a courage commitment: "This week, I will face my fear of _____ by _____. I will reach out to _____ for support."

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 6 OF 6

Courage & Fear Management

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

1. I have strategies for managing fear without substances

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I can feel fear and take action anyway

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have shared my fears honestly with someone in recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I practice facing small fears to build my courage muscle

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I understand courage is action in spite of fear

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I have a support system for when fear is overwhelming

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I can use prayer or grounding when fear spikes

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I believe facing my fears is essential to recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Courage Action Plan

Thirty days of small, planned steps toward what you fear

Climb the Ladder One Rung at a Time

Courage is taking the next right step while afraid. You don't start at the top. You build a ladder from the least frightening step to the most, and climb it with support.

Choose steps that are uncomfortable, not dangerous. Fears connected to trauma, and any step that puts you near alcohol, drugs, or unsafe people, should be planned with your counselor or sponsor, not faced alone.

The Fear I'm Working On

The fear I want to face over the next 30 days:

Why facing it matters for my recovery:

What my life would look like if this fear had less control:

My Fear Ladder

List steps from easiest (1) to hardest (8). Rate how scary each feels from 1 to 10.

1. Easiest step:

2. Step 2:

3. Step 3:

4. Step 4:

5. Step 5:

6. Step 6:

7. Step 7:

8. Hardest step:

Week 1

The ladder step(s) I will take this week:

When and where I will do it:

Who I will tell before, and call after:

End of week: What happened? How scary was it compared to what I predicted?

What I learned about myself and this fear:

Week 2

The ladder step(s) I will take this week:

When and where I will do it:

Who I will tell before, and call after:

End of week: What happened? How scary was it compared to what I predicted?

What I learned about myself and this fear:

Week 3

The ladder step(s) I will take this week:

When and where I will do it:

Who I will tell before, and call after:

End of week: What happened? How scary was it compared to what I predicted?

What I learned about myself and this fear:

Week 4

The ladder step(s) I will take this week:

When and where I will do it:

Who I will tell before, and call after:

End of week: What happened? How scary was it compared to what I predicted?

What I learned about myself and this fear:

30-Day Review

How far up the ladder did I get?

How has my relationship with this fear changed?

The moment of courage I am most proud of:

My next 30 days: keep climbing this ladder, or start a new one?

YOUR EXERCISE

Fear Emergency Response Plan

A plan written calm, for the moment fear is loud

Write It Before You Need It

In a panic, the thinking brain goes offline. That is why first responders train and pilots use checklists. Build your plan now, then keep a copy on your phone.

If you are in danger, thinking about harming yourself, or can't stay safe, call 911 or call or text 988 now. If you have chest pain, trouble breathing, or panic symptoms you have never had before, get medical care. Don't assume it is only anxiety.

My Warning Signs

Body signs that fear is rising:

Racing heart, tight chest, shaking, stomach drop...

Thoughts that tell me fear is taking over:

I can't do this, something bad is going to happen, I need a drink...

Things I start doing:

Isolating, snapping, pacing, planning to use...

Green · Yellow · Red

GREEN — uneasy but steady

What I will do: e.g. name the fear, breathe, keep my routine

YELLOW — fear is growing, urges may start

What I will do: e.g. grounding skill, call someone, get to a meeting

RED — overwhelmed, strong urge to use or unsafe

What I will do: e.g. leave the situation, call my sponsor now, call 988

My Tools

The grounding or breathing skill I will use first:

Box breathing, 5-4-3-2-1, cold water...

What I will say to myself:

This is fear. It is uncomfortable, not fatal. It will pass.

Safe places I can go:

What I will not do (people, places, or actions that make it worse):

My People

Person 1: name and phone number

Person 2: name and phone number

Person 3: name and phone number

My counselor or treatment provider, and how to reach them:

988 Lifeline: Call or text 988

Crisis Text: Text HOME to 741741

SAMHSA Helpline: 1-800-662-4357 (treatment referral, 24/7)

After the Storm

After a fear emergency, I will talk it through with:

Questions I will ask: what set it off, what helped, what I would do differently:

Crisis Resources

SAMHSA: 1-800-662-4357 (24/7)

Safe Call Now: 1-206-459-3020

Crisis Text: Text HOME to 741741

988 Lifeline: Call or text 988