Emotional Sobriety for Men

A Guided Workbook for the First 28 Days of Recovery

This workbook is designed specifically for men in the early stages of recovery from substance use. The journey involves not only physical abstinence but also developing emotional sobriety—the ability to experience, identify, express, and manage emotions in healthy ways.

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WEEK 1 · EMOTIONAL AWARENESS & IDENTIFICATION

Day 1: Emotional Baseline

To establish your current relationship with emotions and create a baseline for measuring growth.

When I feel sad, I usually...

The last time I cried was...

When I feel afraid, I typically...

Showing vulnerability to others makes me feel...

The emotions I'm most comfortable expressing are...

The emotions I find most difficult to express are...

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WEEK 1 · EMOTIONAL AWARENESS & IDENTIFICATION

Day 2: Expanding Your Emotional Vocabulary

To develop a more nuanced understanding of emotional states beyond basic terms.

Emotion	Unknown	Heard of	Experienced	Can define
Absorbed	○	○	○	○
Anxious	○	○	○	○
Ashamed	○	○	○	○
Appreciative	○	○	○	○
Bored	○	○	○	○
Confident	○	○	○	○
Defensive	○	○	○	○
Dejected	○	○	○	○
Delighted	○	○	○	○
Disappointed	○	○	○	○
Disgusted	○	○	○	○
Embarrassed	○	○	○	○
Guilty	○	○	○	○
Hopeful	○	○	○	○
Hurt	○	○	○	○
Insecure	○	○	○	○
Irritated	○	○	○	○
Jealous	○	○	○	○
Overwhelmed	○	○	○	○
Peaceful	○	○	○	○
Proud	○	○	○	○
Resentful	○	○	○	○
Restless	○	○	○	○
Sad	○	○	○	○
Suspicious	○	○	○	○
Sympathetic	○	○	○	○
Tense	○	○	○	○
Terrified	○	○	○	○
Thankful	○	○	○	○
Uncomfortable	○	○	○	○
Confused	○	○	○	○
Enthusiastic	○	○	○	○
Lonely	○	○	○	○
Scared	○	○	○	○

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Emotion	Unknown	Heard of	Experienced	Can define
Vulnerable	○	○	○	○
Curious	○	○	○	○

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WEEK 1 · EMOTIONAL AWARENESS & IDENTIFICATION

Day 3: The Emotional Body Scan

To connect physical sensations with emotional states.

Find a quiet place and slowly scan your body from head to toe, noticing sensations.

Head and face:

Neck and shoulders:

Chest:

Stomach/abdomen:

Arms and hands:

Legs and feet:

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WEEK 1 · EMOTIONAL AWARENESS & IDENTIFICATION

Day 4: Tracking Emotions Through the Day

To notice that emotions come and go all day long, and to start catching them while they are happening instead of hours later.

Why track?

Most of us only notice an emotion once it is loud: a blowup, a craving, a bad night. By then it has been building for hours. Tracking trains you to catch the early, quiet version.

Three check-ins today are enough. You don't need the perfect word. "Tense," "off," or "low" is a start.

How strong was the main emotion at each check-in? (0 = barely there, 10 = overwhelming)

Morning

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

Midday

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

Evening

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

Morning check-in: What was happening, what was I feeling, and what did I do with it?

Midday check-in: What was happening, what was I feeling, and what did I do with it?

Evening check-in: What was happening, what was I feeling, and what did I do with it?

Looking at all three, what do I notice about how my feelings shifted through the day?

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WEEK 1 · EMOTIONAL AWARENESS & IDENTIFICATION

Day 5: The Messages I Learned About Feelings

To identify the rules about emotions you picked up growing up, and to see how those rules shaped your drinking or using.

Rules nobody wrote down

Most men were taught rules about feelings without anyone saying them out loud. We learned by watching our fathers, coaches, older brothers, and friends, and by what happened when we showed something soft.

Those rules made sense in the places we learned them. Many of them also left us with only a few acceptable ways to deal with pain, and a drink or a drug was one of them.

Check the messages you heard or absorbed:

- ■ Men don't cry
- ■ Anger is the only safe feeling to show
- ■ Handle it yourself
- ■ Don't be a burden to anyone
- ■ Talking about feelings is weakness
- ■ Just push through it
- ■ Be the strong one for everyone else
- ■ Don't let them see you sweat
- ■ Asking for help means you failed
- ■ Have a drink and forget about it

Where or from whom did I learn the messages that hit hardest?

What have these rules cost me in my relationships and my health?

How did drinking or using help me follow these rules?

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Which rule do I want to keep, which do I want to change, and what would I replace it with?

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WEEK 1 · EMOTIONAL AWARENESS & IDENTIFICATION

Day 6: The Feelings Underneath My Using

To connect specific emotions with past use, so you can see what the substance was doing for you and meet that need another way.

Using was a solution before it was a problem

Almost nobody drinks or uses for no reason. The substance calmed fear, numbed hurt, quieted shame, filled boredom, or gave courage. That doesn't excuse it. It explains why stopping leaves those feelings with nowhere to go.

Recovery means finding other ways to handle the same feelings. First you have to know which ones they are.

Which feelings most often came right before I drank or used?

- Stress
- Loneliness
- Anger
- Boredom
- Shame
- Fear or anxiety
- Sadness
- Rejection
- Celebration or excitement
- Feeling nothing at all

The feeling I used on most often was... and the substance did this for it:

The feeling I worked hardest to never feel was...

When that feeling shows up now that I'm not using, what happens?

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One healthier way I could meet that same need this week:

Strong cravings in early recovery are common. If one hits while you do this exercise, stop, call your sponsor, a counselor, or a peer, and come back later. If you are thinking about harming yourself, or feel you can't stay safe, call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) now, or call 911. Reaching out is the strong move, not the weak one.

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WEEK 1 · EMOTIONAL AWARENESS & IDENTIFICATION

Day 7: Week 1 Review

Reflect on your first week of emotional awareness work.

What have I learned about my emotions this week?

What surprised me about this emotional awareness work?

What challenges did I face?

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WEEK 2 · EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION & VULNERABILITY

Day 8: What's Under the Anger?

To look beneath anger for the feelings it often protects.

Anger as a bodyguard

For a lot of men, anger is the one feeling that's allowed. It feels powerful and it keeps people back. Often it stands in front of something that feels more exposed: hurt, fear, embarrassment, or grief.

Anger isn't bad. It is often a sign that something matters or a line has been crossed. The work is to ask what else is there.

When I get angry, which of these are sometimes underneath?

- Hurt
- Fear
- Embarrassment
- Shame
- Feeling disrespected
- Feeling helpless
- Rejection
- Grief
- Jealousy
- Exhaustion

The last time I got angry: what happened?

If I look underneath that anger, what else was I feeling?

What might have changed if I had said the feeling underneath instead of showing the anger?

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WEEK 2 · EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION & VULNERABILITY

Day 9: Saying It Straight: "I Feel" Statements

To practice putting feelings into words that people can hear without getting defensive.

A simple formula

"I feel ___ when ___ because ___. What I need is ___."

Example: "I feel shut out when plans change without a heads-up, because it reminds me I'm still earning back trust. What I need is a quick text."

It will feel awkward at first. Awkward is what new skills feel like.

Write an "I feel" statement about something at home:

Write an "I feel" statement about something at work or with a friend:

Write an "I feel" statement about my recovery:

Which one could I actually say out loud this week, and to whom?

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WEEK 2 · EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION & VULNERABILITY

Day 10: Vulnerability Is Not Weakness

To see where you are able to open up and where you shut down, and to take one small risk.

The strength to be seen

Vulnerability means letting someone see what's true even when you can't control how they will react. It takes more nerve than keeping the armor on.

It doesn't mean telling everyone everything. It means being honest with safe people, a little at a time.

How comfortable am I sharing real feelings with each of these? (0 = not at all, 10 = completely)

Sponsor or counselor

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

Partner

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

A close friend

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

A meeting or group

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

Family

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

Who is the safest person for me to be honest with right now, and why?

What am I afraid will happen if I let people see how I really feel?

One small vulnerable thing I will share this week, and with whom:

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WEEK 2 · EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION & VULNERABILITY

Day 11: Letting Someone In

To practice reaching out and sharing one honest feeling with another person.

Today's assignment

Call, text, or sit down with one person in your recovery circle. Tell them one real feeling you have had this week. That's the whole assignment.

Answer the first two questions before you reach out, and the rest afterward.

Before: Who will I reach out to, and what feeling will I share?

Before: What am I feeling about doing this?

After: What happened when I shared?

After: How do I feel now compared to before?

After: What did this teach me about letting people in?

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WEEK 2 · EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION & VULNERABILITY

Day 12: Grief and Loss in Recovery

To name the losses that come with addiction and with recovery, and to give yourself permission to grieve them.

Recovery comes with losses too

Addiction takes things: time, relationships, jobs, health, trust. Recovery also asks you to let go of things, including the substance itself, which may have felt like your most reliable friend.

Grief that isn't felt doesn't go away. It shows up as irritability, numbness, or cravings. Naming it is how it starts to move.

What I lost to my addiction:

What I have had to give up in recovery, including the substance and the life around it:

The loss I have not let myself grieve yet:

One way I could honor that loss this week (writing, talking, visiting a place, a quiet moment):

Grief can hit hard. If it feels like too much to carry alone, bring it to a counselor or sponsor. If you are thinking about harming yourself, or feel you can't stay safe, call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) now, or call 911. Reaching out is the strong move, not the weak one.

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WEEK 2 · EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION & VULNERABILITY

Day 13: Guilt Versus Shame

To tell the difference between guilt about what you did and shame about who you think you are.

Two different feelings

Guilt says, "I did something bad." It points toward repair: an apology, an amends, a change in behavior.

Shame says, "I am bad." It points toward hiding, and hiding is where using grows. Shame loses power when it is spoken to someone safe.

Something I feel guilty about (an action):

What repair or change could that guilt point me toward?

A shame message I carry about who I am ("I'm a failure," "I'm broken"):

Rewrite that shame message as a statement about behavior, not identity:

Who is one safe person I could say this shame out loud to?

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WEEK 2 · EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION & VULNERABILITY

Day 14: Week 2 Review

Reflect on your second week focusing on expression and vulnerability.

How has my ability to express emotions changed?

What did I learn about vulnerability?

What barriers to emotional expression remain?

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WEEK 3 · EMOTIONAL REGULATION & COPING SKILLS

Day 15: Riding the Wave

To learn that strong emotions and urges rise, peak, and pass if you don't feed them.

Every wave breaks

Strong emotions and cravings feel like they will keep building forever. They don't. Most rise, peak, and start to ease within minutes when you let them be there without acting.

Today, when a strong feeling shows up, notice where it is in your body, breathe slowly, and watch it change. Then record what happened.

Rate the intensity of one strong emotion or urge today (0-10):

When I first noticed it

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

At its strongest

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

Fifteen minutes later

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

What was the emotion or urge, and what set it off?

Where did I feel it in my body, and how did that change?

What does this tell me about the next time a wave hits?

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WEEK 3 · EMOTIONAL REGULATION & COPING SKILLS

Day 16: Grounding Skills

To practice simple skills that bring your body and mind back to the present when emotions run high.

Three skills to try today

5-4-3-2-1: Name 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, and 1 you taste.

Box breathing: Breathe in for 4 counts, hold 4, breathe out 4, hold 4. Repeat four rounds.

Feet on the floor: Press both feet into the ground, feel the chair under you, and say where you are and what day it is.

Which skills did I try today?

- 5-4-3-2-1
- Box breathing
- Feet on the floor
- Cold water on face or hands
- A short walk

Which skill helped most, and what did I notice?

When during a normal day am I most likely to need one of these?

How will I remind myself to use it (phone note, card in wallet, habit)?

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WEEK 3 · EMOTIONAL REGULATION & COPING SKILLS

Day 17: HALT: Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired

To recognize four basic states that make emotions harder to manage and cravings stronger.

Check the basics first

Before deciding something is wrong with your life, check whether you are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. Any one of these makes feelings louder and self-control weaker.

Many bad nights in early recovery start with skipped meals, no sleep, and no contact with anyone.

Which of these have I felt today?

- Hungry
- Angry
- Lonely
- Tired

Which HALT state shows up for me most often, and when?

My plan when I'm hungry:

My plan when I'm angry:

My plan when I'm lonely:

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My plan when I'm tired:

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WEEK 3 · EMOTIONAL REGULATION & COPING SKILLS

Day 18: Thought, Feeling, Action

To see how thoughts drive feelings and actions, and to practice choosing a different response.

The chain

Something happens. A thought flashes, often fast and harsh. That thought creates a feeling, and the feeling pushes an action.

Example: My boss doesn't say hello. Thought: "He's about to fire me." Feeling: fear, then anger. Action: I snap at a coworker. You can't always stop the first thought, but you can question it.

A situation today that stirred me up:

The first thought I had:

The feeling it created:

What I did, or wanted to do:

Another way to look at the situation:

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The action that other view would lead to:

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WEEK 3 · EMOTIONAL REGULATION & COPING SKILLS

Day 19: Handling Anger Safely

To build a plan for noticing anger early and handling it without harming yourself, others, or your recovery.

Anger is a signal, not a command

Anger tells you something matters. What you do next is a choice. The earlier you catch it, the more choices you have.

A time-out is a tool, not running away: say "I'm getting too heated, I'm going to take 20 minutes and come back," leave, calm your body, and return to finish the conversation.

My earliest body signs that anger is building (jaw, fists, heat, heart rate):

The thoughts that tell me I'm heading toward losing it:

My time-out plan: what I will say, where I will go, what I will do to calm down:

Who I can call when I'm angry:

How I will come back and finish the conversation:

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If you are afraid you might hurt someone, leave the situation now and call someone. If you are in a relationship where someone is being hurt or controlled, the National Domestic Violence Hotline is 1-800-799-7233 (or text START to 88788). If you are thinking about harming yourself, or feel you can't stay safe, call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) now, or call 911. Reaching out is the strong move, not the weak one.

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WEEK 3 · EMOTIONAL REGULATION & COPING SKILLS

Day 20: My Coping Toolbox

To gather the skills from this week into a plan you can reach for when emotions run high.

Tools I am willing to use:

- Call or text someone in recovery
- Go to a meeting
- Exercise or take a walk
- Grounding or breathing skill
- Write it out
- Prayer or meditation
- Take a shower
- Eat something and drink water
- Get sleep
- Music
- Time-out and come back
- Talk to my counselor

When emotions are low intensity (1-3), I will:

When emotions are medium intensity (4-6), I will:

When emotions are high intensity (7-10), I will:

Three people I can contact, with their numbers saved in my phone:

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WEEK 3 · EMOTIONAL REGULATION & COPING SKILLS

Day 21: Week 3 Review

Assess your emotional regulation skills development.

What new coping skills have I developed?

How am I managing emotional triggers differently?

What regulation strategies work best for me?

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WEEK 4 · AUTHENTICITY & RECOVERY IDENTITY

Day 22: Who Am I Without It?

To begin reconnecting with the parts of yourself that got buried under addiction.

Before addiction took over, what did I enjoy doing?

Interests, people, or goals I let go of:

Qualities in myself I actually like:

Something about myself I have noticed since getting sober:

One thing I used to love that I could try again this month:

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WEEK 4 · AUTHENTICITY & RECOVERY IDENTITY

Day 23: My Values

To name what matters most to you, so your choices can line up with it.

Check the values that matter most to you (pick up to five):

- Honesty
- Family
- Loyalty
- Faith or spirituality
- Hard work
- Courage
- Respect
- Service to others
- Freedom
- Health
- Integrity
- Friendship
- Learning
- Fairness
- Humor
- Responsibility

My top three values, and why each matters to me:

How did my addiction pull me away from these values?

One way I lived one of these values this week:

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One action this week that would line up with a value I have neglected:

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WEEK 4 · AUTHENTICITY & RECOVERY IDENTITY

Day 24: The Masks I Wear

To identify the roles you play to hide what you feel, and to decide where you can take the mask off.

Which masks do I wear?

- The tough guy
- The joker
- The provider who has no needs
- The fixer
- The loner
- The "I'm fine" guy
- The people pleaser
- The one who has it all together

The mask I wear most often, and when I put it on:

What is this mask protecting me from?

What does wearing it cost me and the people close to me?

Who, if anyone, sees me without it, and what is that like?

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WEEK 4 · AUTHENTICITY & RECOVERY IDENTITY

Day 25: Emotional Honesty in My Relationships

To look at how honest you are about your feelings with the people closest to you.

How emotionally honest am I with each? (0 = I hide everything, 10 = they know how I really am)

Partner

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

Children or family

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

Friends

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

Recovery supports

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

The people I most want to be real with:

What I hold back from them, and why:

One honest conversation I need to have, and what I want to say:

A relationship where I need a boundary to stay emotionally healthy:

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WEEK 4 · AUTHENTICITY & RECOVERY IDENTITY

Day 26: Strength, Redefined

To think about what kind of man you want to be in recovery.

What strength looks like now

In active addiction, strength often meant not needing anyone, never showing pain, and powering through alone.

In recovery, strength can look like asking for help, telling the truth, owning mistakes, staying present with your kids, and feeling something hard without running from it.

What I used to believe made a man strong:

A man I admire, and what he does that I respect:

The kind of man I want to be in recovery:

One thing I did this week that took real strength:

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WEEK 4 · AUTHENTICITY & RECOVERY IDENTITY

Day 27: A Letter to Myself One Year From Now

To put your hopes and commitments into words you can come back to.

Write to the man you're becoming

Write a letter to yourself one year from today. Tell him what these four weeks have been like, what you are proud of, what you are afraid of, and what you hope he is still doing.

Dear me, one year from now...

What I hope is true about my emotional life a year from now:

What I want to make sure I am still doing:

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WEEK 4 · AUTHENTICITY & RECOVERY IDENTITY

Day 28: Integration & Moving Forward

To consolidate your learning and create a plan for continuing emotional sobriety.

Three important insights I've gained about my emotions:

Two new emotional skills I've developed:

Daily practices I commit to for emotional sobriety:

People who will support my emotional sobriety:

Early warning signs that I'm struggling emotionally:

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