

Relationship to Self

Sobriety & Resilience · The Recovery Files

What Do You Say About Yourself — to Yourself?

A Resiliency Intensive for Sustained Recovery

Embrace, Empower & Evolve — The Recovery Files

Recognize · Hear the inner voice · Reframe · Challenge & redirect · Grow · Build the Wise Self

In this workbook

- Part 1 · The Foundation: Your Relationship With Yourself
 - Check-in: Self-Compassion & Self-Worth
 - Exercise: Self-Compassion Letter
 - Exercise: Evidence vs. Belief Inventory
- Part 2 · The Voice Inside: Understanding Self-Talk in Recovery
 - Check-in: Self-Talk Quality
 - Exercise: Inner Voice Explorer
 - Exercise: Self-Talk Audit & Reframe
- Part 3 · Beyond Sobriety: The Architecture of Continued Growth
 - Check-in: Growth Orientation & Future Focus
 - Exercise: Growth Edge Mapping
 - Exercise: Values & Vision Alignment
- Part 4 · The Neuroscience of Self-Talk: Rewiring the Inner Voice
 - Exercise: Daily Self-Talk Check-In (7 Days)
- Part 5 · Embrace, Empower, Evolve: Building the Life Recovery Makes Possible
 - Check-in: Recovery Identity Integration
 - Check-in: Resilience & Adaptive Capacity
 - Exercise: Recovery Identity Map
 - Exercise: Resilience Inventory
 - Exercise: Future Self Blueprint

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

The Foundation: Your Relationship With Yourself

Recovery gave you your life back. The question now is: what are you going to do with it?

If you're reading this, you have at least twelve months of sustained recovery — and that is no small thing. You have survived the acute crisis of early sobriety, navigated the emotional turbulence of the first year, built or rebuilt at least some of the structures that support a sober life, and proven to yourself and others that you can live without substances.

That work deserves to be honored and celebrated. But it also deserves to be built upon.

Here is a truth that catches many people off guard: getting sober is not the same thing as growing. Sobriety is the foundation — the cleared ground upon which a meaningful life can be constructed. But the foundation is not the house.

Too many people in recovery stop at the foundation. They maintain their sobriety through the same routines, the same meetings, the same level of self-awareness they developed in their first year — and they plateau. They're sober, but they're not growing. They're alive, but they're not fully living. They've removed the substance, but they haven't replaced it with something that gives life genuine depth, purpose, and richness.

The relationship you have with yourself — what you say to yourself, about yourself, when no one else is listening — is the single most important relationship in your recovery. It predates every other relationship in your life, and it will outlast every other relationship in your life. It is the lens through which you interpret every experience, the voice that narrates your existence, and the foundation upon which every decision, every relationship, and every aspiration is built.

If that relationship is characterized by contempt, harsh criticism, unrealistic expectations, and chronic self-doubt, then sobriety alone will not produce a life worth living. You will simply be sober and miserable — which, while preferable to being drunk or high and miserable, is still a long way from the life that recovery makes possible.

The good news is that your relationship with yourself is not fixed. It was shaped by your experiences — by your family of origin, by your culture, by your addiction, by your trauma — and it can be reshaped by your conscious, deliberate effort. The self-talk patterns that developed over decades can be identified, challenged, and gradually replaced. The beliefs about yourself that were installed during your worst moments can be updated with evidence from your best moments. The internal critic that kept you small, ashamed, and stuck can be balanced with an internal voice of wisdom, compassion, and courage.

This intensive is designed for people like you — people who have done the hard work of getting sober and are now ready to do the deeper work of becoming the person they were always meant to be. It's not about maintaining sobriety. It's about using the clarity, the strength, and the self-awareness that sobriety has given you to build something extraordinary. It's about evolving — not just surviving.

Reflection Questions

1. When you think about the phrase "getting sober is not the same as growing," what is your honest reaction? Have you been growing, or have you been plateauing?

2. What does your internal voice sound like most of the time? If you had to describe its "personality," what would you say?

3. If your relationship with yourself were a relationship with another person, how would you describe it? Would you stay in that relationship?

4. What did you expect your life to look like at this point in recovery? How does the reality compare to that expectation?

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much genuine self-compassion do you practice on a daily basis? What would it take to move that number up by even one point?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Self-Compassion & Self-Worth

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

1. I treat myself with the same kindness I would offer a friend going through a hard time

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I can acknowledge my suffering without dramatizing it or dismissing it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I recognize that struggle and imperfection are part of the shared human experience
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I am able to hold my mistakes with understanding rather than contempt
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I believe I am worthy of love, respect, and good things — not because I've earned them, but because I exist
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I can comfort myself when I'm hurting without turning to substances or destructive behaviors
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I practice patience with my own process of growth and change
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I have forgiven myself — or am actively working on forgiving myself — for the harm I caused during active addiction
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Self-Compassion Letter

Writing to Yourself With the Kindness You Deserve

The Science

Dr. Kristin Neff's research shows that self-compassion activates the brain's caregiving system, releasing oxytocin and promoting emotional healing. Writing a self-compassion letter is one of the most evidence-based tools for shifting from self-criticism to self-kindness. This isn't about letting yourself off the hook — it's about holding yourself with the same understanding you'd offer someone you love.

Preparation: What Do You Need Compassion For?

1. What are you currently being hardest on yourself about? What does the Critic say about it?

2. What is the wound underneath this self-criticism? What are you really hurting about?

3. If your closest friend were going through this exact situation, what would you say to them?
(Write the actual words.)

4. What stops you from speaking to yourself with that same kindness? What feels dangerous about self-compassion?

Your Self-Compassion Letter

Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of someone who knows your full story — every failure, every shame, every regret — and loves you anyway. Not because they excuse what happened, but because they understand the full context of your humanity. Address your current struggles, acknowledge your pain, and offer the compassion, encouragement, and honest hope you need to hear.

Dear [your name], // I want you to know that I see you — all of you...

After the Letter

1. What was it like to write this letter? What emotions came up during the process?

2. Read the letter back to yourself slowly. What shifts when you receive these words?

3. What part of the letter was hardest to write? What does that tell you about where your self-compassion needs the most development?

4. How could you use this letter going forward? When would you most need to read it again?

YOUR EXERCISE

Evidence vs. Belief Inventory

Testing Your Self-Beliefs Against the Evidence of Your Recovery

The Principle

Your beliefs about yourself were formed during your worst moments. Your evidence comes from your best moments — and all the ordinary moments in between. This exercise forces a direct confrontation between what you believe about yourself and what the evidence of your recovery actually shows. Let the evidence speak.

Trustworthiness in Recovery

THE OLD BELIEF

"I can't be trusted"

List specific evidence FROM YOUR RECOVERY that contradicts this belief. Be concrete — dates, events, actions, feedback from others.

How strong is this belief now (1-10) compared to what the evidence actually shows? Is there a gap?

UPDATED BELIEF — Based on the evidence, write a more accurate statement about yourself

Track Record of Follow-Through

THE OLD BELIEF

"I always fail / I'll eventually mess this up"

List specific evidence FROM YOUR RECOVERY that contradicts this belief. Be concrete — dates, events, actions, feedback from others.

How strong is this belief now (1-10) compared to what the evidence actually shows? Is there a gap?

UPDATED BELIEF — Based on the evidence, write a more accurate statement about yourself

Demonstrated Strength & Resilience

THE OLD BELIEF

"I'm not strong enough"

List specific evidence FROM YOUR RECOVERY that contradicts this belief. Be concrete — dates, events, actions, feedback from others.

How strong is this belief now (1-10) compared to what the evidence actually shows? Is there a gap?

UPDATED BELIEF — Based on the evidence, write a more accurate statement about yourself

Worthiness & Earned Growth

THE OLD BELIEF

"I don't deserve good things"

List specific evidence FROM YOUR RECOVERY that contradicts this belief. Be concrete — dates, events, actions, feedback from others.

How strong is this belief now (1-10) compared to what the evidence actually shows? Is there a gap?

UPDATED BELIEF — Based on the evidence, write a more accurate statement about yourself

Relationship Evidence

THE OLD BELIEF

"People only tolerate me / I'm a burden"

List specific evidence FROM YOUR RECOVERY that contradicts this belief. Be concrete — dates, events, actions, feedback from others.

How strong is this belief now (1-10) compared to what the evidence actually shows? Is there a gap?

UPDATED BELIEF — Based on the evidence, write a more accurate statement about yourself

Evidence of Transformation

THE OLD BELIEF

"I'm too damaged to really change"

List specific evidence FROM YOUR RECOVERY that contradicts this belief. Be concrete — dates, events, actions, feedback from others.

How strong is this belief now (1-10) compared to what the evidence actually shows? Is there a gap?

UPDATED BELIEF — Based on the evidence, write a more accurate statement about yourself

Evidence Synthesis

1. Which old belief had the widest gap between what you believe and what the evidence shows? Why do you think that belief persists despite the evidence?

2. What was it like to write out concrete evidence of your growth? Did it feel natural or uncomfortable?

3. If a jury were presented with the evidence of your recovery, what verdict would they render about you as a person? Are you willing to accept that verdict?

4. Choose one updated belief and commit to reading it aloud to yourself every morning for one week. Which one will you choose and why?

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

The Voice Inside: Understanding Self-Talk in Recovery

Self-talk is the continuous internal narration that accompanies every moment of your waking life. It is the voice that comments on your actions, interprets your experiences, predicts your future, evaluates your worth, and tells you stories about who you are and what you're capable of.

Most people are so accustomed to this voice that they don't even recognize it as something separate from themselves — they hear it and assume it's truth, rather than recognizing it as a pattern of thought that was learned and can be changed.

For people in recovery, self-talk takes on particular significance because the addiction itself was a self-talk disorder. Active addiction is fueled by a specific set of internal narratives: "I deserve this." "I need this." "Just this once." "I can control it." "Nobody understands." "What's the point?" "I'm already broken, so what difference does it make?"

These narratives were not random — they were the voice of the addiction speaking in the first person, disguised as your own thoughts. Part of the work of early recovery is learning to recognize this voice and not obey it.

But here's what many people don't realize: the addiction voice is only one of several problematic internal voices that didn't disappear when the substance did.

There's the Critic — the voice that constantly judges, evaluates, and finds you wanting.

There's the Protector — the voice that keeps you small to keep you safe, that avoids vulnerability and intimacy because past experience has taught you that openness leads to pain.

There's the Wounded Self — the voice that carries every hurt, every rejection, every failure, and uses them as evidence that you are fundamentally damaged.

And there's the Imposter — the voice that dismisses every accomplishment, every compliment, every piece of evidence that you are growing and changing, because it can't reconcile the person you're becoming with the person you believe yourself to be.

In sustained recovery, these voices don't get louder — they get more subtle. The addiction voice may fade from a roar to a whisper, but the Critic fills the vacuum. The Protector, which served you well in early recovery by keeping you focused and cautious, can become a cage that prevents you from taking the risks that growth requires. The Wounded Self, which deserved acknowledgment and processing in early recovery, can become a permanent residence if you don't eventually learn to hold your pain with compassion rather than being defined by it.

The goal is not to silence these voices — they each carry information that matters. The goal is to develop a new voice — the Wise Self — that can listen to all of them, understand what they're trying to communicate, and choose the response that serves your growth rather than your fear.

This Wise Self is not born — it is built, deliberately and consistently, through the practices of self-awareness, self-compassion, and intentional self-talk that this intensive will guide you through.

Developing your Wise Self voice is not self-indulgence. It is recovery maintenance at the deepest level. Because if the voice inside your head is constantly tearing you down, dismissing your progress, predicting your failure, and reinforcing shame — that voice will eventually erode the foundation of your sobriety. Not today. Not tomorrow. But slowly, persistently, relentlessly.

The internal environment you create through your self-talk determines whether your recovery thrives or merely survives.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the internal voices described — the Critic, the Protector, the Wounded Self, the Imposter, the Addiction Voice — is most active in your life right now? How does it typically speak to you?

2. Can you recall a specific recent moment when your self-talk directly influenced a decision or emotional state? What did the voice say, and what happened as a result?

3. How has your self-talk changed since early recovery? Has the dominant voice shifted, or has the same voice simply gotten quieter while remaining in control?

4. What would your "Wise Self" sound like if it were fully developed? What would it say to you right now?

5. Is there a difference between what you believe about yourself and what the evidence of your recovery actually shows? What would it mean to trust the evidence more than the belief?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Self-Talk Quality

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

1. My internal voice is more critical than encouraging on most days
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I catch myself saying things to myself I would never say to someone I care about
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. When I make a mistake, my first reaction is harsh self-judgment rather than self-compassion
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I frequently compare myself to others and come up short in my own assessment
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I struggle to accept compliments because my internal voice says I don't deserve them
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. My self-talk often includes absolute words like "always," "never," "can't," or "worthless"
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I replay past failures in my mind far more than I acknowledge successes
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. My inner critic gets louder during times of stress, transition, or vulnerability
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Inner Voice Explorer

Identifying the Voices That Shape Your Self-Relationship

Why This Matters

You don't have one inner voice — you have several, each developed at different stages of your life to serve different purposes. Some protect you. Some punish you. Some guide you. Identifying which voice is speaking at any given moment is the first step to choosing which one to listen to. Tap the voices you recognize in yourself below.

Critic 8 patterns →

☐ Perfectionist ☐ Harsh Judge ☐ Catastrophizer ☐ Comparer ☐ Name-Caller ☐ Blame Artist ☐ Impossibility Thinker ☐ Disqualifier

Protector 8 patterns →

☐ Isolator ☐ People-Pleaser ☐ Deflector ☐ Over-Achiever ☐ Minimizer ☐ Intellectualizer ☐ Controller ☐ Avoider

Wounded 8 patterns →

☐ Abandoned Child ☐ Shame Carrier ☐ Unworthy One ☐ Invisible One ☐ Defective Self ☐ Imposter ☐ Chronic Apologizer ☐ Perpetual Victim

Addict Voice 8 patterns →

☐ Romanticizer ☐ Entitlement Speaker ☐ Justifier ☐ Minimizer of Harm ☐ Future Faker ☐ Grief Manipulator ☐ Boredom Amplifier ☐ Isolation Whisperer

Growth 8 patterns →

☐ Encourager ☐ Curious Observer ☐ Compassionate Witness ☐ Brave Speaker ☐ Gratitude Finder ☐ Boundary Setter ☐ Honest Assessor ☐ Patient Teacher

Wise Self 8 patterns →

☐ Perspective Taker ☐ Values Aligner ☐ Accountable One ☐ Hope Holder ☐ Forgiver ☐ Meaning Maker ☐ Acceptance Speaker ☐ Future Builder

Inner Voice Reflection

1. Which voice category (Critic, Protector, Wounded, Addict, Growth, Wise Self) is loudest in your daily life right now? Give a specific example of something it said to you recently.

2. Which specific patterns did you select? Look at the pattern — are they clustered in one or two categories, or spread across several? What does this tell you?

3. Which voice was dominant during active addiction? Which voice emerged in early recovery? Which voice is most active now? How has the shift happened?

4. Think about the Growth and Wise Self voices — which patterns in those categories do you already have access to? Which ones feel aspirational but not yet real?

5. If your Wise Self could speak to your Critic right now, what would it say? Write that conversation.

YOUR EXERCISE

Self-Talk Audit & Reframe

Catching, Challenging & Replacing Destructive Self-Talk

The Practice

For each pattern below, you'll identify a specific self-talk statement you use, examine the evidence for and against it, and create a reframed version that your Wise Self would offer. This is not positive thinking — it's honest thinking. The goal is accuracy, not optimism.

Shame-Based Self-Talk

Example: "I'm fundamentally broken / damaged / defective"

What shame-based statement do you say to yourself most frequently?

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THIS BELIEF

EVIDENCE AGAINST THIS BELIEF

✦ WISE SELF REFRAME: What would your Wise Self say instead?

Imposter Self-Talk

Example: "They'll figure out I'm not really ____" or "I don't belong here"

Where does the imposter voice show up in your recovery or your life?

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THIS BELIEF

EVIDENCE AGAINST THIS BELIEF

♦ WISE SELF REFRAME: What would your Wise Self say instead?

Catastrophic Self-Talk

Example: "If I fail at this, everything falls apart" or "One mistake and it's over"

What is the catastrophic prediction your mind makes most often?

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THIS BELIEF

EVIDENCE AGAINST THIS BELIEF

✦ WISE SELF REFRAME: What would your Wise Self say instead?

Comparison Self-Talk

Example: "Everyone else has it figured out" or "I'm so far behind"

Who do you compare yourself to, and what does the comparison voice say?

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THIS BELIEF

EVIDENCE AGAINST THIS BELIEF

✦ WISE SELF REFRAME: What would your Wise Self say instead?

Permission-Denying Self-Talk

Example: "I don't deserve ____" or "I haven't earned the right to ____"

What do you deny yourself because of your past?

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THIS BELIEF

EVIDENCE AGAINST THIS BELIEF

♦ WISE SELF REFRAME: What would your Wise Self say instead?

Reframe Summary

1. Looking at all five patterns, what is the common theme underneath your destructive self-talk? What core belief is driving all of them?

2. Which reframe felt most natural to write? Which felt most forced or difficult? What does that tell you?

3. How would your life in recovery change if you practiced these reframes daily for 30 days?

4. Write a commitment: "When I hear [specific self-talk pattern], I will pause and replace it with [specific reframe]."

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

Beyond Sobriety: The Architecture of Continued Growth

There is a concept in recovery that doesn't get discussed nearly enough: the difference between recovery maintenance and recovery growth.

Maintenance is doing what it takes to stay sober — attending meetings, calling your sponsor, avoiding triggers, managing stress, taking medication if prescribed. Maintenance is essential and non-negotiable. But maintenance alone will eventually feel like treading water. You're not drowning anymore, but you're not going anywhere either.

Growth is what happens when you use the stability of sustained recovery as a launching pad rather than a landing zone. Growth means asking yourself not just "How do I stay sober today?" but "Who am I becoming? What am I building? What does my life look like when it's not just defined by what I've survived, but by what I'm creating?"

The architecture of continued growth rests on several pillars.

The first is self-awareness — not just awareness of your triggers and cravings, which you likely developed in early recovery, but deeper awareness of your values, your strengths, your patterns, your relational dynamics, and your authentic desires. Many people in recovery have spent so long focused on what they need to avoid that they've never articulated what they're moving toward. Growth requires a destination, not just an escape route.

The second pillar is intentional identity development. In active addiction, your identity was organized around the substance — obtaining it, using it, hiding it, recovering from it. In early recovery, your identity may have shifted to being organized around not using — meetings, step work, sponsorship, recovery community. Both of these are necessary stages. But in sustained recovery, a third identity must emerge: the person you are becoming apart from the substance and apart from the absence of the substance. This is the person who has interests, passions, values, relationships, and aspirations that are genuinely their own — not reactions to addiction or recovery, but authentic expressions of who they are.

The third pillar is expanding your comfort zone. Early recovery required enormous courage — getting honest, asking for help, facing consequences, sitting with discomfort. But over time, recovery itself can become a comfort zone. The meetings feel safe. The routines feel familiar. The relationships are established. Growth requires that you keep taking calculated risks — not reckless ones, but intentional stretches beyond what feels comfortable. New relationships. New skills. New responsibilities. New vulnerabilities. These are the experiences that build the resilience, the confidence, and the self-knowledge that make sustained recovery not just sustainable, but genuinely fulfilling.

The fourth pillar is contribution. At some point in sustained recovery, the focus must shift from "What do I need?" to "What can I give?" This is not about earning worth through service — you are already worthy. It's about the psychological and spiritual reality that human beings thrive when they are connected to something larger than themselves. Sponsoring others, mentoring,

volunteering, creating, teaching, parenting with presence — these acts of contribution strengthen your recovery by giving it purpose beyond self-preservation.

The fifth pillar is integration — the ongoing work of making peace with your whole story. Not pretending the painful parts didn't happen. Not defining yourself by them either. But holding the full narrative — the addiction, the damage, the recovery, the growth — as one coherent story of a life being lived with increasing courage, awareness, and integrity. Integration means you can talk about your past without being controlled by it. You can acknowledge your vulnerabilities without being defined by them. You can celebrate your growth without denying your wounds.

This is the architecture of a life that sobriety makes possible. It doesn't build itself. It requires the same deliberate, consistent effort that getting sober required — applied now not to survival, but to flourishing.

Reflection Questions

1. Are you currently in "maintenance mode" or "growth mode" in your recovery? What evidence supports your answer?

2. If you removed addiction and recovery from your identity description, who are you? What remains? Is there enough there, or does the identity feel thin?

3. What is one specific area of your life where you have been staying in your comfort zone? What calculated risk could you take to expand it?

4. How are you contributing to others in your recovery? Is your contribution growing, stagnant, or declining?

5. Can you tell the story of your life — including the addiction and recovery — as a narrative of growth rather than a narrative of damage? What changes when you do?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Growth Orientation & Future Focus

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

1. I have a clear vision of who I want to become in the next phase of my recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I actively pursue personal growth beyond just maintaining sobriety
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I set meaningful goals that challenge me without overwhelming me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I can identify specific ways I have grown as a person since getting sober
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I approach new experiences with curiosity rather than fear
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I view setbacks and challenges as learning opportunities rather than proof of failure
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I invest time in activities that develop me as a person — not just avoid relapse
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I believe my best days are ahead of me, not behind me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Growth Edge Mapping

Identifying Where Your Next Level of Growth Lives

The Growth Edge

Your 'growth edge' is the boundary between your current comfort zone and the next level of personal development. It's the place where you feel stretched but not broken, challenged but not overwhelmed. Growth happens at this edge — not in the safe center of what you already know, and not in the panic zone of what feels impossible. This exercise maps your specific edges.

Emotional Growth

Expanding your emotional capacity, vulnerability, and expression

1. What emotion are you most comfortable with? What emotion do you still avoid or suppress?

2. What would it look like to increase your emotional range by 20%? What would become possible?

3. What is one specific emotional risk you could take in the next 30 days?

Relational Growth

Deepening authenticity and connection in relationships

1. Where are you most authentic in your relationships? Where are you still performing or hiding?

2. What relationship in your life would benefit most from you showing up more fully?

3. What is one relational risk (honest conversation, boundary setting, vulnerability) you've been avoiding?

Professional / Purposeful Growth

Expanding your contribution, competence, and impact

1. What professional or purposeful aspiration have you been postponing because it feels "too ambitious" for someone in recovery?

2. What skill or capability would you most like to develop? What stops you from starting?

3. What would "the next level" look like in your work or contribution to the world?

Spiritual / Meaning Growth

Deepening your connection to purpose and meaning

1. What gives your life meaning beyond staying sober? Is it enough, or does it need to expand?

2. What spiritual or existential question are you currently grappling with?

3. What practice or exploration would deepen your sense of meaning and purpose?

Identity Growth

Becoming more fully who you are meant to be

1. What part of yourself have you not yet given yourself permission to develop or express?

2. What would the "fullest version" of yourself look like at five years sober? Ten years?

3. What is the single biggest internal barrier to becoming that person?

Growth Action Plan

1. Looking across all five growth areas, which one is calling to you most urgently? Where does your energy want to go?

2. Choose ONE specific growth edge to focus on for the next 90 days. What is it, and why did you choose it?

3. What is the first small action you can take THIS WEEK to move toward that edge?

4. Who in your life can support you in this growth? How will you invite their support?

5. What will you use as evidence that you're growing? How will you know when you've expanded your comfort zone?

YOUR EXERCISE

Values & Vision Alignment

Aligning Who You Are With How You Live

Why Values Matter

Values are your internal compass. In active addiction, your compass was hijacked — the substance determined your direction. In recovery, you have the opportunity to recalibrate that compass and let your authentic values guide your decisions, your relationships, and your growth. Living in alignment with your values is the foundation of self-respect.

Step 1: Identify Your Core Values

Tap the values that feel most deeply important to you. Select your top 5-7 — not the values you think you should have, but the ones that genuinely move you.

☐ Honesty ☐ Courage ☐ Compassion ☐ Integrity ☐ Family ☐ Service ☐ Growth ☐ Connection ☐
☐ Faith / Spirituality ☐ Health ☐ Freedom ☐ Creativity ☐ Justice ☐ Loyalty ☐ Wisdom ☐ Adventure ☐
☐ Peace ☐ Gratitude ☐ Accountability ☐ Purpose ☐ Humility ☐ Joy ☐ Resilience ☐ Authenticity ☐
☐ Generosity ☐ Discipline ☐ Love ☐ Forgiveness

Step 2: Deepening Your Top Values

For each of your selected top values, answer these questions:

1. List your top 5 values. For each one, write one sentence about why this value matters to you personally — not in general, but in your specific life and recovery.

Explore deeply...

2. Which of your top values were violated most during active addiction? How does honoring them now feel different?

Explore deeply...

3. Which value is hardest to live consistently? What gets in the way?

Explore deeply...

Step 3: Vision Alignment

1. Describe a typical day in your life 3 years from now, lived in full alignment with your core values. What does it look like from morning to night?

2. Where is the biggest gap between your current life and that vision? What specific change would close the gap the most?

3. What decision are you currently facing where your values should be guiding the answer? What do they say?

4. Write a personal mission statement — one sentence that captures who you are, what you value, and what you're building with your recovery.

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

The Neuroscience of Self-Talk: Rewiring the Inner Voice

Your self-talk is not just psychological — it is neurological. Every thought you think activates specific neural pathways, and the thoughts you think most frequently create the strongest pathways. This is the principle of neuroplasticity applied to your inner world: the brain physically restructures itself based on what you repeatedly think.

If your most frequent self-talk is critical, shaming, and catastrophic, then the neural pathways for criticism, shame, and catastrophe are the superhighways of your brain — fast, efficient, and activated automatically. If you want to change your self-talk, you are not just changing a habit — you are literally rewiring your brain.

Research by Dr. Ethan Kross at the University of Michigan has demonstrated that self-talk operates on a neurological continuum. When people use first-person self-talk ("I'm so anxious"), they activate the brain's self-referential processing network in ways that amplify emotional distress. When the same people shifted to third-person or distanced self-talk ("Ethan is feeling anxious — what does he need right now?"), functional MRI scans showed reduced activity in the medial prefrontal cortex and amygdala — the brain regions associated with self-focused emotional processing and threat detection.

In practical terms: how you talk to yourself literally changes how intensely your brain processes the emotion.

Dr. Kristin Neff's research on self-compassion has produced complementary findings. Practicing self-compassion — speaking to yourself with the same warmth and understanding you would offer a close friend — activates the brain's caregiving system, releasing oxytocin and endorphins. This is neurologically distinct from the threat-response system activated by self-criticism, which releases cortisol and adrenaline.

In other words, when you speak to yourself with kindness, your brain responds with chemistry that promotes healing, connection, and calm. When you speak to yourself with contempt, your brain responds with chemistry that promotes fight, flight, or freeze. You are choosing your brain chemistry with every internal statement.

For people in sustained recovery, this neuroscience has specific implications.

First, the negative self-talk patterns that developed during active addiction created neural pathways that don't disappear when you get sober. The pathways of shame, self-contempt, and hopelessness were reinforced thousands of times during active use, and they remain the brain's default routes unless deliberately redirected.

Second, the recovery brain is uniquely primed for neuroplastic change. The first two years of recovery represent a period of extraordinary neural reorganization as the brain heals from the effects of substance use. This means that intentional self-talk practices during this period have amplified effects — you are literally shaping the architecture of your recovering brain.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the research on affect labeling (naming emotions reduces their intensity) and cognitive reappraisal (reframing thoughts changes their emotional impact) shows that you do not need to believe your new self-talk for it to produce neurological benefits. The act of generating compassionate self-talk, even if it feels forced or artificial at first, activates the caregiving neural networks. Over time and with repetition, the new pathways strengthen, the old pathways weaken, and the compassionate self-talk begins to feel authentic — not because you've faked yourself into believing it, but because you've built the neural infrastructure that supports it.

The practical takeaway is both empowering and demanding: your self-talk is a choice, and that choice has measurable neurological consequences. Every time you catch a critical thought and deliberately replace it with a compassionate one, you are performing a neurological intervention. Every time you practice self-compassionate self-talk — in journaling, in meditation, in conversation with your therapist or sponsor — you are building the brain pathways that will eventually make compassion your default response rather than criticism.

The brain does not care whether you feel like being kind to yourself. It responds to the practice regardless of the feeling. Do the practice, and the feeling follows.

Reflection Questions

1. Does understanding the neuroscience of self-talk change your motivation to actively work on changing your inner voice? How?

2. Think about the "superhighways" in your brain — the self-talk patterns that activate automatically and effortlessly. What are they? What do they sound like?

3. Try the distanced self-talk technique right now: instead of thinking "I feel [emotion]," think "[Your name] is feeling [emotion] — what does [he/she/they] need right now?" Does anything shift?

4. If self-compassionate self-talk produces oxytocin and self-critical self-talk produces cortisol, what chemical cocktail has your brain been swimming in? What would changing that chemistry mean for your recovery?

5. The research says the practice works even when it doesn't feel authentic. Does knowing this make it easier or harder to commit to practicing compassionate self-talk? What resistance do you notice?

YOUR EXERCISE

Daily Self-Talk Check-In

7 Days of Monitoring Your Inner Voice

The Practice

Awareness is the first step to change. For seven days, you'll check in with your self-talk at the end of each day. Over time, patterns will emerge — you'll see which voices are loudest, which situations trigger the Critic, and where your Wise Self is already showing up. Complete one entry per day.

Day 1

What was the loudest thing your inner voice said today? (Write the exact statement.)

Which voice was it? (Critic, Protector, Wounded, Addict, Growth, Wise Self)

What was the situation or trigger that activated this voice?

Did you catch the voice in real time or only in hindsight? Were you able to respond to it?

Self-compassion rating today (1 = very self-critical, 10 = deeply self-compassionate)

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

Day 2

What was the loudest thing your inner voice said today? (Write the exact statement.)

Which voice was it? (Critic, Protector, Wounded, Addict, Growth, Wise Self)

What was the situation or trigger that activated this voice?

Did you catch the voice in real time or only in hindsight? Were you able to respond to it?

Self-compassion rating today (1 = very self-critical, 10 = deeply self-compassionate)

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

Day 3

What was the loudest thing your inner voice said today? (Write the exact statement.)

Which voice was it? (Critic, Protector, Wounded, Addict, Growth, Wise Self)

What was the situation or trigger that activated this voice?

Did you catch the voice in real time or only in hindsight? Were you able to respond to it?

Self-compassion rating today (1 = very self-critical, 10 = deeply self-compassionate)

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

Day 4

What was the loudest thing your inner voice said today? (Write the exact statement.)

Which voice was it? (Critic, Protector, Wounded, Addict, Growth, Wise Self)

What was the situation or trigger that activated this voice?

Did you catch the voice in real time or only in hindsight? Were you able to respond to it?

Self-compassion rating today (1 = very self-critical, 10 = deeply self-compassionate)

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

Day 5

What was the loudest thing your inner voice said today? (Write the exact statement.)

Which voice was it? (Critic, Protector, Wounded, Addict, Growth, Wise Self)

What was the situation or trigger that activated this voice?

Did you catch the voice in real time or only in hindsight? Were you able to respond to it?

Self-compassion rating today (1 = very self-critical, 10 = deeply self-compassionate)

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

Day 6

What was the loudest thing your inner voice said today? (Write the exact statement.)

Which voice was it? (Critic, Protector, Wounded, Addict, Growth, Wise Self)

What was the situation or trigger that activated this voice?

Did you catch the voice in real time or only in hindsight? Were you able to respond to it?

Self-compassion rating today (1 = very self-critical, 10 = deeply self-compassionate)

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

Day 7

What was the loudest thing your inner voice said today? (Write the exact statement.)

Which voice was it? (Critic, Protector, Wounded, Addict, Growth, Wise Self)

What was the situation or trigger that activated this voice?

Did you catch the voice in real time or only in hindsight? Were you able to respond to it?

Self-compassion rating today (1 = very self-critical, 10 = deeply self-compassionate)

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

Week in Review

1. Looking at your 7 days of check-ins, which inner voice appeared most frequently? What does this pattern tell you?

2. Did your self-compassion rating change over the week? What influenced higher or lower days?

3. Were you able to catch the Critic in real time more often as the week progressed? What helped you notice it?

4. What was the most important insight you gained from tracking your self-talk for a full week?

5. How will you continue to monitor and redirect your self-talk going forward? What practice will you maintain?

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

Embrace, Empower, Evolve: Building the Life Recovery Makes Possible

Embrace. Empower. Evolve.

These three words are not a slogan — they are a developmental sequence. Each builds on the one before it, and together they describe the trajectory of a recovery that transcends mere sobriety and becomes a genuine transformation of self.

Embrace means acceptance — radical, unflinching acceptance of your whole story. Not just the parts you're proud of. Not just the recovery narrative that sounds good at meetings. All of it. The chaos. The damage. The shame. The loss. The decisions you can't undo and the consequences you can't escape.

Embrace also means accepting who you are right now — not the idealized version of yourself that you think you should be, but the real, complicated, imperfect, growing human being that you actually are. This is not resignation. It is the opposite. It is the recognition that you cannot grow beyond what you refuse to acknowledge. The parts of yourself that you hide, deny, or disown become the parts that control you. Embrace brings them into the light — not to celebrate them, but to integrate them.

For people in sustained recovery, Embrace often means confronting a subtle form of self-rejection that persists even in sobriety. The belief that you are fundamentally damaged. The fear that if people really knew you — your full history, your darkest thoughts, your most shameful moments — they would withdraw their love, their respect, their trust. This belief keeps you performing a version of yourself rather than being yourself. It makes recovery a mask rather than a mirror.

Embracing yourself — truly, completely, with all your history and all your humanity — is the most courageous act available to a person in recovery. It is also the most liberating.

Empower means developing the internal and external resources to build the life you want. It means moving from surviving to thriving, from reacting to creating, from being defined by your limitations to being animated by your possibilities.

Empowerment in sustained recovery looks like: trusting your own judgment again, not because you're infallible, but because you've developed the self-awareness to recognize when you need input. Setting boundaries that protect your recovery and your wellbeing without guilt or apology. Taking responsibility for your life — not just your sobriety, but your relationships, your career, your growth, your happiness.

Empowerment also means developing competence and confidence in areas that matter to you — not just recovery-related skills, but life skills, professional skills, relational skills, creative skills. Every new capability you develop is evidence that you are more than your addiction, and it builds the self-efficacy that makes continued growth feel possible rather than aspirational.

Evolve means continuous, deliberate transformation. It means that your recovery is not a static state to be maintained but a dynamic process to be cultivated. Evolution in recovery means that

the person you are at three years sober is different from the person you were at one year sober — not just older, but wiser, more compassionate, more resilient, more authentic, more capable of connection, more comfortable with uncertainty, more willing to be uncomfortable in the service of growth.

Evolution means you keep learning, keep challenging yourself, keep expanding your understanding of yourself and the world, keep developing new ways of being in relationship with others. It means you don't settle for "good enough" when extraordinary is possible.

The relationship you have with yourself is the engine of this evolution. If you speak to yourself with contempt, you will stay small. If you speak to yourself with compassion, you will find the courage to grow. If you speak to yourself with honesty — not brutal honesty, but kind honesty — you will develop the self-awareness that makes genuine change possible. If you speak to yourself with hope — not naive optimism, but grounded, evidence-based hope — you will find the motivation to keep evolving even when the work is hard.

You are not who you were. You are not yet who you will become. You are in the magnificent, messy, courageous process of becoming — and the voice inside your head is either your greatest ally or your greatest obstacle in that process.

Choose the ally. Build the ally. Become the ally.

Embrace, empower, evolve.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the three — Embrace, Empower, Evolve — feels most natural to you right now? Which feels most challenging? Why?

2. Is there a part of your story that you have not yet fully embraced — a part you still hide, minimize, or deny? What would it mean to bring it into the light?

3. In what specific areas of your life do you feel empowered? In what areas do you still feel powerless or dependent? What would shifting the balance require?

4. Describe the person you are becoming. Not the person you think you should be, but the person you feel yourself evolving into. What does that person look like?

5. Write a statement to yourself — from your Wise Self to your Whole Self — that embraces your full story, empowers your present, and commits to your continued evolution.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Recovery Identity Integration

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

1. I sometimes struggle to see myself as anything beyond "a person in recovery"

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I carry shame about my past that interferes with how I see myself today

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have difficulty trusting my own judgment because of decisions I made during active addiction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I feel like I'm behind in life compared to people who didn't struggle with addiction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. My identity feels uncertain — I know who I was in addiction but I'm still discovering who I am in recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I worry that people will define me by my worst moments rather than my growth

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have difficulty owning my strengths and accomplishments without qualifying them with "but I'm also an addict"

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I sometimes feel like a fraud — like my recovery self isn't the "real me"

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Resilience & Adaptive Capacity

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

1. When I face a challenge, I trust my ability to figure it out rather than catastrophizing
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I have developed healthy coping strategies that I actually use when stressed
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I can tolerate discomfort and uncertainty without needing to immediately fix or escape it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I recover from setbacks more quickly than I did earlier in my recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I can ask for help without seeing it as weakness
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I have a support network I actively lean on when I need it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I use what I've learned from past difficulties to navigate current challenges
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I maintain my recovery practices even when life feels manageable and routine
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Recovery Identity Map

Who Are You Beyond "A Person in Recovery"?

Purpose

In active addiction, your identity revolved around the substance. In early recovery, your identity may have shifted to revolve around not using. This exercise helps you build a rich, multi-dimensional identity that includes recovery but is not limited by it. You are so much more than your diagnosis.

Identity in Active Addiction

1. How did you see yourself during active addiction? What words would you have used to describe yourself?

Be honest about who you were...

2. What roles did you play? (The life of the party, the loner, the caretaker, the rebel, the ghost?)
How did the substance support those roles?

Be honest about who you were...

3. What parts of yourself did you lose, abandon, or suppress during active use?

Be honest about who you were...

Identity in Early Recovery

1. How did your sense of self change in the first year of recovery? What new identity emerged?

2. What recovery-specific roles did you take on? (Meeting regular, sponsor seeker, step worker, newcomer?) How did these shape your self-concept?

3. What did you discover about yourself that you didn't know during active addiction?

Identity Now: The Multi-Dimensional You

For each dimension below, describe who you are — not who you wish you were or think you should be, but who you actually are right now.

As a Person in Recovery

What kind of recovery person are you? What does your recovery look like now compared to year one?

As a Friend / Family Member

What kind of friend, partner, parent, sibling, child are you now?

As a Professional / Contributor

What is your relationship with work, purpose, contribution?

As a Learner / Grower

What are you curious about? What skills are you developing?

As a Physical Being

How do you relate to your body, health, physical self?

As a Spiritual / Meaning-Seeking Being

What gives your life meaning beyond sobriety?

As a Creative / Expressive Being

How do you express yourself? What brings you joy or flow?

Identity Integration

1. Looking at all seven dimensions, where is your identity richest? Where is it thinnest? What does this tell you about where to invest your growth energy?

2. Can you hold your recovery identity AND your other identities simultaneously without one diminishing the others?

3. Write a 3-5 sentence "identity statement" — not an elevator pitch, but an honest declaration of who you are becoming. Include but don't lead with recovery.

4. What would it mean to live from this fuller identity every day? What specific change would you notice?

YOUR EXERCISE

Resilience Inventory

Documenting the Strength You've Already Proven

Why This Matters

Your inner Critic has a short memory for your victories and a photographic memory for your failures. This inventory forces a comprehensive accounting of the strength, courage, and

resilience you have ALREADY demonstrated in your recovery. This is not who you wish you were — this is who you have proven yourself to be.

Getting Sober

What did it take to stop using? What internal resources did you draw on?

What strength, quality, or capacity does this demonstrate about you?

Facing Consequences

How did you face the wreckage of active addiction? Legal issues, broken relationships, financial damage, health consequences?

What strength, quality, or capacity does this demonstrate about you?

Asking for Help

When did you first admit you needed help? What did that require of you?

What strength, quality, or capacity does this demonstrate about you?

Rebuilding Trust

How have you worked to rebuild trust with people you harmed? What has that required?

What strength, quality, or capacity does this demonstrate about you?

Sitting with Discomfort

When was a time in recovery you had to sit with intense discomfort without using? What got you through?

What strength, quality, or capacity does this demonstrate about you?

Maintaining Recovery During Crisis

What is the hardest thing that has happened to you while sober? How did you stay sober through it?

What strength, quality, or capacity does this demonstrate about you?

Changing Lifelong Patterns

What deeply ingrained pattern have you changed in recovery? How did you do it?

What strength, quality, or capacity does this demonstrate about you?

Showing Up Consistently

What does your commitment to showing up — to meetings, to treatment, to recovery practices — demonstrate about who you are?

What strength, quality, or capacity does this demonstrate about you?

Resilience Synthesis

1. Looking at all eight areas, what pattern of strength emerges? What are you consistently good at, even when things are hard?

2. Which resilience surprised you the most when you documented it? Why hadn't you given yourself credit for it before?

3. If you could speak to yourself on the day you entered recovery and show them this inventory, what would they think? What would they feel?

4. Write a "Resilience Statement" — a declaration of the strength your recovery has proven you possess. Start with "I am someone who..."

YOUR EXERCISE

Future Self Blueprint

Designing the Person You Are Becoming

The Blueprint Principle

Dr. Hal Hershfield's research shows that people who have a vivid, detailed connection to their future self make better decisions in the present. Your future self is not a fantasy — it's a blueprint. The more clearly you can see who you're becoming, the more your daily choices will align with that vision. This exercise makes the blueprint concrete.

Three Years From Now

Imagine yourself three years from now, having continued to grow, heal, and evolve in your recovery. Answer each question with as much specific detail as possible.

What does your daily life look like? Walk through a typical day from morning to night.

What is your relationship with yourself like? What does your inner voice sound like?

What are your most important relationships like? How are you showing up for the people you love?

What are you doing with your professional life or your sense of purpose?

What are you most proud of having accomplished or become?

What does your recovery practice look like? How has it evolved?

What challenge have you overcome that currently feels impossible?

Building the Bridge: From Here to There

1. What is the single most important internal shift you need to make to become this future self? (Not external circumstances — internal change.)

2. What self-talk pattern from the present must change for this future to be possible? What must replace it?

3. What specific habit, practice, or behavior — if you started today and maintained it consistently — would contribute most to becoming this person?

4. What are you currently tolerating in your life that your future self would not tolerate? What needs to change?

5. What support, resource, or relationship do you need to cultivate to bridge the gap between who you are and who you're becoming?

Letter From Your Future Self

Write a letter from your future self — three years from now — to the person you are today. Your future self has achieved the growth you've described above. They are writing to encourage, advise, and guide you through the journey ahead. What do they want you to know?

Dear present me, // I'm writing to you from three years in the future, and there's so much I want you to know...

The Commitment

1. Based on everything you've explored in this intensive — the readings, the assessment, and all ten exercises — what is the single most important commitment you are making to your relationship with yourself?

2. How will you hold yourself accountable to this commitment? Who will you share it with?

3. What will you do when the old self-talk patterns return (and they will)? What is your plan for responding to the Critic with the Wise Self?

4. Complete this sentence: "My relationship with myself is the foundation of everything I am building, and I commit to..."
