

The Injustice Collector's Burden

Deep Dives · The Recovery Files

Recognizing & Releasing the Resentment That Drives Relapse
Carrying

Resentments collect, weight grows · Released · Grievances released, recovery flows

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 4 · READING

What Is the Injustice Collector?

In the tapestry of human psychology, there exists a thread that, when pulled too tightly, can unravel the fabric of personal well-being and the fabric of recovery. This thread belongs to the injustice collector — an individual whose perception of the world is filtered through a lens of perpetual grievance, where the primary story is one of being wronged, overlooked, disrespected, and treated unfairly.

Imagine walking through life with an invisible backpack. For most people, this backpack carries the ordinary weight of daily experience — some heavy, some light, but generally manageable. For the injustice collector, this backpack is fundamentally different. It is a repository of perceived wrongs, criticisms, oversights, and disrespects, each carefully preserved, frequently re-examined, and weighted with disproportionate significance. The backpack never empties. It only grows heavier.

The injustice collector does not simply experience life's inevitable bumps and bruises. Each momentary slight, each unintentional oversight, each ambiguous comment is experienced as a deliberate attack on their personhood. These experiences are not merely noted — they are meticulously cataloged, analyzed, and added to the ever-growing collection.

For people in substance use disorder recovery, injustice collecting is not a personality quirk or a minor psychological trait — it is a significant relapse risk factor, a barrier to authentic relationship, and often one of the deepest roots of the substance use itself. The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous identified resentment as "the number one offender" — the single most common cause of relapse and the primary barrier to spiritual growth.

Paradoxically, there is a comfort in the weight of the injustice backpack. It becomes part of the collector's identity — shaping their narrative, casting them as the perpetual underdog, the misunderstood hero in a world of villains. To put down this backpack would be to question the very story they have woven about their place in the world.

The invitation in this intensive is not to deny that you have been genuinely wronged — because you may have been. The invitation is to examine whether the weight you are carrying is serving your recovery or preventing it, and to begin the difficult but liberating process of setting it down.

Reflection Questions

1. Does the description of the "injustice collector" resonate with your own experience? Which parts feel most accurate?

2. When you imagine your "injustice backpack," what are the heaviest items in it? Who put them there, and how long have you been carrying them?

3. How has injustice collecting — holding onto resentments and grievances — directly contributed to your substance use?

4. The text describes the injustice backpack as providing "comfort" — as a source of identity. Does that ring true for you? What would you lose if you set it down?

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how heavily are you currently carrying resentments and grievances? What would a "1" (freedom from resentment) actually feel like?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Grievance Accumulation Patterns

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

1. I have a mental catalog of wrongs done to me that I can recall in detail, even from years ago

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. When someone new hurts me, I connect it to a long list of similar past injuries

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I find it difficult to "let things go" — I hold onto perceived slights long after the incident

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. When I feel wronged, I replay the situation repeatedly in my mind, adding details over time

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I have carried resentments against specific people for months or years without resolution

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. My backpack of grievances has grown heavier throughout my life, not lighter

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I find myself bringing up old hurts during current conflicts, even when they happened long ago

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I believe the injustices I have experienced have permanently shaped who I am in a negative way

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

The Backpack Inventory

Cataloging What You Are Carrying

Why This Matters

You cannot set down what you haven't named. This inventory helps you identify exactly what is in your injustice backpack — who put it there, how long you've been carrying it, and how heavy it actually is.

Family of Origin

Examples: Parents, siblings, grandparents, childhood caregivers

What grievances are you carrying from this area?

How long have you been carrying the heaviest item? What has it cost you?

On a scale of 1-10, how much emotional weight does this category add to your backpack?

Romantic Relationships

Examples: Partners, ex-spouses, dating relationships

What grievances are you carrying from this area?

How long have you been carrying the heaviest item? What has it cost you?

On a scale of 1-10, how much emotional weight does this category add to your backpack?

Friendships

Examples: Close friends, acquaintances, social groups

What grievances are you carrying from this area?

How long have you been carrying the heaviest item? What has it cost you?

On a scale of 1-10, how much emotional weight does this category add to your backpack?

Work & Career

Examples: Employers, supervisors, coworkers, professional setbacks

What grievances are you carrying from this area?

How long have you been carrying the heaviest item? What has it cost you?

On a scale of 1-10, how much emotional weight does this category add to your backpack?

Legal System & Institutions

Examples: Courts, police, government agencies

What grievances are you carrying from this area?

How long have you been carrying the heaviest item? What has it cost you?

On a scale of 1-10, how much emotional weight does this category add to your backpack?

Recovery Community

Examples: Treatment staff, sponsors, recovery peers, programs

What grievances are you carrying from this area?

How long have you been carrying the heaviest item? What has it cost you?

On a scale of 1-10, how much emotional weight does this category add to your backpack?

Myself

Examples: Things you can't forgive yourself for; self-directed injustice

What grievances are you carrying from this area?

How long have you been carrying the heaviest item? What has it cost you?

On a scale of 1-10, how much emotional weight does this category add to your backpack?

Other Sources

Examples: Society, culture, religion, fate, circumstances

What grievances are you carrying from this area?

How long have you been carrying the heaviest item? What has it cost you?

On a scale of 1-10, how much emotional weight does this category add to your backpack?

Backpack Inventory Summary

1. After completing this inventory, which category contains your heaviest item? How long have you been carrying it?

2. Are there any grievances on this list that, upon honest reflection, you played a significant role in creating?

3. Which items on this list feel "permanent" — as if you could never let them go? What does that permanence cost you daily?

4. If you could remove just one item from your backpack this week, what would it be? What would releasing it require?

5. Write a brief statement about the total weight you have been carrying. What has this weight prevented you from doing, being, or becoming?

YOUR EXERCISE

The Magnification Meter

Examining How You Interpret Ambiguous Situations

The Magnification Pattern

Injustice collectors consistently interpret ambiguous situations in the most threatening, most malicious way possible — then experience the magnified interpretation as reality. Your task is to honestly identify which interpretation you typically default to, and why.

A colleague makes a brief critical comment about your work

BALANCED INTERPRETATION

Useful feedback from someone who noticed something worth improving

INJUSTICE COLLECTOR VIEW

Proof they have always disliked you and are trying to undermine your standing

Which interpretation is closest to your typical first response?

What makes the injustice-collector view feel more "true"?

A friend cancels plans at the last minute

BALANCED INTERPRETATION

Something genuinely came up in their life — it happens to everyone sometimes

INJUSTICE COLLECTOR VIEW

They don't value your time, your friendship means nothing to them

Which interpretation is closest to your typical first response?

What makes the injustice-collector view feel more "true"?

Someone else gets the promotion you wanted**BALANCED INTERPRETATION**

They may have had qualities or experience that fit the role better

INJUSTICE COLLECTOR VIEW

You were deliberately passed over; the system is rigged against you

Which interpretation is closest to your typical first response?

What makes the injustice-collector view feel more "true"?

Your sponsor challenges something you said about a resentment**BALANCED INTERPRETATION**

They are trying to help you see your own part so you can grow in recovery

INJUSTICE COLLECTOR VIEW

They're taking the other person's side; they don't understand what you've been through

Which interpretation is closest to your typical first response?

What makes the injustice-collector view feel more "true"?

You are not included in a meeting you expected to attend

BALANCED INTERPRETATION

An oversight, a scheduling decision, or a meeting that wasn't relevant to your role

INJUSTICE COLLECTOR VIEW

You are being deliberately excluded, marginalized, and pushed out

Which interpretation is closest to your typical first response?

What makes the injustice-collector view feel more "true"?

Someone forgets to acknowledge your birthday

BALANCED INTERPRETATION

Life is busy; people forget; it doesn't reflect how they feel about you

INJUSTICE COLLECTOR VIEW

Final proof that you don't matter, that no one genuinely cares about you

Which interpretation is closest to your typical first response?

What makes the injustice-collector view feel more "true"?

Magnification Meter Summary

1. Across all six scenarios, how often did you identify more with the injustice-collector interpretation?

2. What is the "payoff" of the injustice-collector interpretation — what does it give you that the balanced interpretation doesn't?

3. When you imagine consistently choosing the balanced interpretation, what emotion comes up? Relief? Loss? Fear?

4. Choose one scenario where you want to practice the balanced interpretation in your real life. What will you do differently?

PART 2 OF 4 · READING

The Roots: Why We Collect Grievances

People do not become injustice collectors because they are bad, broken, or deliberately destructive. They develop these patterns for understandable reasons, rooted in real experiences and learned adaptations. Understanding why you collect injustices is not about making excuses — it is about making the unconscious conscious so that you can begin to choose differently.

Childhood experiences are among the most powerful roots of injustice collecting. Children who actually experienced unfair treatment — chronic criticism, favoritism between siblings, scapegoating, parental inconsistency, abuse, or neglect — develop a finely tuned radar for injustice because it was adaptive in their original environment. The tragedy is that this skill, so necessary in childhood, often overgeneralizes in adulthood.

Trauma shapes injustice collecting in profound ways. When the nervous system has been overwhelmed by experiences of genuine violation — violence, betrayal, abuse, exploitation — it develops hypervigilance as a protective mechanism. Injustice collecting is, in many cases, hypervigilance applied to the social world.

Cognitive biases play a significant role. Negativity bias — the tendency to give more weight to negative experiences than to equivalent positive ones — is a universal human trait that injustice collectors experience in an amplified form. Confirmation bias leads them to notice and remember experiences that confirm their belief that they are unfairly treated, while discounting evidence to the contrary.

Cultural and family-system factors add important layers. Some families nurture grievances as a form of cohesion — the shared enemy that binds the family together. Some communities teach that forgiveness is weakness and that holding grudges is a form of strength and loyalty.

Understanding these roots does not excuse the damage that injustice collecting causes to yourself and to your relationships. But it transforms a character defect into a comprehensible human adaptation — one that made sense once, and that you now have the power to change.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the roots described here — childhood experiences, trauma, cognitive biases, family/cultural factors — feel most relevant to your own injustice collecting?

2. Can you identify a time when your hypervigilance for injustice was genuinely adaptive? Can you also identify a time when it misfired?

3. How did your family of origin handle grievances? Were grudges normalized? Was forgiveness modeled?

4. What cognitive biases do you recognize in your own pattern?

5. If your injustice collecting began as an adaptation to real experiences, what would it mean to honor the original wound while releasing the ongoing pattern?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Cognitive Distortions & Interpretation Bias

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

1. I frequently interpret neutral or ambiguous actions by others as intentional attacks or disrespect

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. When something goes wrong, my first instinct is to look for who is to blame rather than what happened

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I assume that when people whisper or exclude me, they are likely talking negatively about me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I tend to assign malicious intent to accidents, oversights, or misunderstandings

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. A small slight or criticism can color my entire perception of a person permanently

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I often feel that I am treated more unfairly than other people in the same situations

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. When I receive constructive criticism, I typically experience it as a personal attack

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. My internal narrative frequently casts me as the wronged party and others as perpetrators

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Roots Excavation

Where Did Your Injustice Collecting Begin?

Making the Unconscious Conscious

You don't heal what you can't see. This exercise excavates the origins of your injustice collecting — the experiences, messages, and adaptations that created the pattern.

Childhood Messages About Fairness

What did you learn growing up about fairness, justice, and what you were owed?

Your honest response:

How does this root show up in your current recovery?

Family Grievance Culture

How did your family system handle resentments? Were grudges modeled and normalized?

Your honest response:

How does this root show up in your current recovery?

Genuine Injustices Experienced

What real wrongs were done to you — abuse, neglect, betrayal, exploitation?

Your honest response:

How does this root show up in your current recovery?

Trauma & Hypervigilance

Has trauma activated a "stay alert for threats" response in your nervous system?

Your honest response:

How does this root show up in your current recovery?

Cultural & Community Factors

What cultural, ethnic, professional, or community values shaped your relationship with grievance?

Your honest response:

How does this root show up in your current recovery?

Identity Investment in Being Wronged

When did being "the one who has been wronged" become part of your identity?

Your honest response:

How does this root show up in your current recovery?

Roots Excavation Summary

1. Which root feels most central to your injustice collecting? How early did it take hold?

2. Can you feel compassion for the younger version of yourself who needed this protection? Write what you would tell that younger person now.

3. Now that you can see the roots, what specific recovery action follows this insight?

4. Write a letter to the person or experience that planted the deepest root of your injustice collecting.

YOUR EXERCISE

Cognitive Reframe Workshop

Challenging and Revising the Thought Patterns That Fuel Resentment

The Power of Reframing

Cognitive-behavioral therapy demonstrates that the thoughts we have about events — not the events themselves — primarily determine our emotional responses. By examining and reframing the automatic thoughts that feed injustice collecting, we can reduce the emotional charge of grievances.

"They did that on purpose to hurt me"

REFRAME QUESTION

Is it possible they were distracted, thoughtless, or dealing with their own issues — rather than deliberately targeting me?

Do you recognize this thought in yourself? Describe a specific recent situation.

Write your own reframed version — one that is both more accurate AND more useful to your recovery.

"I am always being treated unfairly"

REFRAME QUESTION

Can I identify three recent situations where I was treated well or fairly? What does the full picture actually look like?

Do you recognize this thought in yourself? Describe a specific recent situation.

Write your own reframed version — one that is both more accurate AND more useful to your recovery.

"They never respected me"

REFRAME QUESTION

Is "never" accurate? Can I identify even one instance of genuine respect from this person?

Do you recognize this thought in yourself? Describe a specific recent situation.

Write your own reframed version — one that is both more accurate AND more useful to your recovery.

"Nobody cares about what happens to me"

REFRAME QUESTION

Who has shown care for me recently, even in small ways? Am I able to receive it, or do I discount it?

Do you recognize this thought in yourself? Describe a specific recent situation.

Write your own reframed version — one that is both more accurate AND more useful to your recovery.

"If I forgive, I am saying what they did was okay"

REFRAME QUESTION

Forgiveness means I choose to stop poisoning myself with this resentment — it says nothing about approving their behavior.

Do you recognize this thought in yourself? Describe a specific recent situation.

Write your own reframed version — one that is both more accurate AND more useful to your recovery.

"I deserve better than what I always receive"

REFRAME QUESTION

What role have my own choices and patterns played in the situations I'm dissatisfied with?

Do you recognize this thought in yourself? Describe a specific recent situation.

Write your own reframed version — one that is both more accurate AND more useful to your recovery.

"People always take advantage of me"

REFRAME QUESTION

In what situations have I allowed or enabled the dynamic I resent? What boundaries would change the outcome?

Do you recognize this thought in yourself? Describe a specific recent situation.

Write your own reframed version — one that is both more accurate AND more useful to your recovery.

"The world is unfair and I always get the worst of it"**REFRAME QUESTION**

Unfairness is real and universal — not uniquely targeted at me. How might others see my situation differently?

Do you recognize this thought in yourself? Describe a specific recent situation.

Write your own reframed version — one that is both more accurate AND more useful to your recovery.

Reframe Workshop Summary

1. Which of the eight automatic thoughts appears most frequently in your daily experience?

2. What was the most difficult reframe for you to accept? Is it logical, emotional, or identity resistance?

3. Describe a specific situation in your recovery right now where applying a cognitive reframe would change your response.

4. Write a personal "reframe reminder" — a short statement you could say to yourself when an injustice-collecting thought arises.

PART 3 OF 4 · READING

The Weight: How Injustice Collecting Damages Recovery

The injustice backpack is not just uncomfortable — it is actively toxic to recovery. The most direct connection is between resentment and relapse. Twelve-step literature has long identified resentment as the number one cause of relapse, and clinical research has validated this observation consistently.

When you are preoccupied with how others have wronged you, your nervous system remains in a chronic state of threat activation. This chronic stress state increases craving, decreases distress tolerance, depletes the executive function resources needed to make recovery-aligned decisions, and undermines the motivation to do the hard work of recovery.

Injustice collecting also sabotages the internal work that recovery requires. Step 4 asks you to take a "searching and fearless moral inventory" of yourself. The injustice collector approaches this inventory facing outward, cataloging the wrongs others have done to them, rather than inward, examining their own patterns. Step 9 asks you to make direct amends to people you have harmed. The injustice collector's mental accounting system keeps a detailed ledger of what others owe them but minimizes or denies what they owe others.

The mental health toll is significant and often underestimated. Chronic resentment is physiologically similar to chronic stress — it produces sustained cortisol elevation, impairs immune function, disrupts sleep, and is associated with increased risk of anxiety, depression, and cardiovascular disease. Research on forgiveness consistently shows that the act of forgiving produces immediate and measurable improvements in physical and psychological health. The injustice backpack is literally making you sick.

The good news is that the science of forgiveness, the tools of cognitive-behavioral therapy, the wisdom of recovery's step work, and the transformative power of accountability all point toward the same possibility: the backpack can be set down.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you experienced a direct connection between a specific resentment and a relapse or near-relapse?

2. When you have done step work, have you found yourself focusing more on what others owe you than on your own patterns?

3. What relationships have been most damaged by your injustice collecting?

4. Where do you feel your resentments in your body — in your gut? Your chest? Your jaw?

5. What would your life look like if you were able to put down the most significant resentments you are currently carrying?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Relational & Interpersonal Impact

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

1. People close to me have told me I am "too sensitive" or that I hold grudges

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. My relationships are frequently damaged or ended because of accumulated grievances

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I struggle to forgive, even when the other person has acknowledged wrongdoing

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. Others sometimes feel like they are "walking on eggshells" around me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I have pushed away people who genuinely cared about me because of perceived slights

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. My resentments and grudges have created significant conflict in my family or close relationships

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I struggle to give people "the benefit of the doubt" — I tend to assume the worst

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. My perceived injustices have contributed directly to conflict with authority figures

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Impact on Recovery & Substance Use

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

1. Resentment, anger, or feelings of being treated unfairly have contributed to my substance use

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have relapsed or come close to relapsing specifically because of a perceived injustice

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I struggle to fully engage in recovery because I feel the world — or people in it — owe me something

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. My sense of being wronged has made it difficult to take responsibility for my own role in problems

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I resist recovery suggestions when they feel like others are telling me what to do

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I have justified my substance use to myself by pointing to others who have wronged me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. Resentment occupies significant mental and emotional energy that interferes with my recovery work

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. My injustice collecting has made it difficult to trust sponsors, counselors, or recovery community members

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Impact Mapping

Who Has Been Affected by Your Injustice Collecting?

Accountability Through Empathy

Injustice collectors are often so focused on how others have affected them that they lose sight of how their own patterns have affected the people around them.

Intimate Partner / Spouse

How has your injustice collecting specifically affected this relationship?

If this person could speak completely honestly, what would they say about how your grievance patterns have affected them?

What would need to change in your behavior for this relationship to feel safer?

Children / Family You Parent

How has your injustice collecting specifically affected this relationship?

If this person could speak completely honestly, what would they say about how your grievance patterns have affected them?

What would need to change in your behavior for this relationship to feel safer?

Parents / Family of Origin

How has your injustice collecting specifically affected this relationship?

If this person could speak completely honestly, what would they say about how your grievance patterns have affected them?

What would need to change in your behavior for this relationship to feel safer?

Close Friends

How has your injustice collecting specifically affected this relationship?

If this person could speak completely honestly, what would they say about how your grievance patterns have affected them?

What would need to change in your behavior for this relationship to feel safer?

Coworkers / Colleagues

How has your injustice collecting specifically affected this relationship?

If this person could speak completely honestly, what would they say about how your grievance patterns have affected them?

What would need to change in your behavior for this relationship to feel safer?

Recovery Community / Sponsor

How has your injustice collecting specifically affected this relationship?

If this person could speak completely honestly, what would they say about how your grievance patterns have affected them?

What would need to change in your behavior for this relationship to feel safer?

Yourself — Your Inner Life

How has your injustice collecting specifically affected this relationship?

If this person could speak completely honestly, what would they say about how your grievance patterns have affected them?

What would need to change in your behavior for this relationship to feel safer?

Impact Map Summary

1. Which relationship has been most damaged by your injustice collecting? What is the most important thing you could do to begin repairing it?

2. What was it like to genuinely consider how your patterns have affected others? What emotion came up?

3. In what ways has your injustice collecting damaged your relationship with yourself?

4. Write a brief accountability statement acknowledging the impact of your injustice collecting on the most affected person in this map.

YOUR EXERCISE

Recovery Connection Map

How Injustice Collecting Directly Fuels Relapse & Recovery Barriers

The Connection

Every major recovery challenge has a potential injustice-collecting dimension. When the grievance underneath a recovery challenge is named and worked, the challenge becomes more manageable.

Relapse & Near-Relapse

GRIEVANCE DIMENSION

Resentment at a specific person or situation; sense of being treated unfairly by life

RECOVERY RESPONSE

Naming the resentment reduces its power to drive using; "I'm not going to let this person take my sobriety"

Have you experienced this challenge in YOUR recovery? What resentment was underneath it?

What would it look like to use the Recovery Response? What concrete action could you take?

Resistance to Step Work

GRIEVANCE DIMENSION

Anger at being asked to examine my own role; sense that inventory is yet another unfair burden

RECOVERY RESPONSE

Recognizing that Step 4 is not an accusation but a liberation — naming what I carry so I can set it down

Have you experienced this challenge in YOUR recovery? What resentment was underneath it?

What would it look like to use the Recovery Response? What concrete action could you take?

Difficulty Making Amends

GRIEVANCE DIMENSION

Belief that others owe ME amends first; unwillingness to make amends if the other person hasn't acknowledged their part

RECOVERY RESPONSE

Decoupling my amends from their apology — my amends is about my recovery, not their response

Have you experienced this challenge in YOUR recovery? What resentment was underneath it?

What would it look like to use the Recovery Response? What concrete action could you take?

Trust Issues with Sponsors / Counselors

GRIEVANCE DIMENSION

Interpreting recovery guidance as judgment or control; seeing helpers as adding to the injustice list

RECOVERY RESPONSE

Recognizing the projection — testing whether this person is actually safe before filing them in the injustice archive

Have you experienced this challenge in YOUR recovery? What resentment was underneath it?

What would it look like to use the Recovery Response? What concrete action could you take?

Anger Outbursts in Recovery Settings

GRIEVANCE DIMENSION

A perceived slight triggering accumulated backpack weight; small current injustice carrying all historical weight

RECOVERY RESPONSE

Pausing before responding: "Is this about now, or about everything? What is the appropriate response to this specific moment?"

Have you experienced this challenge in YOUR recovery? What resentment was underneath it?

What would it look like to use the Recovery Response? What concrete action could you take?

Isolation & Withdrawal from Support

GRIEVANCE DIMENSION

Deciding the recovery community has let me down; pulling away after a perceived injustice

RECOVERY RESPONSE

Naming the perceived injustice to the group rather than disappearing; staying connected even when it's hard

Have you experienced this challenge in YOUR recovery? What resentment was underneath it?

What would it look like to use the Recovery Response? What concrete action could you take?

Chronic Low-Grade Agitation

GRIEVANCE DIMENSION

Carrying so much accumulated resentment that the nervous system never reaches baseline

RECOVERY RESPONSE

Daily check-in practice reduces the accumulated load; gratitude work directly counterbalances the negativity bias

Have you experienced this challenge in YOUR recovery? What resentment was underneath it?

What would it look like to use the Recovery Response? What concrete action could you take?

Difficulty Finding Meaning in Recovery

GRIEVANCE DIMENSION

Sense that recovery is unfair — "Why do I have to work so hard when others don't?"

RECOVERY RESPONSE

Reframing: recovery is not punishment for being wronged; it is the path to the life that resentment has been blocking

Have you experienced this challenge in YOUR recovery? What resentment was underneath it?

What would it look like to use the Recovery Response? What concrete action could you take?

Your Personal Recovery Connection Map

1. Which recovery challenge from this map is most active in your life right now?

2. What is the most common way that injustice collecting manifests as a recovery obstacle for you?

3. How would your recovery change if you could identify and address the grievance dimension of challenges in real time?

4. Write a commitment statement: "When I notice [specific recovery challenge], I will look for the resentment underneath it and address it by [specific action]."

PART 4 OF 4 · READING

Setting Down the Backpack: The Path to Grievance Freedom

Setting down the injustice backpack is one of the most counterintuitive and most liberating acts available in recovery. It feels counterintuitive because holding onto grievances can feel like justice — like the appropriate response to real wrong.

Forgiveness is not approval. Releasing a resentment does not mean that what happened was acceptable. Forgiveness means choosing to stop allowing the wrong — and the wrongdoer — to occupy real estate in your mind and body at a cost to your own well-being. "Resentment is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." Forgiveness is choosing to stop drinking the poison.

Forgiveness also does not require contact or reconciliation. You can release a resentment against someone who is dead. You can let go of a grievance against someone who has never apologized and never will. Forgiveness is an internal act — a reconfiguration of your relationship with your own history.

The path to grievance release begins with radical honesty about your own role. When you can see your own part in a situation, you shift from being a passive victim of circumstances to being an active participant in your own story. That shift from victim to actor is not a demotion. It is an enormous promotion in personal power.

Accountability is the twin of forgiveness. As you release what others owe you, you become newly available to examine what you owe others — the genuine amends, the direct harms, the ways your own patterns have injured the people in your life.

Finally, setting down the backpack requires the development of a new identity that does not depend on grievance for its narrative structure. The identity that waits on the other side — the person who has survived real wounds and chosen freedom over resentment — is far more powerful, far more authentic, and far more capable of building the recovery life you actually want.

Reflection Questions

1. What does "forgiveness" mean to you right now? Does the reframing here — that forgiveness is for you, not for the person who hurt you — change anything?

2. What is the single resentment that is costing you the most in your recovery right now? What would it look like to begin releasing it?

3. When you honestly examine a major grievance in your life, what is your own role in that situation?

4. Who do you owe genuine amends to? What is stopping you from beginning that process?

5. Write a brief description of the person you would be if you successfully set down your injustice backpack. What becomes possible?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Recovery Strengths & Perspective Capacity

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

1. I am developing the ability to consider another person's perspective when conflict occurs

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have at least one person I can talk to honestly about my resentments without them escalating

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I am beginning to recognize the connection between my resentments and my substance use

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I can acknowledge my own role in some conflicts, rather than always placing blame externally

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I have experienced moments of genuine forgiveness that brought me relief rather than defeat

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am developing the ability to distinguish between intentional harm and unintentional hurt

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. My recovery is teaching me that holding resentments hurts me more than the person I resent

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I believe it is possible for me to put down the weight of past grievances and find freedom

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

The Other Side of the Story

Developing Perspective-Taking as a Recovery Skill

Two Versions of Every Story

Every conflict and every perceived injustice has at least two sides. The injustice collector knows their own side in extraordinary detail. What they rarely examine is the other person's experience of the same events.

Your Biggest Current Resentment

Describe the situation from your perspective.

Now write the other person's version — as generously and honestly as you can.

What part of their experience creates any movement in your level of resentment?

What is YOUR honest role in this situation?

A Significant Family Conflict

Describe the situation from your perspective.

Now write the other person's version — as generously and honestly as you can.

What part of their experience creates any movement in your level of resentment?

What is YOUR honest role in this situation?

A Workplace or Professional Grievance

Describe the situation from your perspective.

Now write the other person's version — as generously and honestly as you can.

What part of their experience creates any movement in your level of resentment?

What is YOUR honest role in this situation?

A Conflict Within Your Recovery Community

Describe the situation from your perspective.

Now write the other person's version — as generously and honestly as you can.

What part of their experience creates any movement in your level of resentment?

What is YOUR honest role in this situation?

Perspective-Taking Summary

1. Which of the four perspective-taking exercises was most difficult? Why?

2. Did imagining the other person's experience create any shift in your level of resentment?

3. What is the most honest thing this exercise revealed about your own role?

4. Write a single sentence that honestly captures the other person's experience in the conflict you resent most.

YOUR EXERCISE

Forgiveness & Letting Go Practice

Choosing Freedom Over Resentment

Forgiveness Is for You

Forgiveness is not a gift to the person who hurt you. It is the decision to stop allowing their action to continue occupying space in your mind, body, and recovery. You release the poison you have been carrying.

Step 1: Clearing Misconceptions

Rate your agreement (1 = completely reject; 5 = genuinely believe), then write your honest reaction.

Forgiving someone means what they did was acceptable

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

Forgiving means I have to reconcile with them or let them back into my life

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

I cannot forgive until they apologize

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

Forgiving means I have to forget what happened

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

Forgiving means I am weak or surrendering

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

Holding onto the resentment keeps me safe from being hurt again

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

Step 2: Assessing Your Readiness

Choose one resentment you are ready to begin releasing. Name it first:

Name the resentment you are choosing to work with...

What am I still getting from holding onto this resentment?

Am I willing to release this resentment even though the other person may never apologize?

What will I gain in my recovery when this resentment no longer occupies the space it currently does?

Who in my recovery community can support me in the process of releasing it?

Step 3: The Forgiveness Letter (Unsent)

Write your forgiveness letter. Include what happened, your honest anger, any understanding of their humanity, and your decision to release them. You don't need to excuse them — only to free yourself.

Dear [name]...

Step 4: Designing Your Forgiveness Ritual

1. Describe the forgiveness ritual you will use to mark the release of this resentment. What will you do, when, and who will witness it?

Describe your forgiveness practice...

2. What will you say to yourself when the resentment returns? What is your "recovery response"?

Describe your forgiveness practice...

3. How will you know when the forgiveness is taking hold? What will be different in your daily experience?

Describe your forgiveness practice...

YOUR EXERCISE

Daily Grievance Check-In

7-Day Recovery Practice

Daily Awareness Practice

Injustice collecting often operates below conscious awareness. A daily check-in practice brings the pattern into the light, allowing you to interrupt it before new resentments calcify.

Day 1 — Monday

TODAY'S FOCUS

Opening Inventory: What am I currently resenting?

What grievances, resentments, or perceived slights are present today?

What is my honest assessment of my own role in any of today's conflicts?

What one thing can I do today to reduce my resentment load?

Resentment weight today (1-10) and one-sentence summary:

Day 2 — Tuesday

TODAY'S FOCUS

Today's Triggers: What new perceived slights arose today?

What grievances, resentments, or perceived slights are present today?

What is my honest assessment of my own role in any of today's conflicts?

What one thing can I do today to reduce my resentment load?

Resentment weight today (1-10) and one-sentence summary:

Day 3 — Wednesday

TODAY'S FOCUS

My Role: Where did I play a part in today's conflicts?

What grievances, resentments, or perceived slights are present today?

What is my honest assessment of my own role in any of today's conflicts?

What one thing can I do today to reduce my resentment load?

Resentment weight today (1-10) and one-sentence summary:

Day 4 — Thursday

TODAY'S FOCUS

Perspective Practice: Choose one resentment and write the other side

What grievances, resentments, or perceived slights are present today?

What is my honest assessment of my own role in any of today's conflicts?

What one thing can I do today to reduce my resentment load?

Resentment weight today (1-10) and one-sentence summary:

Day 5 — Friday

TODAY'S FOCUS

Gratitude Inventory: What went right this week that I did not collect as a grievance?

What grievances, resentments, or perceived slights are present today?

What is my honest assessment of my own role in any of today's conflicts?

What one thing can I do today to reduce my resentment load?

Resentment weight today (1-10) and one-sentence summary:

Day 6 — Saturday

TODAY'S FOCUS

Forgiveness Practice: One resentment I am choosing to release

What grievances, resentments, or perceived slights are present today?

What is my honest assessment of my own role in any of today's conflicts?

What one thing can I do today to reduce my resentment load?

Resentment weight today (1-10) and one-sentence summary:

Day 7 — Sunday

TODAY'S FOCUS

Weekly Reflection: What am I learning about my injustice collecting pattern?

What grievances, resentments, or perceived slights are present today?

What is my honest assessment of my own role in any of today's conflicts?

What one thing can I do today to reduce my resentment load?

Resentment weight today (1-10) and one-sentence summary:

7-Day Practice Summary

1. What patterns did you notice across the 7 days? Are there particular people or times when grievances most reliably arise?

2. Did your daily resentment weight change across the week? What drove increases or decreases?

3. What surprised you most about this week's practice?

4. What is the most important ongoing change you want to make to how you handle perceived injustices?

YOUR EXERCISE

Amends vs. Resentment Clarifier

Balancing the Ledger — What Others Owe You vs. What You Owe Others

The Imbalanced Ledger

The injustice collector maintains a detailed mental ledger of what others owe them, while minimizing their own debts to others. Recovery asks us to examine both sides of the ledger honestly.

Column A: What I Believe I Am Owed

List the significant debts you believe others owe you — the apologies not received, the repairs not made.

Person / Situation 1:

Likelihood they will ever pay this debt voluntarily:

Person / Situation 2:

Likelihood they will ever pay this debt voluntarily:

Person / Situation 3:

Likelihood they will ever pay this debt voluntarily:

Person / Situation 4:

Likelihood they will ever pay this debt voluntarily:

Column B: What I Owe Others

List the genuine harms you have caused — the people to whom you owe amends. Be specific and avoid rationalization.

Person / Situation 1:

My readiness to make this amend honestly:

Person / Situation 2:

My readiness to make this amend honestly:

Person / Situation 3:

My readiness to make this amend honestly:

Person / Situation 4:

My readiness to make this amend honestly:

Balancing the Ledger

1. Look at both columns honestly. Is your ledger balanced? What does the imbalance reveal?

2. How does focusing on what YOU owe — rather than what others owe you — change your emotional state?

3. Which amend in Column B, if made genuinely, would most reduce the weight of the resentments in Column A?

4. Write a specific action plan: one amend you will make, to whom, in what form, and by when.

5. What does genuine amends-making give you that collecting resentments never can?
