

The Geography of Recovery

Remapping Your World

Topic Learning · The Recovery Files

Self-check questions are printed without scoring. Your scores and what they mean are in the app.

The Geography of Recovery: Remapping My World Without Substances

Recovery involves more than just abstaining from substances—it requires comprehensively remapping the geography of your life. This interactive module helps you assess and transform the five key dimensions that shape addiction and recovery: people, places, patterns, things, and thoughts.

Important: Recovery isn't just about the substance itself but about dismantling and reconstructing the entire architecture of a life that had been organized around acquisition and use. This process creates space for authentic growth and new possibilities.

How to use this module: Complete the self-assessment to identify environmental factors that may support or challenge your recovery. Then explore each dimension through reflection questions and develop an action plan for creating a more recovery-supportive life geography.

Introduction: The Interconnected Elements

Understanding how environment shapes recovery

Environmental Factors Self-Assessment

Evaluate your recovery geography

People and Relationships

Explore this dimension of recovery geography

The individuals with whom we spend time significantly impact recovery through direct influence, modeling of behaviors, emotional triggers, and the quality of support they provide.

Key Considerations

- Drinking buddies vs. recovery supporters
- Family members who enable vs. those who encourage growth
- Workplace relationships centered on after-work drinks
- New recovery community connections
- Sponsor and accountability partners
- Professional support team members

Reflection Questions

How have your social connections changed since beginning recovery?

Which relationships pose the greatest risk to your recovery, and why?

What qualities do you look for in recovery-supportive relationships?

How have you handled setting boundaries with people who still use substances?

Places and Spaces

Explore this dimension of recovery geography

Physical environments become conditioned triggers through repeated association with substance use. The brain learns to associate specific locations with the anticipation and experience of intoxication.

Key Considerations

- Former drinking or using locations
- Routes that pass by liquor stores or bars
- Specific rooms or areas in your home
- Social venues strongly associated with use
- New recovery-centered spaces
- Safe zones free from triggers

Reflection Questions

What locations most strongly trigger cravings or memories of substance use?

How have you modified your living space to support recovery?

What new places have become important in your recovery journey?

How do you prepare yourself when you must enter potentially triggering environments?

Patterns and Routines

Explore this dimension of recovery geography

Daily routines, regular behaviors, and habitual responses form the structure of our lives. Recovery requires disrupting automatic sequences and establishing new routines aligned with sobriety.

Key Considerations

- Time-based triggers (happy hour, weekends)
- Stress response patterns
- Celebration routines
- Boredom behaviors
- New morning and evening rituals
- Recovery-focused activities and schedules

Reflection Questions

What daily routines from your addiction era have you changed, and how?

What time periods or situations present the greatest risk for triggering old patterns?

What new routines have you developed that support your recovery?

How have your stress response patterns changed in recovery?

Things and Objects

Explore this dimension of recovery geography

Physical objects carry powerful associations and can trigger cravings through their connection to substance use, from obvious paraphernalia to subtle environmental cues.

Key Considerations

- Drinking or drug paraphernalia
- Specific glassware or containers
- Music or media associated with use
- Clothing worn during using episodes
- Recovery literature and tools
- Meaningful sobriety reminders

Reflection Questions

What objects most strongly trigger cravings or memories of substance use?

How have you handled items with mixed significance (both recovery-threatening and personally meaningful)?

What new possessions or tools support your recovery journey?

How has your approach to media consumption changed in recovery?

Thoughts and Beliefs

Explore this dimension of recovery geography

The internal landscape of beliefs, assumptions, and automatic thoughts powerfully influences recovery. Thought patterns from addiction continue operating unless consciously modified.

Key Considerations

- Justification and minimization
- Entitlement thinking
- Terminal uniqueness beliefs
- Catastrophic thinking patterns
- Recovery-focused affirmations
- Growth mindset perspectives

Reflection Questions

What thought patterns most commonly justify or rationalize potential substance use?

How has your identity belief system changed since beginning recovery?

What cognitive distortions do you notice most frequently in your thinking about recovery?

What recovery-supportive thoughts have you developed to replace addiction-driven thinking?

The Evolution of Environmental Change

Understanding the phases of geographical transformation

Action Planning

Create your environmental restructuring plan

Based on your assessment results, select 2-3 specific environmental factors to modify. Prioritize the highest-risk elements that most directly threaten your recovery stability.

Environmental Factor 1

1. Define the specific element requiring change:

What specific person, place, pattern, thing, or thought needs to change?

2. Identify its connection to past substance use:

How is this element connected to your substance use history?

3. Set a clear, measurable modification goal:

What specific change will you make?

4. Action steps:

List specific steps to implement this change...

5. Accountability measures:

How will you ensure follow-through?

6. Timeline:

When will you implement each step?

7. Plan for potential challenges:

What obstacles might arise and how will you handle them?

Sample Action Plan: Commute Route

Element: Daily drive home passing three bars and a liquor store

Connection: Route became associated with anticipated drinking; automatic turns toward these locations

Goal: Establish new route avoiding triggers with alternative transition routine

Actions: Map alternatives, test routes, program GPS, create after-work ritual, place visual reminders

Accountability: Share with sponsor, partner check-ins, track in recovery journal

Timeline: Research this week, test next week, implement permanently within two weeks

Challenges: Traffic issues, unexpected triggers, motivation on difficult days

Additional environmental factors requiring attention:

List other elements that need modification...

What recovery-supportive elements will you add to replace what you're removing?

New relationships, activities, routines, environments...

Integration & Long-Term Vision

Based on your assessment and reflection, what are the three most important environmental changes you need to make?

Prioritize the changes that will most support your recovery...

How do you envision your ideal recovery geography looking in one year?

Describe the people, places, patterns, things, and thoughts that will surround you...

What internal shifts need to accompany these external changes?

Consider beliefs, identity, and mindset changes...

What support will you need to successfully remap your life geography?

Professional help, recovery community, family support...

Remember: Environmental restructuring in recovery isn't about creating perfect, trigger-free surroundings but about intentionally designing a life geography that supports rather than undermines recovery efforts. The goal is progress, not perfection—identifying the highest-risk elements for initial change while gradually expanding recovery-supportive aspects across all dimensions of your environment.

"What initially felt like deprivation—giving up people, places, and things I valued—has revealed itself as liberation from constraints I hadn't fully recognized. The geographic territory of my life has expanded rather than contracted, encompassing experiences, relationships, and possibilities

that active addiction had rendered inaccessible."

Introduction: The Interconnected Elements

Imagine driving back from a family visit, and without conscious thought, your hands steer the car toward the familiar exit leading to your old liquor store. This automatic behavior—operating below the level of awareness—illustrates how deeply addiction patterns become embedded in our daily geography.

Recovery requires understanding that addiction creates an entire ecosystem of habits, associations, and neural pathways. The people we spend time with, places we frequent, patterns we follow, things we keep, and thoughts we harbor all become interconnected elements supporting substance use. Lasting recovery means consciously remapping each of these dimensions.

The Five Dimensions of Change

- People: Relationships that either support recovery or maintain addiction patterns
- Places: Physical locations that trigger cravings through conditioned associations
- Patterns: Routines and behaviors that structured life around substance use
- Things: Objects carrying powerful memories and associations with using
- Thoughts: Belief systems and mental patterns that enabled and maintained addiction

Remember: This transformation isn't purely subtractive. Each elimination needs corresponding addition—new relationships, activities, coping skills, and meaning to fill the space left by addiction.

Environmental Factors Self-Assessment

This assessment explores both risk factors that may trigger substance use and protective factors that strengthen recovery. Rate each statement on a scale of 1-5:

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

Part 1: Environmental Risk Factors

1. I maintain close relationships with people who actively use substances.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☒ 5

2. I frequent locations where I previously used substances or that strongly trigger cravings.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

3. I follow daily routines and patterns similar to those during my active addiction.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

4. I keep items that remind me of substance use or serve as triggers.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

5. I travel routes that pass by my previous purchasing or using locations.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

6. I engage in activities that I strongly associate with past substance use.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

7. I experience automatic thoughts justifying or minimizing the risks of substance use.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

8. I put myself in social situations where substance use is central to the gathering.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

9. I maintain environmental cues that trigger conditioned cravings (sights, sounds, smells).

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

10. I believe I'm different from others in recovery and can safely handle situations they avoid.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

Environmental Risk Score: 0 / 50

Part 2: Recovery-Supportive Environment

11. I actively build relationships with people who support my recovery goals.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

12. I have restructured my living space to remove triggers and support sobriety.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

13. I have developed new routines that replace previous substance-related patterns.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

14. I avoid unnecessary exposure to high-risk places, especially in early recovery.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

15. I consciously choose routes and locations that minimize triggers.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

16. I engage in regular activities that strengthen my recovery identity.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

17. I challenge thoughts that present substance use as a solution or necessity.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

18. I have created new associations and memories in previously triggering locations.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

19. I have replacement behaviors for situations that previously involved substances.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☒ 5

20. I recognize my conditioned responses to triggers without automatically acting on them.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

Recovery-Supportive Environment Score: 0 / 50

The Evolution of Environmental Change

Environmental changes in recovery typically follow a progressive path. Understanding these phases helps you set realistic expectations and recognize that different dimensions may evolve at different rates.

Crisis Management

Days 1-30

Initial, often dramatic changes focused on creating basic safety and interrupting the most immediate trigger-craving-use cycle. May include temporary complete avoidance of high-risk people, places, and things.

Foundational Restructuring

Months 1-3

More systematic changes creating separation from addiction-associated elements while beginning to build recovery-supportive alternatives. Involves more conscious choice-making about necessary changes.

Selective Integration

Months 3-12

Cautious reintroduction of some previously triggering elements with new associations and stronger coping skills. Testing and refining understanding of personal triggers with greater discernment.

Environmental Expansion

1+ years

Continued growth of recovery-supportive geography while maintaining awareness of conditioned responses. Focus shifts from avoidance to creation of a fulfilling lifestyle that naturally supports recovery.

Sustained Awareness

Ongoing

Maintenance of environmental consciousness even in long-term recovery, recognizing that neural pathways established during addiction remain present though less active.

Which phase best describes where you are currently in your environmental restructuring?

Reflect on your current phase and what you're experiencing...
