

Fear of Presence in Recovery

Understanding Anxieties About Full Engagement

Presence & Engagement in Recovery

Topic Studies · The Recovery Files

In this workbook: key ideas, worksheet.

The topic's scored self-assessment is in the app.

KEY IDEAS

Fear of Presence in Recovery

Specific anxieties about being physically, emotionally, and socially present in recovery settings—fears that often center on the unpredictability of what might emerge with full engagement.

What is Fear of Presence?

- Reluctance to enter recovery settings
 - Emotional withdrawal when physically present
 - Avoidance of deeper engagement after establishing basic attendance
 - "Showing up but not showing up" physically present without engagement
- ✓ The paradox: The experiences we fear most—emotional release, authentic connection, vulnerability— are often most essential for lasting recovery.

Social Recognition Anxiety

Fear about being identified as someone in recovery or encountering people from other areas of life in recovery settings—concerns about stigma, privacy, and social implications.

Common Manifestations:

- Worrying about seeing people you know at functions
 - Anxiety about being recognized as "in recovery"
 - Concern about running into colleagues or acquaintances
 - Discomfort with others learning about your journey
 - Fear about how participation affects social reputation
- ✓ Reframe: Being recognized in recovery is an opportunity for authentic connection rather than a threat.

Emotional Overwhelm & Participation Anxiety

Emotional Overwhelm Concerns:

Fear about experiencing and expressing intense emotions.

- Fearing emotional overwhelm during activities
- Worrying about crying or showing strong emotions
- Anxiety about facing painful feelings
- Fear of losing emotional control

Participation Apprehension:

Anxiety about active engagement, particularly verbal contribution.

- Anxiety about being called on to share
- Worry about "freezing up" if asked to contribute
- Fear of saying "the wrong thing"
- Performance anxiety about expectations

Remember: Emotional expression is normal, accepted, and healing in recovery communities.

Relationship & Change Fears

Relationship Formation Anxiety:

Fear about developing connections and vulnerability required.

- Nervousness about forming new relationships
- Worry about vulnerability in authentic connection
- Anxiety about others knowing the "real you"
- Fear of becoming dependent on recovery relationships

Change Acceleration Fear:

Anxiety that deeper engagement will necessitate life changes at uncomfortable pace.

- Worry deeper engagement will accelerate unwanted changes
- Fear of lifestyle changes beyond current readiness
- Concern about disruption to current life structure
- Fear of losing important aspects of identity

Environmental & Anticipatory Fears

Environmental Discomfort:

Unease with physical, cultural, and procedural aspects of recovery settings.

- Anxiety about unfamiliar physical environments
- Discomfort with recovery customs, rituals, or formats
- Unease with recovery language or terminology
- Anxiety about navigating unwritten rules

Anticipatory Avoidance:

Escalating anxiety as participation approaches, leading to avoidance strategies.

- Increasing anxiety as meetings approach
- Creating mental escape routes or exit strategies
- Rehearsing potential difficult scenarios
- Physical symptoms when anticipating participation

Building Presence Practices

Developing effective responses to cultivate courage and capacity for authentic presence.

Emotional Capacity:

- Prepare for emotional responses
- Practice grounding techniques
- Build gradual exposure to emotions
- View emotional release as healing

Participation Prep:

- Prepare small, manageable contributions
- Set boundaries around sharing
- Start with lower-risk participation
- Remember perfection isn't expected

Relationship Building:

- Form connections at manageable pace
- Set clear boundaries
- Practice graduated vulnerability
- Distinguish healthy interdependence

Present-Moment Anchoring:

- Practice mindfulness techniques
- Use breathing exercises
- Develop grounding practices
- Create supportive self-talk

The Miracle of Showing Up

"The miracle happens when you show up"

Not just physically, but with your full humanity—one courageous moment of presence at a time.

Between the impulse to avoid and the choice to engage lies a space of possibility that grows larger with each day of recovery practice. In that space lies the freedom that makes recovery not just about abstaining, but about building a life of authentic connection, purpose, and growth.

Each time you recognize presence fear yet choose engagement anyway, you strengthen the foundation upon which lasting recovery is built.

✓ Physical presence creates the conditions for psychological transformation. Your capacity for presence despite fear is a profound victory.

WORKSHEET

Fear of Presence Worksheet

Mapping Your Presence Anxiety Patterns

About This Worksheet

This worksheet helps you identify your specific fear of presence patterns, understand their protective functions, and develop personalized strategies for cultivating courage and capacity for authentic presence in recovery settings.

Your Personalized Fear of Presence Map

For each fear category, write your specific examples that affect you personally:

Social Recognition Anxiety

Example: I worry about running into clients from my workplace at my regular Tuesday meeting

Emotional Overwhelm Concerns

Example: I fear I'll start crying uncontrollably if I talk about my children

Participation Apprehension

Example: I feel physical panic when the meeting format includes going around the circle

Relationship Formation Anxiety

Example: I worry people will expect more closeness than I'm comfortable with

Change Acceleration Fear

Example: I'm afraid deeper engagement will force me to leave my current relationship

Environmental Discomfort

Example: I feel extremely anxious about where to sit in new meetings

Anticipatory Avoidance

Example: I develop headaches the morning of meetings I'm particularly nervous about

Understanding Your Fear of Presence Landscape

1. What category of presence fear (social recognition, emotional overwhelm, etc.) affects you most powerfully, and why do you think that is?

2. How does your fear of presence specifically manifest in your body? What physical sensations signal increasing anxiety about recovery participation?

3. At what specific moments during recovery activities does your fear of presence tend to peak? What might this timing reveal about your particular concerns?

4. How have your fears about presence evolved or changed throughout your recovery journey?

5. Are there specific types of recovery activities or settings that intensify or diminish your fear of presence? What patterns do you notice?

The Psychology of Your Presence Fear

1. How might your specific presence fears relate to experiences in your addiction history or earlier life experiences?

2. What core values or needs might your fear of presence be attempting to protect? How might these legitimate needs be met in healthier ways?

3. How do your different presence fears interact with each other? For example, does social recognition anxiety intensify your participation apprehension?

4. What beliefs about yourself, others, or recovery might be fueling your specific presence fears?

5. How might presence fear be creating a self-fulfilling prophecy in your recovery experience?

Developing Your Presence Practices

1. What specific presence practices have proven most effective for your most challenging fear category?

2. How do you distinguish between presence fear that signals a genuine need for caution versus fear that primarily impedes your recovery?

3. What role does self-compassion play in your approach to managing presence anxiety?

4. What recovery support resources have been most helpful when experiencing strong presence fear?

5. How might you strengthen your response to the presence fear category you identified as most challenging?

Building Presence Courage

1. How has your relationship with presence fear changed throughout your recovery journey?

2. What experiences have most powerfully demonstrated that presence fears typically diminish rather than intensify with consistent exposure?

3. How do you balance respecting your current limitations while gradually expanding your comfort with presence?

4. What would it look like to view presence fear as a signpost pointing toward important growth opportunities?

5. How might sharing your presence fear experiences benefit both your own recovery and potentially help others?

Action Planning

Select 2-3 specific presence fears to address. For each fear, complete the following:

Action Plan #1

1. Specific presence fear:

2. Category and manifestation:

3. Clear, measurable goal:

4. Action steps:

5. Accountability measures:

6. Timeline:

7. Potential challenges:

Action Plan #2

1. Specific presence fear:

2. Category and manifestation:

3. Clear, measurable goal:

4. Action steps:

5. Accountability measures:

6. Timeline:

7. Potential challenges:

Action Plan #3

1. Specific presence fear:

2. Category and manifestation:

3. Clear, measurable goal:

4. Action steps:

5. Accountability measures:

6. Timeline:

7. Potential challenges:
