

Mental Absence During Attendance

Cultivating Psychological Engagement in Recovery

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

Mental Absence During Attendance

Being physically present while remaining psychologically disconnected from recovery activities—creating the appearance of engagement without its benefits.

The "Body Present, Mind Absent" Pattern:

- Physical attendance without psychological engagement
 - Going through the motions creating illusion of participation
 - Missing transformative potential despite regular presence
 - Elusive resistance easily undetected by self and others
- ✓ "Bring the body, the mind will follow" requires the mind to eventually engage—not remain perpetually disconnected.

Attention Diversion & Anticipatory Thinking

Attention Diversion:

Challenges maintaining focused awareness during recovery activities.

- Daydreaming during recovery activities
- Checking phones or watches during meetings
- Engaging in unrelated activities (doodling, reading)
- Thoughts wandering to unrelated topics

Anticipatory Thinking:

Mentally focusing on future events instead of present engagement.

- Mentally planning other activities during meetings
- Using recovery time to organize schedules
- Thinking about future conversations or tasks
- Focusing on post-meeting activities

Counter these by cultivating attention and creating present-moment anchors.

Environmental Fixation & Observer Stance

Environmental Fixation:

Becoming preoccupied with physical surroundings rather than content.

- Focusing on physical aspects rather than content
- Analyzing or judging the meeting space
- Preoccupation with comfort or discomfort
- Attention to people entering or leaving

Intellectual Observer Stance:

Engaging analytically rather than as personal participant.

- Analyzing from observer perspective
 - Mentally critiquing formats or leadership
 - Intellectualizing rather than applying personally
 - Maintaining emotional distance through intellect
- ✓ Shift to active participation stance with personal application and emotional connection.

Strategic Disengagement & Performative Participation

Strategic Disengagement:

Intentionally disconnecting from threatening or overwhelming content.

- Disconnecting during challenging topics
- "Checking out" when content becomes personal
- Creating mental barriers when emotions surface
- Mentally withdrawing from difficult principles

Performative Participation:

Appearing engaged while internally disconnected.

- Presenting engaged appearance while absent
- Offering contributions suggesting false presence
- Performing expected behaviors without engagement
- Misleading facial expressions and body language

Retention Difficulties

Challenges remembering and integrating recovery content after meetings—reflecting the relationship between present-moment engagement and lasting integration.

Common Manifestations:

- Trouble remembering meeting content afterward
 - Unable to recall significant points or themes
 - Surprise when others reference earlier parts of meetings
 - Experiencing content as vague or blurry in memory
 - Connecting momentarily but quickly losing it
- ✓ Solution: Develop integration practices—journaling insights, discussing content with others, creating daily life applications.

Building Mental Presence Practices

Developing effective strategies for psychological engagement that transforms attendance into meaningful participation.

Attention Cultivation:

- Bring attention back when wandering
- Put away potential distractions
- Prepare mentally before functions
- Position to minimize distraction

Present-Moment Anchoring:

- Use grounding techniques
- Bookmark planning thoughts for later
- Create dedicated planning time
- Reconnect when noticing future-thinking

Active Participation:

- Engage as participant, not observer
- Apply concepts to personal experience
- Balance intellect with emotional connection
- Contribute authentically, not analytically

Integration Practices:

- Review content after meetings
- Identify key points to remember
- Discuss with others to reinforce
- Journal about significant insights

The Power of Full Presence

The deepest benefits of recovery become available not merely through showing up, but through showing up fully

With body, mind, and heart engaged in the transformative work of healing—one moment of reconnection at a time.

Mental presence is a skill that develops through practice—an ability that grows stronger with each moment of reconnection and becomes progressively more natural as it transforms from effortful attention to habitual engagement.

Between the tendency toward disconnection and the choice for psychological presence lies a space where lasting recovery is built—each reconnection strengthening the foundation for transformation.

✓ Each time you recognize psychological disconnection yet choose to reconnect with the present moment, you build capacity for deeper healing.

WORKSHEET

Mental Absence Worksheet

Mapping Your Disconnection Patterns

About This Worksheet

This worksheet helps you identify your specific mental absence patterns, understand what drives psychological disconnection, and develop personalized strategies for cultivating full mental presence that transforms attendance into meaningful participation.

Your Personalized Mental Absence Map

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

Attention Diversion

Example: I regularly plan my grocery list during recovery shares

Anticipatory Thinking

Example: I mentally compose work emails during recovery meetings

Environmental Fixation

Example: I track every person who enters late and leaves early

Intellectual Observer Stance

Example: I mentally critique the meeting format rather than participating

Strategic Disengagement

Example: I tune out completely when others discuss relationship challenges

Performative Participation

Example: I nod and make eye contact while thinking about unrelated topics

Retention Difficulties

Example: I often can't recall the topic of a meeting an hour after it ends

Understanding Your Mental Absence Landscape

1. What category of mental absence (attention diversion, anticipatory thinking, etc.) affects you most powerfully, and why do you think that is?

2. How does your mental absence specifically manifest? What specific thoughts or mental activities signal psychological disconnection?

3. When during recovery activities do you notice yourself most vulnerable to mental absence? Are there particular topics, formats, or situations that intensify disconnection?

4. How have your patterns of psychological disconnection evolved or changed throughout your recovery journey?

5. Are there specific types of recovery activities where you maintain stronger mental presence, and what might this indicate about your engagement preferences or needs?

The Psychology of Your Mental Absence

1. How might your patterns of psychological disconnection serve a protective function? What might they be attempting to shield you from?

2. In what ways might your specific addiction history have shaped your particular mental absence patterns?

3. How do your different disconnection patterns interact with each other? For example, does attention diversion strengthen your intellectual observer stance?

4. What early warning signs might indicate you're slipping into mental absence before complete disconnection occurs?

5. How might co-occurring conditions affect your vulnerability to psychological disconnection?

Developing Your Mental Presence Practices

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

2. How do you distinguish between productive mental processing and disconnection during recovery activities?

3. What role does preparation play in your approach to maintaining psychological engagement?

4. What recovery support resources have been most helpful in establishing stronger mental presence?

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

Building Engagement Resilience

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

2. What practices help you maintain engagement even during low-motivation or high-distraction periods?

3. How do you balance focused attention in recovery with a relaxed rather than tense approach to presence?

4. What would it look like to view moments of mental absence as opportunities for practice rather than failures of attention?

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

Action Planning

Select 2-3 specific mental absence patterns to address. For each pattern, complete the following:

Action Plan #1

1. Specific mental absence pattern:

2. Category and manifestation:

3. Clear, measurable goal:

4. Action steps:

5. Accountability measures:

6. Timeline:

7. Potential challenges:

Action Plan #2

1. Specific mental absence pattern:

2. Category and manifestation:

3. Clear, measurable goal:

4. Action steps:

5. Accountability measures:

6. Timeline:

7. Potential challenges:

Action Plan #3

1. Specific mental absence pattern:

2. Category and manifestation:

3. Clear, measurable goal:

4. Action steps:

5. Accountability measures:

6. Timeline:

7. Potential challenges: