

Childhood Trauma & Addiction

Chris Herren childhood assessment

Printable worksheet · 6 parts

Name _____ Date _____

Chris Herren's Message: Understanding Your Childhood Self

A compassionate exploration of childhood motivations for substance use

Save Your Progress

Your responses are automatically saved to your browser. You can return to this assessment at any time to continue or review your work.

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Remember: The child who first reached for substances was reaching for healing. Recovery is finally finding that healing in ways that last.

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PART 1 OF 6

Introduction

Understanding Chris Herren's Message

Chris Herren's powerful recovery message centers on a fundamental truth: substance use often begins as a solution to social anxiety and the desperate need to fit in. As a former NBA player who battled addiction, Herren's story illustrates that addiction doesn't start with moral failing, but with the universal human experience of feeling awkward, anxious, and different.

This assessment helps you explore the childhood origins of your substance use with compassion, understanding that the child within you who first turned to substances was simply trying to solve very real emotional needs.

How This Assessment Works

Part 1: Childhood Motivations

Explore what drove your childhood self toward substances

Part 2: Wisdom for Your Childhood Self

Develop compassionate understanding and alternative strategies

Letter Writing Exercise

Write a healing letter to your younger self

Important: This assessment may bring up difficult emotions. Please ensure you have support available, such as a sponsor, therapist, or trusted friend. Take breaks as needed.

☐ Begin Assessment

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PART 2 OF 6

Assessment

Childhood Self-Assessment

For each statement, choose the option that best describes your childhood experience or current understanding:

Scale: 1 = Never / Strongly Disagree · 2 = Rarely / Disagree · 3 = Sometimes / Neutral · 4 = Often / Agree · 5 = Always / Strongly Agree

Part 1: Childhood Motivations for Substance Use

1. As a child, I felt fundamentally different from other kids in ways that made me uncomfortable.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I believed that using substances would help me be accepted by peers I wanted to impress.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I felt socially awkward or anxious in group situations from an early age.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I thought alcohol or drugs would make me more fun or interesting to others.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I experienced a deep fear of rejection that made me willing to try anything to fit in.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I felt nervous or anxious in social situations even as a young person.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I believed substances would give me the confidence I naturally lacked.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I felt like I needed something external to feel comfortable being myself.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
9. I thought alcohol or drugs would help me overcome shyness or social fears.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
10. I felt like the "real me" wasn't good enough for others to like.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
11. I experienced uncomfortable emotions that felt too big or overwhelming to handle.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
12. I wanted something that would help me feel different when I felt sad, angry, or scared.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
13. I looked for ways to escape from difficult feelings rather than learning to cope with them.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

14. I believed substances would provide comfort when life felt too painful.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
15. I felt emotionally overwhelmed and wanted relief from intense feelings.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
16. I felt fundamentally flawed or "not good enough" compared to other kids.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
17. I believed using substances would make me feel better about myself.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
18. I struggled with feeling worthless or inadequate from an early age.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
19. I thought alcohol or drugs would help me feel more valuable or important.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
20. I had difficulty seeing positive qualities in myself without external validation.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
21. I wanted to change how I felt about myself and my life circumstances.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
22. I sought ways to escape from painful realities of my childhood experience.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
23. I believed substances would provide relief from depression, anxiety, or other mental health struggles.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
24. I wanted to feel "normal" or different from my usual emotional state.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
25. I looked for ways to temporarily forget about problems or painful experiences.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
26. I felt pressure to perform or achieve at levels that created significant stress.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
27. I believed substances would help me handle academic, athletic, or social pressures.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
28. I felt like I had to be perfect or exceptional to be worthy of love and acceptance.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
29. I used or wanted to use substances to cope with fear of failure or disappointment.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
30. I felt overwhelmed by expectations from parents, teachers, coaches, or peers.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

31. Substance use was normalized or modeled in my family or environment.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

32. I learned that substances were acceptable ways to cope with stress or problems.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

33. I was exposed to substance use as a solution to emotional or social difficulties.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

34. I received messages (spoken or unspoken) that substances were part of growing up or being cool.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

35. I learned to associate substance use with fun, relaxation, or social connection.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Part 2: What I Would Tell My Childhood Self

1. I would tell my childhood self that their worth isn't determined by what others think of them.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I would explain that feeling different or awkward is normal and doesn't require fixing with substances.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I would reassure my childhood self that they are enough exactly as they are.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I would help them understand that everyone feels insecure sometimes, and that's part of being human.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I would emphasize that their value comes from who they are, not from what they do or how others perceive them.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I would teach my childhood self that real confidence comes from practice and experience, not from substances.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I would show them that authentic relationships form when people accept you as you really are.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I would help them develop skills and hobbies that build genuine self-esteem.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

9. I would teach them that courage means acting despite fear, not eliminating fear with chemicals.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

10. I would help them understand that social skills can be learned and improved over time.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

11. I would teach my childhood self healthy ways to process and cope with difficult emotions.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
12. I would help them understand that uncomfortable feelings are temporary and survivable.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
13. I would show them that talking to trusted adults about problems is more effective than using substances.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
14. I would teach them relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, or other natural stress management tools.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
15. I would help them develop a vocabulary for emotions and ways to express feelings appropriately.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
16. I would help my childhood self understand that true friendship doesn't require substance use.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
17. I would teach them to look for friends who accept them without needing to alter their personality.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
18. I would help them develop conversation skills and shared interests as ways to connect with others.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
19. I would show them that vulnerability and authenticity create deeper relationships than artificial confidence.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
20. I would help them recognize that peer pressure is about the other person's insecurity, not their inadequacy.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
21. I would help my childhood self understand that they don't have to be perfect to be loved.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
22. I would teach them that mistakes and failures are opportunities for learning, not reasons for shame.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
23. I would help them develop realistic expectations for themselves and their performance.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
24. I would show them healthy ways to handle stress and pressure without needing chemical relief.
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

25. I would help them understand that their parents' or others' expectations don't define their worth.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

26. I would honestly explain that substances create more problems than they solve, especially over time.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

27. I would help them understand that chemical confidence isn't real confidence and doesn't last.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

28. I would explain that substances interfere with natural emotional and social development.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

29. I would share that using substances to cope prevents learning real coping skills.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

30. I would help them understand that early substance use can lead to serious long-term consequences.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

31. I would teach my childhood self that they have inner resources to handle life's challenges.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

32. I would help them develop self-compassion and kindness toward themselves.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

33. I would show them that discomfort and struggle are part of growth, not problems to avoid.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

34. I would teach them to trust their own judgment rather than looking to substances for answers.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

35. I would help them understand that building character through facing difficulties makes them stronger.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

☐ Calculate Scores ☐ Explore Categories

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Categories

Understanding Childhood Motivation Categories

Click on each category to explore the specific childhood motivations and wisdom for healing.

Social Belonging and Fitting In

The need to belong and be accepted by peers.

Self-Confidence and Social Anxiety

The desire for confidence in social situations.

Emotional Regulation and Comfort

The need to manage overwhelming emotions.

Self-Worth and Identity Issues

The struggle with feeling valuable and worthy.

Mood Alteration and Escape

The desire to escape difficult feelings or reality.

Performance and Achievement Pressure

The stress of high expectations and pressure.

Your Primary Motivations

No primary motivations selected yet.

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Letter Writing

Write a Letter to Your Childhood Self

Writing to your childhood self helps you develop compassion for that young person who was just trying to feel better. This can strengthen your recovery by healing old wounds with understanding instead of shame.

Letter Writing Guide

- Start with understanding and acknowledgment of their struggles
- Explain their true worth and value
- Gently warn about substance use consequences with compassion
- Teach about healthy alternatives for meeting emotional needs
- End with reassurance about their future potential

Dear [Your childhood name],

Begin your letter here... Remember to write with compassion and understanding, as if you're talking to that young person in front of you. Use simple words they would understand, and be kind throughout.

With love and understanding, [Your current name]

Remember: This letter is an act of love toward yourself. That child deserves compassion, not criticism. By understanding and forgiving your younger self, you strengthen your recovery and heal old wounds.

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Example

Example: Letters to My Awkward Self

Here's an example of a recovery letter written with humor and honesty. Your letter doesn't need to be perfect—just honest and kind.

Dear 13-Year-Old Me (aka "The Walking Anxiety Attack"),

Hey kid. It's me—you, but with significantly less hair and marginally more wisdom. I'm writing this from the year 2025, where apparently everything is supposed to be flying cars and world peace, but instead we have TikTok and I'm still figuring out how to fold fitted sheets.

I heard through the time-space continuum (also known as "therapy") that you're thinking about trying alcohol because you believe it'll magically transform you from an awkward human pretzel into some sort of social butterfly. Let me stop you right there, kiddo.

Remember how you think drinking will help you fit in with the cool kids? Here's the thing—those "cool kids" you're so desperate to impress? Half of them peak in high school. The other half are just as insecure as you are, they're just better at hiding it.

True story: Twenty years later, the kids who genuinely liked your weird sense of humor and your encyclopedic knowledge of obscure movie quotes? They're still your friends. The ones who only hung out with you when you had a flask? I couldn't pick them out of a police lineup if my life depended on it.

You're going to discover that alcohol gives you confidence, and you're going to think this is the best thing since sliced bread. But here's what nobody tells you about liquid courage: it's like buying confidence on credit with a 500% interest rate.

Your rough edges are what make you interesting. Your weird obsession with disaster movies, your tendency to quote *The Princess Bride* at inappropriate moments—these aren't bugs, they're features.

You want real confidence? Start small. Join drama club. Learn to play guitar—badly at first, but who cares? Talk to that girl about marine biology and actually listen to her answers. You're going to be okay. Not perfect, not problem-free, but okay. And that's actually pretty great.

Your Slightly Wiser Self

P.S. Start flossing now. Trust me on this one.

Writing Tips: Your letter can be serious, funny, or anywhere in between. What matters is that it's genuine and comes from a place of compassion for your younger self.

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Action Plan

Recovery Action Plan

Based on your assessment results and selected motivations, create a personalized action plan for strengthening your recovery.

Support System

Who will you share these insights with?

Sponsor, therapist, recovery friends...

How will you use your story to help others?

In meetings, with sponsees, in family discussions...

Weekly Check-in Questions

- • How am I meeting my childhood needs in healthy ways this week?
- • What situations triggered old childhood feelings?
- • How can I show compassion to my inner child today?

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