Substance Use History Progression Timeline

Map how addiction developed across every life stage

Printable worksheet · 4 parts

Name _____ Date _____

Crisis Resources: 988 Lifeline (call/text 988) • SAMHSA: 1-800-662-4357 • Crisis Text: HOME to 741741

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Home

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Substance Use History

Progression Timeline

A guided journey through your life stages — mapping how addiction developed, progressed, and impacted every area of your life. Understanding the path you've walked is the foundation for the road ahead.

Why Map Your History?

Addiction is a progressive disease. It doesn't happen overnight — it unfolds across years and decades, touching every part of your life. The disease is sneaky: it distorts your memory, minimizes consequences, and whispers "It wasn't that bad." This tool is designed to help you see the full picture that addiction tried to hide.

By walking through each stage of your life — from childhood through the present — you'll begin to see the patterns of progression: how use escalated, how consequences mounted, how denial deepened, and how the disease systematically dismantled the life you were building.

This is not about shame. This is about truth, understanding, and building a foundation for lasting recovery. Your history is your most powerful teacher — but only if you're willing to look at it honestly.

Your Life Stages

Childhood & Early Adolescence

Birth – 13

Family environment, early experiences, ACEs, first exposure to substances, family history of addiction

High School Years

14 – 17

Peer influence, identity formation, first regular use, academics, sports, social development

Young Adulthood

18 – 25

Independence, college/military/work, escalation, new substances, forming adult identity

Late Twenties

25 – 30

Career building, marriage, children, escalation vs. responsibilities, consequences mounting

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The Thirties

30 – 40

Consequences compounding, health declining, relationships strained, denial deepening or cracking

The Forties

40 – 50

Chronic consequences, health crises, accumulated losses, possible treatment/recovery or deeper decline

The Fifties

50 – 60

Long-term consequences, health deterioration, grief over lost years, possible late recovery

Sixty & Beyond

60+

Legacy, long-term health, late-life recovery, wisdom gained, making peace, giving back

12 Life Domains Tracked

For each life stage, you'll explore how addiction affected these areas — with guided prompts to help you remember honestly.

Substances Used

Relationships & Family

Employment / Education

Legal Consequences

Physical Health

Mental Health

Financial Impact

Housing & Living Situation

Social & Spiritual Life

Attempts to Control Use

Attempts to Quit / Abstinence

Treatment & Recovery Support

A Note on Safety & Self-Care

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Reviewing your substance use history can surface painful memories and intense emotions. Go at your own pace. You don't have to complete everything in one sitting. If you're in treatment, consider working through this with your counselor or therapist.

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Let's Begin

First Name or Initials (optional)

How you'd like to be addressed

Birth Year (helps calculate calendar years)

e.g., 1985

Your timeline saves to this device and to your account. It is never shared without your consent.

○ Begin Mapping Your History

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PART 2 OF 4

Builder

Auto-saved

○ Birth – 13 ○ 14 – 17 ○ 18 – 25 ○ 25 – 30 ○ 30 – 40 ○ 40 – 50 ○ 50 – 60 ○ 60+

Select a Life Stage

Choose a stage from the sidebar to begin.

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Timeline

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No Timeline Data Yet

Set severity levels in the Builder to see your visual timeline.

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Reflections

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Patterns, Insights & Reflections

Looking across your entire life — what does the progression reveal?

Stages with Active Use

0/5

Peak Severity Reached

0/12

Life Domains Affected

Treatment Episodes Noted

How Denial & Justification Evolved Over Time

No data yet. Add "What I Told Myself" for each stage in the Builder.

Looking at the Big Picture

Now that you've mapped your history across all life stages, sit with these deeper questions.

How did your substance use progress across the stages of your life? What pattern do you see when you step back?

Look at the severity chart. Did it climb steadily? Were there jumps? Plateaus? What drove the escalation?

What has addiction cost you — across your entire lifetime? What can never be recovered?

Relationships, time with children, careers, health, trust, self-respect, dreams, years of your life...

How did the stories you told yourself evolve from stage to stage? How did denial deepen?

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Compare what you wrote in "What I Told Myself" across the stages. See the progression of rationalization.

Looking at all your attempts to control or quit — what do they tell you about the nature of this disease?

Could someone without a disease need all those rules, attempts, and strategies? What does that pattern reveal?

What recurring patterns repeat across different stages of your life?

Relationship patterns, emotional triggers, cycles of escalation and consequences, geographic cures, broken promises...

When did you first know — really know, deep down — that you had a problem? And how long did you keep going after that?

There's often a gap between knowing and acting. What kept you in that gap?

You survived everything on this timeline. What does that say about your strength and resilience?

Recovery asks you to turn that same survival energy toward healing. What strengths can you bring forward?

What needs to be fundamentally different this time? What has your history taught you about what you need?

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Not just "try harder" — what structural, relational, and spiritual changes are necessary?

"Understanding where you've been is the foundation for knowing where you're going.

Your history is not your destiny — it's your teacher."

This timeline is a living document. Return to it as your recovery deepens and new insights emerge.

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