



Letting Go of the Past, Building Your Future: A Guide to Recovery

Why This Matters for Your Recovery

This session explores a new way of understanding addiction and provides a roadmap for building a meaningful life beyond it.

- * Addiction is viewed as a relationship with your past self that holds back your future self.
- * Recovery involves disconnecting from the painful parts of your past while honouring the journey that brought you to today.
- * Building a future self requires defining who you are now, what you value, and what you hope to achieve.
- * This process gives you a clear direction and purpose, making it harder for addiction to find a place in your life.
- * Lasting recovery is built on a foundation of physical health, emotional healing, and a sense of purpose or spiritual connection.

What's Happening in the Brain and Body

The session discussed the physical and biological impacts of certain lifestyle factors on health and longevity.

- * **Mitochondrial Efficiency:** Regular moderate-intensity exercise (Zone 2 cardio) improves the efficiency of your mitochondria, the energy powerhouses of your cells. This is linked to a longer lifespan, as seen in the comparison between pigeons (high activity, long life) and gerbils (low activity, short life).
- * **Sleep Architecture:** Substances like alcohol, cannabis, and benzodiazepines disrupt your natural sleep cycle. They prevent you from entering deep REM and slow-wave sleep, which are essential for emotional processing and feeling refreshed. This leads to a state of unconsciousness, not true restorative sleep.
- * **Heart Rate Variability (HRV):** HRV is a measure of the variation in time between each heartbeat and is a good indicator of sleep quality and nervous system health. Higher HRV is better. Alcohol significantly lowers HRV and increases resting heart rate, negatively impacting your recovery.
- * **Immune System:** Spending time in nature exposes you to natural compounds released by plants (phytoncides), which can stimulate and strengthen your immune system.

The Addiction Lens

Addiction is framed as being tethered to a past self defined by pain, shame, and regret. These "cords" that pull you back are of your own making, but you also have the power to cut them.

- * **Cravings and Behaviour:** When your life lacks clear values, purpose, and goals, there is more room for addictive behaviours to take hold. Defining your "North Star" or moral compass makes it harder to live a double life and engage in behaviours that go against your true self.
- * **Recovery as Redefinition:** Recovery is the process of asking "Who am I now?" once you are no longer defined by your past. It is a lifelong journey of discovering your new identity, separate from the addiction. This involves actively building a future you are excited to live in.
- * **The Role of the Future Self:** Your future self holds your hope. By visualising a healthy, functional, and loving future, you create a powerful motivator to pull you forward, away from



the grip of the past.

Core Models and Frameworks

1. The SHINE Framework for Recovery

A practical guide for building a new life.

- * **S - Self:** Discovering who you are outside of your addiction. This starts with identifying your core values (e.g., love, compassion, authenticity), which then inform your purpose (what you want to be), and finally your goals (the concrete actions you take, like volunteering).
- * **H - Hope:** Hope resides in the future. You must connect with your future self by visualising where you want to be and what you want your life to look like. Writing a letter from your future self to your present self can be a powerful exercise.
- * **I - Inspiration:** This is the driving force and bright idea for what you want to do with your life. It is closely linked to having a "spiritual awakening" of some kind—a connection to something greater than yourself that gives you direction.
- * **N - North Star:** This is your internal moral compass, guided by your values. Knowing your "true north" helps you stay on the right path. When you are misaligned with it, you feel a sense of unease, which acts as a signal to correct your course.
- * **E - Empowerment:** Empowerment comes from doing hard things. The "104% Rule" suggests that true growth happens when you push yourself just 4% beyond your current comfort zone. This principle of slow, consistent, and incremental improvement builds self-efficacy and resilience.

2. The Body, Heart, and Soul Pyramid (Simplified Maslow)

You cannot work on higher-level needs (like purpose and meaning) until your fundamental needs are met.

- * **Body (Base of the pyramid):** This is your foundation. It requires attending to your basic physiological needs: food, water, and sleep, as well as exercise and connection to nature.
- * **Heart (Middle of the pyramid):** This level relates to safety, love, and belonging. In recovery, this involves healing your relationship with your past self, showing it compassion, and feeling a sense of self-respect and esteem.
- * **Soul (Top of the pyramid):** This is about "self-actualisation" or finding your higher purpose. It involves the work of defining your values, finding inspiration, and living in alignment with your North Star—the core elements of the SHINE framework.

What This Looks Like in Real Life

- * **Example of Values to Goals:** If your value is "compassion," your purpose might be "to be a compassionate person," and a corresponding goal could be "to volunteer for one hour a week." This aligns with the 12th Step of AA, where helping others is key to maintaining one's own sobriety.
- * **Example of Empowerment (The 104% Rule):** If you want to become a better tennis player, playing against your 5-year-old nephew won't challenge you, and playing against Roger Federer would be overwhelming. You improve by playing against someone who stretches your abilities just enough—making you work hard but still allowing for success. Apply this to all areas of your life: aim for 4% improvement beyond what's comfortable.

Practical Strategies for Recovery



1. Foundational Body Care:

* Exercise:

* Aim for 150 minutes of moderate-intensity ("Zone 2") cardio per week (e.g., 30 minutes, 5 days a week). This is an intensity where you can talk but not sing. The target heart rate is 60-70% of your maximum (220 minus your age). This improves mitochondrial efficiency and longevity.

* Perform resistance/weight training at least twice a week for all major muscle groups. This prevents age-related muscle loss (sarcopenia) and maintains physical independence.

* Sleep:

* Aim for 7-9 hours of quality sleep per night.

* Avoid using alcohol, cannabis, or benzodiazepines as sleep aids. They prevent restorative REM sleep and lead to poor sleep quality.

* Try "sky gazing" for 20 minutes within three hours of waking. This practice can reduce the time it takes to fall asleep by an average of 25 minutes, which is nearly as effective as a benzodiazepine but without the negative side effects.

* Nature:

* Spend time in nature regularly. It reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, and improves mood. Being in a forest can also boost your immune system.

2. Mental and Emotional Tools:

* **The Miracle Question:** Ask yourself, "If a miracle happened tonight and the cords connecting me to my past self were cut, what would be different about me tomorrow? How would I behave?"

* **The Obituary Question:** Imagine your own obituary written by someone you care about, like your children. What do you want it to say? This helps clarify your legacy and long-term purpose.

* **Future Self to Past Self Dialogue:** Imagine a conversation where your future self speaks to your past self. The key is to offer compassion and gratitude, saying things like, "Well done for surviving. Thank you for getting me here. You can let go now; I've got it from here."

Common Pitfalls

* **Criticising Your Past Self:** It is tempting for your future self to judge your past self for its mistakes. However, your past self did what it needed to do to survive. It deserves compassion, not criticism. Recovery is hindered if you cannot show your past self enough compassion for it to let you go.

* **Using Substances for Sleep:** Using alcohol, cannabis, or benzodiazepines to sleep is a major pitfall. While they may induce unconsciousness, they destroy sleep quality, prevent emotional processing, and leave you feeling tired and unregulated the next day. This creates a vicious cycle that undermines recovery.

* **Ignoring the Foundations:** Trying to work on your "soul" (purpose, values, spirituality) without first taking care of your "body" (sleep, exercise, diet) and "heart" (safety, self-esteem) is like building a house on a shaky foundation. It is very difficult to do higher-level work when your basic needs are not met.

Key Take-Home Messages

* Recovery is about disconnecting from the past self that holds you back and actively



connecting with a future self you want to become.

- * You must show compassion to your past self to truly let it go.
- * Define your new self by discovering your values, purpose, and goals.
- * Hope, inspiration, and a moral compass (your North Star) are essential guides on your recovery journey.
- * Empowerment is built by consistently challenging yourself with "hard things" that are just outside your comfort zone (the 104% rule).
- * Your physical health is the foundation of your recovery. Prioritise exercise, sleep, and connecting with nature.

Optional Reflection Questions

1. If the cords binding you to your past were cut tonight, what is the first thing you would do differently tomorrow morning?
2. What three words do you hope are included in your obituary? What values do those words represent?
3. What compassionate message would your wise, future self give to your younger, struggling self?
4. Using the SHINE model, what is one small, 104% action you can take this week to build empowerment?
5. Looking at the Body, Heart, Soul pyramid, which level needs the most attention in your life right now, and what is one simple step you can take to strengthen it?