



## Letting Go of the Past to Build Your Future in Recovery

### Why This Matters in Recovery

- \* Addiction can be understood as a relationship with your past self that negatively impacts your future self.
- \* Recovery involves disconnecting from the "hooks" of your past, such as pain, shame, and anger, which hold you back.
- \* By letting go of these past connections, you create space to discover new purpose and meaning in your life.
- \* Focusing on building a future aligned with your values makes it more difficult for addiction to maintain its hold.

### What's Happening in the Brain and Body

- \* **Mitochondrial Health:** Moderate-intensity exercise (Zone 2 cardio) improves the efficiency of your mitochondria, the powerhouses of your cells. This is linked to increased longevity and overall health.
- \* **Sleep Quality:** Alcohol, cannabis, and benzodiazepines disrupt the natural stages of sleep (REM and slow-wave sleep). While they may induce unconsciousness, they prevent restorative sleep, which is vital for emotional processing and feeling refreshed.
- \* **Heart Rate Variability (HRV):** HRV is a marker of your nervous system's health and resilience. Substance use, including even a single alcoholic drink, can lower HRV and increase resting heart rate, indicating stress on the body. Abstinence significantly improves HRV.
- \* **Benefits of Nature:** Spending time in nature lowers stress, reduces blood pressure, and improves mood. Plants also release airborne compounds (phytosides) that can help stimulate your immune system.

### The Addiction Lens

- \* Addiction keeps you tethered to a past self that is often defined by pain and shame. These connections, or "cords," reinforce addictive behaviours.
- \* A core part of recovery is redefining your identity, separate from the person you were in active addiction.
- \* When you clearly define your personal values, establish a sense of purpose, and set meaningful goals, addiction has less space to operate in your life.

## Core Models and Frameworks

### The SHINE Framework for Recovery



**S - Self:** *Discovering who you are now. This begins by identifying your core values (e.g., love, kindness, authenticity), which then inform your purpose (what you want to be), and finally, your goals (what you want to do\*).*

\* **H - Hope:** Hope resides in the future. Connecting with your future self—visualising the life you want—is essential for cultivating hope.

\* **I - Inspiration:** This is the driving force that carries you toward your future self. It involves connecting with what you enjoy, your skills, and your passions. A spiritual awakening or connection to something larger than yourself is often a source of powerful inspiration.

\* **N - North Star:** This is your internal moral compass, guided by your values. Knowing your "true north" helps you stay on the right path in recovery and recognise when you are misaligned.

\* **E - Empowerment:** Empowerment comes from doing hard things. By consistently challenging yourself just beyond your comfort zone (the "104% rule"), you build competence and self-belief through slow, steady increments of improvement.

### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Simplified: Body, Heart, Soul)**

This model shows that you must meet fundamental needs before you can focus on higher-level growth and self-actualisation.

\* **Body (Foundation):** Basic physiological needs like food, water, and sleep, as well as safety and security.

\* **Heart (Connection):** The need for love, belonging, and healthy relationships. This also includes developing a compassionate relationship with your past self.

\* **Soul (Growth):** Self-actualisation, which involves finding your values, purpose, and engaging in spiritual growth. It's difficult to work on your "soul" if your "body" and "heart" needs are not met.

### **What This Looks Like in Real Life**

\* Identifying your values might involve reflecting on what you have fought for in the past or what actions you regret, as regret often points to a transgressed value. For example, feeling bad about being dishonest reveals that you value authenticity.

\* Finding inspiration could be sparked by a conversation with a financial planner that motivates you to get well enough to enjoy your future.

\* Practising empowerment means choosing a challenge that stretches you but doesn't overwhelm you. For example, instead of trying to play tennis against a professional (too hard) or a child (too easy), you find a partner who is slightly better than you to ensure you are consistently improving.

### **Practical Strategies for Recovery**

\* **Care for Your Body:**

\* **Exercise:** Aim for 150 minutes of moderate-intensity (Zone 2) cardio per week (e.g., brisk



walking where you can talk but not sing). Also, include resistance training at least twice a week to maintain muscle mass (sarcopenia).

\* **Sleep:** Prioritise 7-9 hours of quality sleep per night. Avoid using alcohol, cannabis, or benzodiazepines as sleep aids, as they disrupt sleep architecture. A natural alternative is morning "sky gazing" for 20 minutes, which can significantly help regulate your sleep cycle.

\* **Nature:** Regularly connect with nature by walking in a forest, sitting under a tree, or simply being outdoors to reduce stress and boost immunity.

\* **Connect with Your Purpose:**

\* Volunteer for one hour a week. Giving back is a key component of long-term sobriety, as helping others reinforces your own recovery. This aligns with the 12th Step of AA.

\* **Dialogue with Your Selves:**

\* Show compassion to your past self. Thank it for surviving and getting you to where you are today, then give it permission to let go. Avoid criticism.

\* Write a letter from your future self to your present self, offering encouragement and a vision of the life that awaits.

### Common Pitfalls

\* **Using Substances for Sleep:** Believing that alcohol, cannabis, or sleeping pills provide "good" sleep. These substances prevent the restorative stages of sleep necessary for physical and emotional health.

\* **Criticising Your Past Self:** Your future self may be tempted to judge your past self. This is counterproductive. Your past self needs compassion, not criticism, to be able to let go.

\* **Trying to "Boil the Ocean":** Taking on challenges that are far too difficult can lead to failure and demotivation. Focus on small, incremental 4% improvements.

### Key Take-Home Messages

\* Recovery requires disconnecting from your past self and connecting with your future self.

\* You must show compassion to your past self to allow it to let you go.

\* Building a meaningful life based on your values, purpose, and goals leaves little room for addiction.

\* Foundational physical health (exercise, diet, sleep, nature) is the platform upon which all emotional and spiritual growth is built.

\* Consistent, small efforts to improve (the 104% rule) are the key to building lasting empowerment and change.

### Optional Reflection Questions

\* If a miracle happened tonight and the "cords" to your past were cut, what is the first thing you would do differently tomorrow?

\* What three words do you hope will be in your obituary? Who would you want to write it?

\* What compassionate message does your future self have for your past self?



- \* What are your core values? How can they guide your purpose and goals?
- \* What is one "hard thing" you can do this week that is just 4% outside of your comfort zone?