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4

DAILY PRACTICE

TOOLS YOU CAN USE ON YOUR OWN

A Guide to
Self-Directed Recovery

STEPHEN DEASON

Alder Creek
EDITIONS

Tools You Can Use on Your Own

With Thanks

These books are offered at a low price in print and free online through the generous support of Matthew Marberry and the Michael Marberry Family Fund.

Thank you, Matthew, for helping put these books in the hands of the people who need them.

Stephen Deason

DON'T PANIC

If you are in danger, call 911.

If you are in crisis, or thinking about suicide, call or text 988.

For free help finding treatment, call 1-800-662-4357.

For tools to use right now, turn to page 16.

Part of

The Mile Marker Library

BOOK 4 · DAILY PRACTICE

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A Guide to Self-Directed Recovery

Stephen Deason

Melissa Deason

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Alder Creek EDITIONS

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Recovery Books

The Mile Marker Library: standalone books and tools for people getting into recovery on their own. Each one is numbered and labeled by what it helps with. Start with any of them.

RIGHT NOW

1. *Don't Panic: The First Hours After You Stop*
What to Do When You Stop Drinking or Using

2. *Wallet Crisis Card* **Free Printable**
Numbers to Call, Ready to Print

3. *Free Help Directory*
Meetings, Helplines, and Low-Cost Care

4. *Medications for Addiction, Explained*
What They Are, How to Ask, and How to Pay

DAILY PRACTICE

5. *Tools You Can Use on Your Own* **This book**
A Guide to Self-Directed Recovery

6. *Cravings and Hard Hours Workbook*
A Companion to Tools You Can Use on Your Own

7. *One Day at a Time, Written Down*
A 90-Day Gratitude Journal, in General and Christian Editions

8. *Daily Reader, 365 Days* **Forthcoming**
For Any Recovery Path

9. *Worksheet Library* **Forthcoming**
Every Journal Page and Exercise, Ready to Print

REBUILDING

10. *Money in Early Recovery*

Budgets, Debts, Benefits, and Credit

11. *Work and Recovery*

Finding a Job, Keeping It, and What to Tell Employers

12. *Finding a Safe Place to Live*

Sober Housing and What to Check Before You Move In

13. *Court, Probation, and Recovery* **Forthcoming**

What to Ask a Lawyer and What Records to Keep

PEOPLE AROUND YOU

14. *For Families*

When Someone You Love Can't Get to Treatment

15. *Group Facilitator Guide*

Running Free Peer Support Groups with These Books

16. *Employer Guide* **Forthcoming**

Hiring and Keeping People in Recovery

Who This Book Is For and How to Use It

This book is for people doing recovery on their own, and for anyone in a program who wants something to do between meetings.

This book is a set of tools that people in recovery use to get through cravings, hard feelings, and long days. You can use every one of them on your own, at any hour, without paying anyone.

You do not have to read it in order. Look at the Contents, find what matches the day you are having, and start there. Some tools will fit you and some will not. Keep the ones that work, and come back to the others later. A tool that feels useless in your first week can turn into the one you rely on in your third month.

How each tool is laid out

Each tool has a name and a line on when it helps. Most have a short note on why people find it useful, a few numbered steps, an example, and a line on what to try if it does not help. Most tools take less than ten minutes.

The examples describe made-up situations to show how a tool works. They are not stories about any real person.

Where these tools come from

People in recovery have passed many of these tools along to each other for years, in meetings, in kitchens, and on late-night phone calls. Some come from counseling

approaches such as cognitive behavioral therapy and dialectical behavior therapy. Using them on your own is self-help. A counselor can help you go further with them, and Chapter 16 tells you who to call, and Chapter 17 describes what professional care looks like.

What this book is not

This book is not medical advice, and the authors are not your doctor or counselor. If cravings or your mood are not easing, if you feel worse, or if you are thinking about hurting yourself, talk with a qualified health care provider or use the numbers below.

If you are in danger right now

Emergency: 911

Crisis or thoughts of suicide: call or text 988

Free treatment referrals: 1-800-662-4357

A word about practice

None of these tools needs to be done perfectly. A breath that is only a little slower still counts. A walk to the mailbox still counts. The point is to put a little space between the urge and what you do next, and to do that again and again until it becomes habit.

Quick Tool Finder

Find what is happening, then turn to the chapter.

- I want to use right now: the ten-minute delay, urge surfing, call someone (Chapter 2).
- I am on autopilot: the SOBER breathing space (Chapter 2).
- I cannot get out of my head: grounding (Chapter 4); thought or fact (Chapter 5).
- I am wide awake at 3 a.m.: the 3 a.m. plan (Chapter 4).
- I cannot sleep at all lately: a steady bedtime (Chapter 4).
- Nothing feels good anymore: the flat stretch (Chapter 6).
- I am angry: cool down anger (Chapter 6).
- I am lonely: the loneliness plan (Chapter 6); call someone (Chapter 2).
- I feel ashamed: guilt or shame, a self-compassion break (Chapter 6).
- I have lost track of why I am doing this: your reasons (Chapter 7).
- Someone offered me something: saying no (Chapter 8).
- I have a date, or loneliness is turning into wanting someone: dating and intimacy (Chapter 8).
- I am going somewhere with alcohol or drugs: the event plan, the exit line (Chapter 9).
- It is payday: the payday plan (Chapter 3).

- My phone keeps pulling me back: clear the phone (Chapter 3).
- I have too much empty time: a boredom list, plan things you enjoy (Chapter 10).
- A problem is eating at me: work the problem (Chapter 5).
- I have started pulling away from recovery: notice the drift (Chapter 3).
- I used again: After a Slip (Chapter 12), and If I Use Again at the back of this book.
- Nothing is helping: When Nothing Seems to Work (Chapter 13).
- I need a doctor for something else: when medical care and recovery meet (Chapter 17).
- I need more help: Chapters 16 and 17.

An alphabetical Index of Tools is near the back of the book.

1. How to Use a Tool

A tool works best when you have tried it before you need it. The middle of a hard hour is a difficult time to learn anything new. If you have practiced when things are calm, your hands and your head already know what to do.

Practice when calm

When it helps: on an ordinary day, when nothing is wrong.

Skills you practice when calm are easier to reach when you are upset. Think of a fire drill: nobody learns the route during the fire.

How to do it:

1. Pick one tool from this book.
2. Try it today, when you do not need it.
3. Notice how it feels, and what was easy or hard.
4. Try it again tomorrow.

An example: On a quiet Sunday afternoon, you try the slow breathing in Chapter 4 for two minutes. It feels odd. On Wednesday night, when a craving hits after a hard day at work, you already know the count.

Give it three tries

When it helps: when a tool did not seem to work the first time.

The first try of almost anything feels awkward. Most people need a few tries before a tool feels natural.

How to do it:

1. Try the tool on three different days.
2. After each try, rate how you felt before and after, from 0 to 10.
3. Look at the three ratings together before you decide.

If it does not help: set it aside and try a different tool. You can come back to this one later.

Stack your tools

When it helps: when one tool is not enough.

Many people use two or three tools in a row. A craving that one tool only softens can fade when you follow it with a second and a third.

How to do it:

1. Start with a fast tool, such as the ten-minute delay.
2. Follow it with a body tool, such as a walk or slow breathing.
3. Finish with a people tool, such as a phone call.

An example: A craving hits at 9 p.m. You set a ten-minute timer, go for a walk while it runs, and call a friend on the way back. By the time you hang up, the craving has dropped from an 8 to a 3.

Keep your tools where you can find them

When it helps: before you need them.

At 3 a.m. you will not want to search for a book. A card in your wallet or a note on your phone is easier to reach.

How to do it:

1. Write the tools that help you on the Toolkit Card in Chapter 19.
2. Put the same list in your phone's notes.
3. Tape a copy inside a kitchen cabinet or next to your bed.

2. The Next Ten Minutes

A craving rises, peaks, and passes. Most people find that the strongest part lasts minutes. These tools are for getting through the peak, when the pull is strongest and the thinking part of your brain feels far away.

The ten-minute delay

When it helps: the moment a craving hits.

You do not have to decide never. You only have to decide not now. Ten minutes is a promise most people can keep, and cravings often lose strength while you wait.

How to do it:

1. Tell yourself: not now. I will check again in ten minutes.
2. Set a timer on your phone.
3. Do something with your hands until it rings: dishes, a puzzle, folding laundry, texting a friend.
4. When it rings, check in with yourself. If the craving is still strong, set the timer again.

An example: You pass a liquor store on the way home. You pull into a parking lot, set a timer, and text a friend about their day. When the timer rings, you drive home a different way.

If it does not help: stack it with a body tool from Chapter 4 or call someone.

Urge surfing

When it helps: when a craving feels like it will never stop.

Watching a craving closely, without acting on it, can show you that it has a shape. It builds, it crests, and it falls. Seeing that happen, even once, can make the next one less frightening.

How to do it:

1. Sit down somewhere safe.
2. Notice where you feel the craving in your body: your chest, your stomach, your hands, your mouth.
3. Rate it from 0 to 10.
4. Breathe slowly and watch it the way you would watch a wave come in.
5. Rate it again every two minutes. Write the numbers down.
6. Notice when the number starts to drop.

An example: Your craving starts at an 8, feels like a 9 after four minutes, and is a 5 by minute twelve. The next time, you remember the 5.

The HALT check

When it helps: when you feel off and cannot say why.

Hunger, anger, loneliness, and tiredness can each feel like a craving. Fixing the plain need underneath sometimes takes the edge off.

How to do it:

1. Ask yourself: am I Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired?
2. If hungry, eat something, even something small.
3. If angry, move your body or write down what happened.
4. If lonely, call or text someone, or go where people are.
5. If tired, rest, even for fifteen minutes.

An example: It is 4 p.m. and you are edgy. You realize you skipped lunch. A sandwich later, the edge is gone.

Change the room

When it helps: when where you are is part of the problem.

Places carry memories. Moving your body to a new place can interrupt the pull.

How to do it:

1. Stand up and go somewhere else, even another room.
2. If you can, go outside.
3. If people or places are pulling at you, leave and go somewhere safe: a meeting, a friend's house, a library, a coffee shop.

Call someone

When it helps: any time. This is one of the strongest tools there is.

Cravings grow in isolation. A voice on the phone reminds you that you are not alone with it, and it gives your mind something else to hold.

How to do it:

1. Call a person on your list.
2. You do not have to explain. You can say: I am having a hard minute. Can you talk?
3. Talk about anything, even the weather.
4. If nobody answers, leave a message and call the next person.
5. If nobody answers at all, call a helpline. 988 is open all day, every day.

If it does not help: call again in ten minutes, or go where people are.

Delay, distract, decide

When it helps: when you want a simple plan you can remember.

How to do it:

1. Delay: set a timer for ten minutes.
2. Distract: do something that takes your full attention, such as a game, a puzzle, cooking, or cleaning.
3. Decide: when the timer rings, choose your next step on purpose.

The SOBER breathing space

When it helps: when you notice you are on autopilot.

This short practice comes from mindfulness-based relapse prevention. It helps you step out of autopilot before you act.

How to do it:

1. Stop what you are doing.
2. Observe what is happening in your body, your feelings, and your thoughts.
3. Breathe, and focus on your breath for a few moments.
4. Expand your attention to your whole body and the room around you.
5. Respond on purpose, choosing what you will do next.

Say it out loud

When it helps: when the craving is loud in your head.

Saying a craving out loud, to yourself or to someone else, can shrink it. It moves the craving from a secret to a fact you can handle.

How to do it:

1. Say: I am having a craving right now.
2. Say how strong it is, from 0 to 10.
3. Say what you are going to do next.

3. Cues and Triggers

A trigger is anything that sets off a craving: a place, a person, a time of day, a feeling, a smell, a song, payday. Knowing your triggers lets you plan for them instead of being surprised.

Map your triggers

When it helps: when cravings seem to come out of nowhere.

How to do it:

1. For one week, write down each craving as it happens.
2. Note the time, where you were, who you were with, and how you felt.
3. At the end of the week, look for patterns.
4. Circle the three triggers that show up most.

An example: Your week shows that most cravings hit between 5 and 7 p.m., after work, when you are alone and tired. That tells you where to put a plan.

Clear your space

When it helps: in your first days and weeks, and any time you notice a reminder.

Things you see every day can pull at you. Removing them takes one trigger off the table.

How to do it:

1. Remove alcohol, drugs, and anything used with them from your home, if you can do so safely.
2. Delete numbers of people you used with or bought from, or block them.
3. Change routes that take you past places you used to go.
4. Ask the people you live with for help if you share the space.

Notice the drift

When it helps: when things feel a little off, before any craving shows up.

Recovery usually comes apart slowly before it comes apart all at once. The early changes are your warning signs. They are different for everyone, so this tool helps you find your own.

How to do it:

1. Think about a past bad stretch, or a time you went back to using.
2. Ask: what changed first? What did I stop doing? Who did I stop talking to?
3. Ask: what places, people, money habits, routines, or thoughts started showing up again?
4. Pick the two changes another person could notice before you did.
5. Write an if-then plan for each one, and tell someone close to you what to watch for.

An example: Common warning signs people report include skipping meals, staying up late, pulling away from people, stopping meetings or calls, reopening an old contact, carrying more cash, driving past old places, and thinking often about how good using used to feel.

Clear the phone

When it helps: in your first weeks, and any time your phone pulls you back.

A phone can hold a lot of triggers: numbers, photos, apps, and old routes.

How to do it:

1. Delete or block numbers of people you used with or bought from.
2. Archive or delete photos and messages that pull you back.
3. Remove delivery apps, betting apps, or anything else tied to using.
4. Change map favorites and routes that pass old places.
5. Set your phone to go quiet at night, and charge it outside the bedroom.

Avoid, alter, or accept

When it helps: when you know a trigger is coming.

How to do it:

1. Avoid it if you can: skip the event, take another route, leave early.

2. Alter it if you cannot avoid it: bring a friend, drive yourself, set a time limit.
3. Accept what you cannot change, and bring your tools: a plan, a phone number, an exit.

Payday plan

When it helps: when money in your pocket is a trigger.

How to do it:

1. Decide ahead of time where your pay goes: rent, food, bills.
2. Pay what you can the day you get paid.
3. Carry only the cash you need that day.
4. Ask someone you trust to check in with you on payday.

Anniversaries and hard dates

When it helps: on birthdays, holidays, and dates tied to loss or old memories.

How to do it:

1. Mark hard dates on your calendar a week ahead.
2. Plan the day, hour by hour if you need to.
3. Tell someone the date is coming and ask them to check on you.
4. Plan one kind thing for yourself that day.

4. Your Body

Your body and your mood are connected. When you are wound up, hungry, or exhausted, cravings can feel stronger. These tools work through your body.

Slow breathing

When it helps: when you feel wound up or shaky.

Many people find that slowing their breath helps them settle. Breathing out longer than you breathe in is a simple way to slow down.

How to do it:

1. Breathe in through your nose while you count to four.
2. Hold for a count of two.
3. Breathe out through your mouth while you count to six.
4. Repeat five to ten times.

If it does not help: try box breathing below, or pair your breathing with a walk.

Box breathing

When it helps: when you want a pattern that is easy to remember.

How to do it:

1. Breathe in for a count of four.
2. Hold for four.
3. Breathe out for four.

4. Hold for four.
5. Repeat four times. You can trace a square with your finger as you go.

Grounding: five, four, three, two, one

When it helps: when your mind is racing or you feel far away.

Paying close attention to what is around you right now can pull your mind out of the past or the future and back into the room.

How to do it:

1. Name five things you can see.
2. Name four things you can touch, and touch them.
3. Name three things you can hear.
4. Name two things you can smell.
5. Name one thing you can taste.

Tense and release

When it helps: when your body feels tight.

How to do it:

1. Sit or lie down.
2. Squeeze your hands into fists for five seconds, then let go.
3. Do the same with your shoulders, then your jaw, then your legs, then your feet.
4. Notice how each part feels after you let go.

Move

When it helps: when you feel restless or stuck.

Many people in recovery say movement is one of their most reliable tools. It does not have to be exercise. It only has to be movement.

How to do it:

1. Walk around the block, or up and down the stairs.
2. Stretch your arms over your head and hold for five breaths.
3. Put on a song and move to it.
4. Do what your body allows. A slow walk counts.

Get outside

When it helps: when you have been inside too long.

How to do it:

1. Step outside for five minutes.
2. Look at the sky and the trees, or whatever is there.
3. If you can, walk somewhere green: a park, a trail, a quiet street.

A steady bedtime

When it helps: when nights are long.

How to do it:

1. Go to bed and get up at about the same time every day, even on weekends.

2. Put your phone across the room thirty minutes before bed.
3. Keep the room dark and cool if you can.
4. If you cannot sleep, get up, sit somewhere quiet, and go back when you feel sleepy.
5. If sleep stays hard for weeks, talk with a doctor or a community health center.

The 3 a.m. plan

When it helps: when you wake in the night and the house is quiet.

How to do it:

1. Get up and turn on a small light.
2. Drink a glass of water and eat something small if you are hungry.
3. Do something quiet with your hands: a puzzle, a book, folding laundry, a coloring page.
4. Put on a recorded meeting, a podcast, or calm music.
5. If a craving hits, use the ten-minute delay and urge surfing in Chapter 2.
6. If you need to talk, 988 and many warmlines answer at night. Online meetings run around the clock.
7. Go back to bed when you feel sleepy.

Eat and drink water

When it helps: every day, and especially on hard ones.

How to do it:

1. Eat something every few hours, even if it is small.
2. Keep water where you can see it.
3. Keep easy food nearby: crackers, fruit, peanut butter, soup, bread.
4. If eating is hard, start with something small and plain.

5. Your Thoughts

A thought is not an order. You can notice a thought, question it, and choose what to do. These tools help you slow your thinking down.

Catch it, check it, change it

When it helps: when a thought is pulling you toward using, or making you feel worse.

Thoughts can feel like facts, especially when you are tired or upset. Writing a thought down and looking at it makes it easier to see whether it is true.

How to do it:

1. Catch it: write the thought down, word for word.
2. Check it: ask, is this true? What would I tell a friend who thought this?
3. Change it: write a thought that is more fair to you.
4. Read the new thought out loud.

An example: Thought: I will never get this right. Check: I have gone four days, which is longer than last month. New thought: I am learning, and four days is real progress.

Play the tape forward

When it helps: when using starts to sound like a good idea.

Cravings show you the first five minutes. This tool shows you the rest of the movie.

How to do it:

1. Picture the first drink or the first use.
2. Keep going. Picture the next hour, the next morning, and the next week.
3. Write down how it ends.
4. Read what you wrote the next time the thought comes back.

Pros and cons

When it helps: when you feel pulled in two directions.

How to do it:

1. Draw four boxes: good things about using, bad things about using, good things about not using, and bad things about not using.
2. Fill in each box. Include what you get from using, such as relief, sleep, or fun. A list that leaves those out is easy to argue with later, when a craving hits.
3. Circle the items that matter most to you, and keep the page where you can find it.

Name the trap

When it helps: when your thinking gets extreme.

Some kinds of thoughts show up again and again. Naming them makes them easier to spot.

- All or nothing: I slipped, so I have failed completely.
- Fortune telling: This will never get better.
- Mind reading: Everyone thinks I am a mess.

- Just this once: One time will not matter.
- Should statements: I should be over this by now.
- Labeling: I am a loser.

When you notice one, say its name. Then ask what a more fair thought would be.

Thought or fact?

When it helps: when you are sure of something that makes you feel terrible.

How to do it:

1. Write the thought.
2. Ask: could I prove this in a courtroom?
3. Write what you actually know for certain.
4. Notice the difference.

I am having the thought that

When it helps: when a thought grabs hold and will not let go.

This tool comes from acceptance and commitment therapy. Adding a few words in front of a thought can put a little distance between you and it.

How to do it:

1. Say the thought: I will never be happy sober.
2. Say it again with a frame: I am having the thought that I will never be happy sober.
3. Say it once more: I notice I am having the thought that I will never be happy sober.

4. Notice whether the thought feels any lighter.

The ABC of a craving

When it helps: when you want to understand what set a craving off.

This tool comes from rational emotive behavior therapy and is used in SMART Recovery. It separates what happened from what you told yourself about it.

How to do it:

1. A is the activating event: what happened.
2. B is the belief: what you told yourself about it.
3. C is the consequence: how you felt and what you wanted to do.
4. Question the B. Is it true? Is it helpful? Write a new belief.
5. Notice how the new belief changes the C.

An example: A: Your boss criticized your work. B: I am useless, so why bother. C: You wanted a drink. New belief: One bad review is one bad review. I can fix the report tomorrow.

Worry time

When it helps: when worries follow you all day.

How to do it:

1. Pick a fifteen-minute window each day for worrying.
2. When a worry shows up at another time, write it down and tell yourself you will get to it at worry time.

3. At worry time, read the list and write one small step for any worry you can act on.
4. When the fifteen minutes are up, stop.

Work the problem

When it helps: when a problem keeps eating at you.

How to do it:

1. Write the problem in one sentence.
2. Write what you actually know about it.
3. List every possible next action, even ones that seem silly.
4. Pick one action you can take today.
5. Put it on your calendar, and do it.

The next right thing

When it helps: when everything feels too big.

How to do it:

1. Stop trying to solve the whole problem.
2. Ask: what is the next right thing I can do in the next hour?
3. Do only that.
4. Then ask again.

Kind self-talk

When it helps: when your inner voice is harsh.

How to do it:

1. Notice what you are saying to yourself.

2. Ask: would I say this to a friend?
3. Say what you would tell a friend instead, out loud if you can.

6. Your Feelings

Many people used alcohol or drugs to handle feelings. In recovery, the feelings come back, sometimes all at once. These tools help you feel them without being run by them.

Name it

When it helps: when you feel overwhelmed and cannot sort it out.

Putting a feeling into words can make it easier to handle. Naming it does not make it go away.

How to do it:

1. Say or write: right now I feel...
2. Pick the closest word: sad, angry, scared, ashamed, lonely, bored, restless, jealous, tired.
3. Rate it from 0 to 10.
4. Write one thing that might have set it off.

Ride the wave

When it helps: when a feeling is strong and you want it gone right now.

How to do it:

1. Notice where the feeling sits in your body.
2. Remind yourself that feelings rise and fall.
3. Breathe slowly and let it be there without acting on it.
4. Check the number again in ten minutes.

Do the opposite

When it helps: when a feeling is pushing you toward something that will make things worse.

Feelings come with urges: hide, lash out, use. Doing a small opposite action can change how you feel.

How to do it:

1. Notice what the feeling wants you to do.
2. Pick a small action that goes the other way: step outside instead of hiding, speak kindly instead of yelling, call someone instead of using.
3. Do it, even if you do not feel like it.

An example: Shame tells you to stay in bed and not answer the phone. The opposite action is to get up, shower, and text one friend.

Comfort through the five senses

When it helps: when you need to be gentle with yourself.

How to do it:

1. Sight: look at a photo you love, or out a window.
2. Sound: play a song that calms you.
3. Smell: soap, coffee, or something from outside.
4. Taste: a piece of candy or a warm drink.
5. Touch: a soft blanket, clean socks, a warm shower.

A self-compassion break

When it helps: when you are being hard on yourself.

How to do it:

1. Say: this is a hard moment.
2. Say: hard moments are part of being human, and other people feel this too.
3. Put a hand on your chest or your arm.
4. Say: may I be kind to myself right now.

The flat stretch

When it helps: when weeks go by and nothing feels good.

Many people in early recovery describe a stretch when nothing feels good, sleep is off, and old pleasures feel empty. Some people call it post-acute withdrawal. It is common, and it does not mean recovery is failing.

How to do it:

1. Keep doing small things you used to enjoy, even when they feel flat. Plan things you enjoy, in Chapter 10, is built for this.
2. Notice small good moments and write one down each day.
3. Keep your routine, meals, and sleep as steady as you can.
4. Tell someone how it feels.
5. If it lasts or gets heavier, talk with a doctor or a community health center.

Cool down anger

When it helps: when you feel your temper rising.

How to do it:

1. Walk away from the situation, if you can do so safely.
2. Move your body hard for a few minutes: walk fast, climb stairs.
3. Breathe out slowly, five times.
4. Write down what you wish you could say. Do not send it.
5. Come back to the problem when you are calmer.

Guilt or shame?

When it helps: when you feel bad about yourself.

Guilt says: I did something wrong. Shame says: I am something wrong. Guilt can point you toward a fix. Shame tends to push people toward hiding and using.

How to do it:

1. Write what you feel bad about.
2. Ask: is this about something I did, or about who I am?
3. If it is about something you did, pick one step to make it right. Chapter 8 has a tool for amends.
4. If it is about who you are, talk with someone you trust.

Loneliness plan

When it helps: when you feel alone.

How to do it:

1. Text or call one person, even if it is only to say hello.

2. Go where people are: a meeting, a library, a park, a place of worship, a coffee shop.
3. Join one online meeting. Chapter 16 tells you where to find them.
4. Plan tomorrow so it has at least one contact with another person.

Signs to check with a provider

When it helps: when you wonder whether this is more than early recovery.

Some people find that depression, anxiety, trauma, or attention problems show up once they stop drinking or using. A provider can help sort that out.

How to do it:

1. Talk with a doctor, counselor, or community health center if, for more than two weeks, you notice any of these: feeling down or empty most days; losing interest in almost everything; panic attacks; worry that will not let up; trouble focusing that keeps you from daily tasks; old memories that take over your day.
2. If you are thinking about suicide, call or text 988 now.

Grief

When it helps: when you are missing someone, or missing your old life.

Recovery can bring grief: for people you have lost, for time you cannot get back, even for the substance itself. That is normal.

How to do it:

1. Name what you are grieving.
2. Write a letter to the person or thing you have lost. You do not have to send it.
3. Tell someone what you are missing.
4. If grief stays heavy for a long time, reach out to a counselor or a grief group.

7. What Matters to You

Knowing why you are doing this can carry you through the hours when you do not feel like doing it. These tools come from motivational interviewing and acceptance and commitment therapy.

Your reasons

When it helps: early on, and any time your reasons feel far away.

How to do it:

1. Write down every reason you want to change, big or small.
2. Circle the three that matter most.
3. Put those three somewhere you will see them every day.

The importance and confidence scales

When it helps: when you feel stuck or unsure.

These two questions come from motivational interviewing. They help you see where you are and what would move you forward.

How to do it:

1. Ask: on a scale of 0 to 10, how important is this change to me?
2. Ask: why did I pick that number and not a lower one? Write the answer. Those are your reasons.

3. Ask: on a scale of 0 to 10, how confident am I that I can do it?
4. Ask: what would move my confidence up by one point? Do that.

Your values

When it helps: when you want direction.

Values are what you want your life to stand for, such as honesty, family, faith, work, health, or kindness. You never finish a value the way you finish a goal.

How to do it:

1. Write five things that matter most to you.
2. For each one, write one small action this week that would move you toward it.
3. Notice when using, or wanting to use, pulls you away from them.

Willingness

When it helps: when a craving or feeling will not leave.

Fighting a feeling can make it louder. Willingness means letting a feeling be there while you still do what matters to you.

How to do it:

1. Notice the feeling and name it.
2. Say: I am willing to feel this and still do what matters.
3. Take one small step toward one of your values, with the feeling along for the ride.

Committed action

When it helps: every week.

How to do it:

1. Pick one value.
2. Set one small, specific action for this week that serves it.
3. Tell someone your plan.
4. At the end of the week, check how it went and set the next one.

8. People

Recovery happens with other people. These tools help you reach out, set limits, and repair what needs repair.

Build your list

When it helps: now, before you need it.

How to do it:

1. Write down five people you could call on a hard day.
2. Next to each name, write when they are usually free.
3. Add two helplines: 988 and 1-800-662-4357.
4. Put the list in your phone and on paper.

If it does not help: if you cannot think of five people, start with one, and add people you meet at meetings or recovery groups.

Asking for help

When it helps: when you are carrying too much alone.

How to do it:

1. Pick one person.
2. Say what you need in one sentence: Can you check on me tonight? Can you drive me to a meeting?
3. If they say no, thank them, and ask the next person on your list.

Finding a sponsor or mentor

When it helps: when you want steady support from someone further along.

How to do it:

1. Go to a few meetings and listen for someone whose recovery you respect.
2. Ask them after a meeting: would you be willing to help me?
3. If they say no, it is not personal. Ask someone else.
4. Agree on how often you will talk.

Your first meeting

When it helps: before you walk into a room for the first time.

How to do it:

1. Pick a meeting and look up the time and place, or the online link.
2. Arrive a few minutes early. You can tell the person at the door that it is your first time, or say nothing.
3. Sit anywhere. You do not have to speak, and you do not need to arrive knowing what to say.
4. Formats differ. It is fine to ask the host what to expect.
5. If a room does not feel right, you can leave. Try a different meeting next time.

If you hate meetings

When it helps: when meetings have not worked for you.

How to do it:

1. Try a different group or format. Groups differ a lot from room to room.

2. Try a different program: SMART Recovery, LifeRing, Recovery Dharma, Celebrate Recovery, or others at the back of this book.
3. Try online or phone meetings, where you can listen with your camera off.
4. Go three times before you decide.
5. If groups make you feel worse, use one-on-one support: a peer recovery coach, a counselor, or a trusted friend.

Saying no

When it helps: when someone offers you a drink or a drug, or asks for something you cannot give.

How to do it:

1. Keep it short: No, thanks.
2. You do not owe a reason. If you want one, have it ready: I am not drinking right now.
3. Hold something else in your hand, like a soda or a coffee.
4. If they push, leave.

Setting a boundary

When it helps: when someone keeps doing something that pulls you backward.

How to do it:

1. Decide what you will do, not what they must do.

2. Say it once, calmly: If there is drinking at the house, I will leave.
3. Follow through.

Making amends

When it helps: when you have hurt someone and want to set it right.

How to do it:

1. Say what you did, without excuses.
2. Say you are sorry.
3. Ask what you can do to make it right, and listen.
4. Change what you do. That is the part people remember.

If it does not help: if contacting someone would hurt them or you, talk it through with a sponsor or counselor first.

Dating and intimacy

When it helps: before a date, after being with someone, or when loneliness turns into wanting someone.

How to do it:

1. Plan dates that do not center on drinking: coffee, a meal, a walk.
2. Decide ahead of time what you will say if you are offered a drink or a drug.
3. Tell someone you trust your plan for the evening, and check in after.

4. Notice when wanting someone is really loneliness, boredom, or a craving in disguise. The HALT check in Chapter 2 helps.
5. Early in recovery, many people choose to go slowly with new relationships. Talk it over with a sponsor or someone further along.

Talking with family

When it helps: when the people at home are worried, angry, or hopeful.

How to do it:

1. Pick a calm time to talk.
2. Say what you are doing for your recovery.
3. Say what would help you, and ask what would help them.
4. Give trust time. It usually comes back slowly.

Service

When it helps: when you are stuck in your own head.

Many people in recovery say that helping someone else is one of the things that helps them most.

How to do it:

1. Offer to set up chairs or make coffee at a meeting.
2. Call someone newer than you and ask how they are doing.
3. Volunteer somewhere that does not revolve around alcohol: a food bank, a shelter, an animal rescue.

4. Help a neighbor with a small task.

9. Places and Events

Parties, weddings, holidays, work events, and game days can be hard. A plan made ahead of time does most of the work.

The event plan

When it helps: before any event where alcohol or drugs will be around.

How to do it:

1. Decide whether you really need to go.
2. Drive yourself, or have a ride you can call.
3. Bring a friend who knows your plan.
4. Decide how long you will stay.
5. Decide what you will drink, and hold it all night.
6. Have a line ready for when someone offers.

The exit line

When it helps: when you need to leave.

How to do it:

1. Have a short line ready: I have an early morning.
2. Say it once and go.
3. Text your friend or sponsor once you are out.

Holidays

When it helps: in the weeks around a holiday.

How to do it:

1. Plan each holiday day ahead of time.
2. Add extra meetings the week of the holiday. Many groups hold marathon meetings on holidays.
3. Plan a new tradition that does not center on drinking or using.
4. Have a phone plan for the hardest hour.

Work and travel

When it helps: at work events or when you are away from home.

How to do it:

1. Find online meetings you can join from anywhere.
2. Tell one person at work or at home your plan.
3. Keep your routine as close to normal as you can: meals, sleep, and a check-in call.

10. Your Days

Unplanned time can be one of the hardest parts of early recovery. A day with some shape is easier to get through.

A simple routine

When it helps: when your days have no shape.

How to do it:

1. Pick a wake-up time.
2. Plan one thing for the morning, one for the afternoon, and one for the evening.
3. Put one recovery action in every day: a meeting, a call, or a page of this book.
4. Write tomorrow's plan before bed.

A morning start

When it helps: every morning.

How to do it:

1. Get up at your set time.
2. Drink a glass of water.
3. Write one thing you are grateful for.
4. Read your plan for the day.

An evening review

When it helps: every night.

How to do it:

1. Ask: what went well today?

2. Ask: what was hard, and what helped?
3. Write one thing you will do tomorrow.
4. Put your phone on the charger across the room.

Plan the hard hours

When it helps: when the same hours are hard every day.

How to do it:

1. Write down the hours when cravings are strongest.
2. Plan something for each of those hours: a meeting, a walk, a call, a meal.
3. Tell someone your plan.

If-then plans

When it helps: when you know a hard moment is coming.

How to do it:

1. Write: if this happens, then I will do that.
2. Keep the plan short and specific.
3. Make three of them for your most common triggers.

An example: If I pass the store on the way home, then I will call my sister. If I cannot sleep, then I will get up and read. If someone offers me a drink, then I will say no, thanks, and step outside.

A boredom list

When it helps: when you have time on your hands.

How to do it:

1. Write a list of twenty things you can do that cost little or nothing.
2. Include things for your hands, your body, and your mind: cooking, walking, drawing, fixing something, a library book, a free class.
3. When boredom hits, pick one from the list without thinking about it too long.

Plan things you enjoy

When it helps: when days feel flat and empty.

This tool comes from behavioral activation. Doing things you enjoy, or things that give you a sense of accomplishment, can lift your mood even when you do not feel like starting.

How to do it:

1. List ten activities you enjoy or used to enjoy, and ten small tasks that make you feel capable.
2. Put one of each on your calendar every day.
3. After each one, rate how you felt from 0 to 10.
4. Look for the ones that raise your number, and do more of them.

Reward yourself

When it helps: when you want a new habit to stick.

Actions that are followed by something good are easier to repeat.

How to do it:

1. Pick one recovery action: a meeting, a call, a walk, a day's tracking.
2. Pick a small reward you will take right after: a favorite drink, a show, a hot bath, a few dollars in a jar.
3. Do the action, then take the reward, every time.
4. Save up the jar for something bigger at the end of the month.

Journaling

When it helps: at the end of the day, or any time your head is full.

How to do it:

1. Write for ten minutes without stopping.
2. If you get stuck, start with: today I noticed...
3. Write about what happened, how you felt, and what helped.
4. Read back through a week of entries now and then to see what you are learning.

Creative outlets

When it helps: when feelings need somewhere to go.

How to do it:

1. Pick something you can do with your hands: drawing, music, cooking, writing, building, gardening.
2. Do it for twenty minutes, without judging the result.
3. Keep your supplies where you can reach them.

Weekends

When it helps: on Friday afternoon.

How to do it:

1. Plan Saturday and Sunday before Friday night.
2. Put at least one meeting or recovery contact in each day.
3. Plan one thing you will look forward to.

11. Quiet

Quiet time can steady you. Many people in recovery set aside a few minutes each day for it.

A simple sitting practice

When it helps: every day, for a few minutes.

How to do it:

1. Sit somewhere quiet and set a timer for three minutes.
2. Breathe normally and notice each breath.
3. When your mind wanders, bring it back to your breath. That is the practice.
4. Add a minute each week if you want.

Walking practice

When it helps: when sitting still is too hard.

How to do it:

1. Walk slowly for five minutes.
2. Notice each step: your heel, the ball of your foot, your toes.
3. When your mind wanders, bring it back to your feet.

Gratitude

When it helps: in the morning and at night.

How to do it:

1. Write three things you are grateful for today.

2. Make them specific: a hot shower, a text from a friend, a meal.
3. Read yesterday's list before you write today's.

The journal One Day at a Time, Written Down in this library gives you ninety days of this practice.

Kind wishes

When it helps: when you feel angry at yourself or someone else.

How to do it:

1. Sit quietly.
2. Say to yourself: may I be safe, may I be well, may I be at peace.
3. Then say the same for someone you love.
4. If you can, say it for someone you are angry with.

Prayer or reflection

When it helps: if faith is part of your life, or you want a moment to step back.

How to do it:

1. Set aside a few minutes at the same time each day.
2. Pray, read something that steadies you, or sit with a question.
3. Write down anything you want to remember.

12. After a Slip

A slip does not erase what you have learned. Many people in long-term recovery had slips along the way. What you do next matters most.

Get safe first

If you return to opioids after a period of not using or using less, your tolerance may be lower than it was before. Do not use alone, and keep naloxone nearby. If you are in danger, call 911. The If I Use Again page at the back of this book has a plan to fill in.

Tell someone

When it helps: as soon as you can.

Keeping a slip secret gives shame room to grow. Saying it out loud to someone you trust helps you start again.

How to do it:

1. Call a person you trust, your sponsor, or your group.
2. Say what happened in one or two sentences.
3. Ask them to check on you tomorrow.

A learning review

When it helps: a day or two after, once you are steady.

How to do it:

1. Write what happened, in order, starting a few hours before.
2. Mark the moment where things turned.

3. Write one thing you could do differently at that moment.
4. Add it to your if-then plans in Chapter 10.

Start the next day

When it helps: the morning after.

How to do it:

1. Get up at your usual time.
2. Eat, drink water, and shower.
3. Go to a meeting or make a call.
4. Go back to your routine.

13. When Nothing Seems to Work

Some days, every tool falls flat. That happens to everyone. On those days, lower the bar.

- Get through the next hour, not the whole day.
- Do the smallest possible version of a tool: one slow breath, one text, one step outside.
- Go to bed early. Tomorrow is a new start.
- Call 988 if you feel hopeless or unsafe.

If most days feel like this for more than a couple of weeks, that is a reason to talk with a doctor, a counselor, or the SAMHSA National Helpline. Chapter 16 has the numbers.

14. Tools for the People Around You

Family and friends can use many of these same tools. Some that help most:

- The HALT check, for yourself on hard days.
- Setting a boundary, so you can support someone without being pulled under.
- Slow breathing and grounding, for when you are worried.
- Your own support: family groups meet in person and online, and are listed at the back of this book.

The book For Families in this library goes further.

15. Where These Skills Come From

Many of the tools in this book come from counseling approaches that have been studied and used for years. You do not need to know these names to use the tools. They are here so you know where to look if you want to learn more, or if a counselor mentions them.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
Looks at how thoughts, feelings, and actions affect each other. Tools in this book: catch it, check it, change it; thought or fact; name the trap; mapping triggers.

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT)
Teaches skills for handling strong emotions and hard moments. Tools in this book: do the opposite, ride the wave, comfort through the five senses, pros and cons.

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)
Helps people make room for hard thoughts and feelings while acting on what they value. Tools in this book: I am having the thought that, your values, willingness, committed action.

Motivational interviewing
A way of talking about change that draws out a person's own reasons. Tools in this book: your reasons, the importance and confidence scales, play the tape forward.

Mindfulness-based relapse prevention

Combines mindfulness practice with relapse prevention. Tools in this book: urge surfing, the SOBER breathing space, a simple sitting practice.

Behavioral activation

Builds a fuller life by scheduling activities that bring enjoyment or accomplishment. Tools in this book: plan things you enjoy, a simple routine, a boredom list.

SMART Recovery

A free mutual-help program built around four points: building and keeping motivation, coping with urges, managing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and living a balanced life. Tools in this book that match its approach: pros and cons, the ABC of a craving, delay and distract. Its meetings and tools are free at smartrecovery.org.

16. When Self-Help Is Not Enough

These tools work alongside support from other people, and many people use them while they are in treatment, meetings, or counseling.

Before you stop on your own

Stopping alcohol or benzodiazepines suddenly can be dangerous. Talk with a qualified provider before you stop, or call the SAMHSA National Helpline. The book Don't Panic in this library covers the first hours after you stop.

Asking about medication

If you want to know whether a medication could help, say to a doctor, nurse practitioner, or clinic: "I want to know if a medication for alcohol or opioids is an option for me." The book Medications for Addiction, Explained in this library goes further.

If cravings or your mood are not easing, if you feel worse, or if you are thinking about suicide, reach out:

- Call or text 988 for crisis support, any hour.
- Call the SAMHSA National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357 for free referrals to treatment and counseling.
- Community health centers offer counseling on a sliding scale. Find one at findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov.
- Meetings and online meetings are free. They are listed at the back of this book.

- The Free Help Directory in this library lists more free and low-cost help.

17. What Professional Care Looks Like

If you can get professional care, it can work alongside every tool in this book. This chapter describes the kinds of care that exist, so you know what you are asking for. It does not tell you which one you need. A qualified provider can help you decide.

Kinds of care

- Counseling: one-on-one or group sessions with a licensed counselor, social worker, or psychologist.
- Outpatient treatment: regular sessions, often a few hours a week, while you live at home and keep working.
- Intensive outpatient: more hours each week, usually several days a week.
- Residential treatment: you live at the program for a period of time.
- Medically supervised withdrawal, often called detox: care while you stop, for people who need medical support.
- Medications for opioid and alcohol use disorders: prescribed and followed by a doctor, nurse practitioner, or clinic.
- Peer recovery coaching: support from a trained peer in recovery, often free through recovery community organizations.

What a first appointment is usually like

Most programs start with an assessment. Someone will ask what you use, how much, and for how long, and about your health, your mental health, your living situation, and what you want. The questions are there to match you with care that fits. You can ask questions too.

Questions you can ask

- What kinds of care do you offer?
- Do you take Medicaid, or people with no insurance? Do you have a sliding scale?
- Do you offer medications for addiction, or work with someone who does?
- How long is the wait?
- What does a typical week look like?

When medical care and recovery meet

A broken bone, dental work, surgery, or back pain can bring you into medical care that has nothing to do with addiction. Tell the clinician treating you: "I am in recovery from alcohol or drug use. I want you to know that before we decide how to treat this."

Questions you can ask:

- What are my options?
- Does anything you are considering have misuse or dependence risks I should know about?
- If you prescribe something, what should I know about taking it safely?

- Whom should I call if I have concerns after I leave?
- Should someone in my recovery support know about the plan?

Finding care you can afford

Call the SAMHSA National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357, search FindTreatment.gov, or look for a community health center at findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov. The Free Help Directory in this library lists more.

If opioids have been part of your use

Get naloxone now, while things are steady. Ask a pharmacist, health department, or harm-reduction program where to get it. Learn how to use the kind you have. Tell someone close to you where you keep it.

Check the date and replace it when needed. If you think someone is overdosing, give naloxone if you have it and call 911.

18. My Written Plan

A written plan pulls your tools together in one place. Fill this in when you are calm, and keep a copy where you can find it.

My three biggest reasons:

My main triggers:

My warning signs that things are slipping:

My go-to tools for a craving:

MY WRITTEN PLAN

People I will call:

My daily routine:

What I will do if I slip:

Professional care or groups I use or want to try:

MY WEEK

Fill this in at the end of each week to see whether your tools are working.

Highest craving this week, from 0 to 10:

Average hours of sleep:

Contacts made: calls, meetings, check-ins:

Tools I used most:

What worked, and what I will try next week:

19. Building Your Toolkit

Pick the five tools that work best for you. Write them here, with one line each on when you will use them.

Tool 1:

Tool 2:

Tool 3:

Tool 4:

Tool 5:

Toolkit Card

Copy your five tools onto a card or a piece of paper that fits in your wallet or phone case. Add 988 and 1-800-662-4357, and the names of two people you can call.

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If I Use Again

If you use again, this book is still yours. Get safe first, then use this plan. Fill it in now, while you are steady.

If you return to opioids after a period of not using or using less, your tolerance may be lower than it was before. Do not use alone. Keep naloxone (Narcan) nearby, and make sure someone with you knows how to use it.

The first person I will call:

If they do not answer, I will call:

A safe place I can go:

What I will do in the next hour:

Who else needs to know (doctor, counselor, group):

What I will do tomorrow morning:

If you are in danger, call 911. For crisis support, call or text 988.

People and Resources

Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number

Crisis: call or text 988
988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, 24/7. Chat at 988lifeline.org.

Emergency: 911

Treatment referrals: 1-800-662-4357
SAMHSA National Helpline, free and confidential, 24/7, English and Spanish. Text your ZIP code to 435748 or search FindTreatment.gov.

Free Support Groups

These groups are free to attend. Most meet in person and online. Try more than one until you find a room that fits.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) aa.org
12-step groups for people with a drinking problem.

Narcotics Anonymous (NA) na.org
12-step groups for recovery from any drug.

SMART Recovery smartrecovery.org
Skills-based groups with no religious content, for any addiction.

LifeRing Secular Recovery lifering.org
Secular peer support, in person, online, and by email.

Recovery Dharma recoverydharma.org
Peer-led groups based on Buddhist practices.

Celebrate Recovery celebraterecovery.com
Christ-centered 12-step groups, usually hosted by churches.

Women for Sobriety womenforsobriety.org
Support groups for women.

For family and friends al-anon.org
Al-Anon, Nar-Anon, and SMART Recovery Family & Friends.

Online Meetings

Online meetings run at every hour of the day and night. You can use a first name only and keep your camera off. Many also have a phone number you can dial in to with no internet at all.

In The Rooms intherooms.com
Free live video meetings every week for many recovery paths, 12-step and others. A free account with a username is all you need.

AA Online Intergroup aa-intergroup.org
AA meetings by video, phone, chat, and email, around the clock.

Meeting Guide app aa.org
AA's free app lists in-person, online, and phone meetings.

Virtual NA virtual-na.org
Narcotics Anonymous meetings online and by phone.

SMART Recovery Online smartrecovery.org
Online meetings, chat, and message boards.

LifeRing Online lifering.org
Video meetings, chat, forums, and email groups.

Some recovery websites show phone numbers that connect to treatment centers selling their services. For free, neutral referrals, call the SAMHSA National Helpline:

1-800-662-4357

Alder Creek Editions is not connected to any group or website listed in this book. Websites change. If one stops working, the SAMHSA helpline can point you to current options.

About the Authors

Stephen Deason has been in Recovery for more than eleven years and still begins and ends each day with meditation and gratitude. He has spent more than thirty years building teams and companies in healthcare and technology, and writes from his own experience about recovery, economics, business, and social enterprise. You can find more about Stephen and his work at aldercreekeditions.com and stephendeason.com.

Melissa Deason is also in long-term recovery, is a CPS-AD CARES Certified Peer Support Specialist for Addictive Disease, has been an attorney, and now spends her days wrangling tiny humans and working with women entering Recovery. She is Stephen's wife and the co-author of this book.

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