

Drug and Alcohol: 12-Week Core Structure (Extendable to 24 Weeks as Needed)

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Week 1: Building a Foundation in Recovery

Therapist Guide:

- **Objective:** Establish trust, introduce core ACT/CBT/EMDR principles, and help clients understand addiction as a cycle.
- **Universal Steps for Building Rapport and Trust:**
 1. **Create a Safe Environment:** Ensure a welcoming, nonjudgmental space where the client feels heard and supported.
 2. **Use Open-Ended Questions:** Encourage the client to share their story by asking about their experiences, struggles, and goals.
 3. **Validate Their Experience:** Acknowledge their feelings and challenges without offering premature solutions (e.g., "It sounds like this has been really difficult for you.").
 4. **Introduce ACT Principles:** Explain the importance of values, acceptance, and committed action in shaping recovery.
 5. **Psychoeducation on Addiction Cycle:** Introduce the "Bad Habit Cycle," discussing triggers, behaviors, and consequences to build awareness.
 6. **Mindfulness and Grounding Exercise:** Guide the client through a brief breathing or visualization exercise to demonstrate practical coping strategies.
- **Interventions:**
 - **Psychoeducation:** Explain addiction as a learned behavior and discuss the "Bad Habit Cycle."
 - **Values Exploration:** Introduce ACT principles, helping clients identify what matters most to them.
 - **Grounding Exercise:** Guided meditation for stability and present-moment awareness.
- **Handouts:**
 - **Bad Habit Cycle (illustration)**
 - **ACT Choice Point worksheet**
 - **Personal Values Worksheet**
- **Client Homework:**

- **Complete the Values Worksheet.**
- **Practice a daily 5-minute mindfulness grounding exercise.**
- **Journal a "Trigger Log"—when urges appear, what led to them, and what helped resist or manage them.**



Trigger Journal Template

Use this journal to track triggers that lead to cravings, emotional distress, or unwanted behaviors. By identifying patterns, you can develop healthier coping strategies.

Date & Time	Trigger	Emotion Felt	Reaction	Coping Strategy Used

Reflection Questions:

- What patterns do you notice in your triggers?
- Which coping strategies were most effective?
- What could you try differently next time?

ACT Defusion Techniques Guide

Defusion techniques help create distance between you and unhelpful thoughts, allowing you to see them as passing mental events rather than absolute truths. Use these strategies to practice cognitive defusion and break free from negative thought patterns.

1. Naming the Thought

Instead of saying, 'I'm a failure,' try saying, 'I'm having the thought that I'm a failure.' This helps separate you from the thought and recognize it as just one possible perspective.

2. The Silly Voice Technique

Say the thought in a silly or exaggerated voice. Repeat it in a cartoonish or robotic tone. This makes the thought feel less powerful and reduces its emotional impact.

3. Leaves on a Stream

Visualize placing each negative thought on a leaf and watching it float down a stream. Observe the thought without judgment and let it drift away.

4. Thank Your Mind

When an intrusive thought appears, acknowledge it by saying, 'Thanks, mind, for that thought. I see what you're doing, but I don't need to engage with that right now.'

5. The Radio Metaphor

Imagine your negative thoughts as background noise on a radio station. You can acknowledge them playing but choose not to tune in or engage deeply with them.

6. Hands as Thoughts Exercise

Place your hands in front of your face and notice how they block your view. Now, move them away and recognize how thoughts, like hands, can obscure perspective but don't define reality.

7. Singing Your Thoughts

Take a distressing thought and sing it to the tune of a familiar song (e.g., 'Happy Birthday'). This helps make the thought seem less serious and overwhelming.

8. Noticing and Labeling

When a thought arises, simply label it as 'worrying,' 'judging,' or 'remembering' rather than engaging with it. This helps create emotional distance and reduces over-identification with the thought.

Urge Surfing Worksheet

Urge surfing is a mindfulness-based technique that helps you observe cravings without acting on them. By acknowledging and riding out urges like waves, you can gain control over impulses and reduce their intensity.

Step 1: Notice the Urge

Describe the urge you are experiencing. Where do you feel it in your body? How intense is it?

Step 2: Observe Without Reacting

Instead of fighting the urge, visualize it as a wave. How does the sensation change over time?

Step 3: Ride the Wave

Engage in deep breathing and mindfulness. What strategies help you stay present and avoid acting on the urge?

Step 4: Reflect on the Experience

How did the urge change over time? What did you learn from this experience?

Coping Toolbox Guide

A coping toolbox is a personalized set of strategies that can help you navigate difficult emotions, triggers, and stressors in recovery. Use this guide to identify and develop your own toolbox.

1. Mindfulness & Grounding Techniques

- Deep breathing exercises (4-7-8 breathing, diaphragmatic breathing)
- Guided meditations (body scan, mindfulness for cravings)
- 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique
- Visualization of a safe or calming place

2. Emotional Regulation Strategies

- Journaling thoughts and emotions
- Practicing cognitive reframing (challenging negative thoughts)
- Using self-compassion techniques (affirmations, self-kindness exercises)
- Expressing emotions through art, music, or movement

3. Physical Coping Strategies

- Engaging in physical activity (walking, running, stretching, yoga)
- Taking a cold shower or using temperature changes for distress tolerance
- Practicing progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)
- Engaging in deep pressure stimulation (weighted blankets, hugging yourself)

4. Social Support & Connection

- Calling a trusted friend, sponsor, or support person
- Attending a support group or meeting
- Engaging in meaningful social activities
- Practicing assertive communication and boundary-setting

5. Crisis Coping Strategies

- Creating a written crisis plan for high-risk moments
- Identifying emergency contacts for immediate support
- Using distraction techniques (watching a comforting movie, listening to music)
- Reminding yourself of your reasons for recovery

6. Values-Based Activities

- Engaging in hobbies or interests aligned with your values
- Volunteering or helping others in a meaningful way

- Setting small, achievable goals that support recovery
- Practicing gratitude journaling or listing daily positives

7. Reflection & Personalization

- Identify which tools work best for you in different situations
- Keep a small notebook or note on your phone listing your coping strategies
- Adjust and refine your toolbox as needed to support your recovery journey