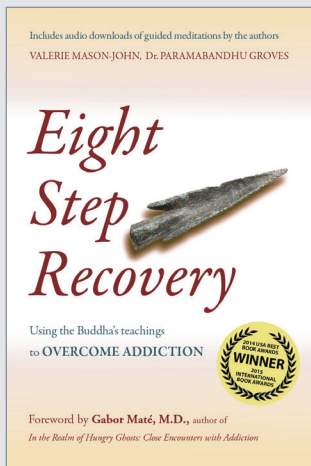


Eight Step Recovery



Eight Step Recovery Meetings and Mentorship

Preface to the second printing

Eight Step Recovery Meetings

Since we launched Eight Step Recovery we have had many requests on how to run an Eight Step Recovery Meeting. These Eight Step Recovery Meetings have been pioneered in India, the UK, the US, Canada, Mexico, and Finland. Many people have benefited from these meetings and we hope you will too.

The meeting formats, given below, have all been tried and tested. We suggest several formats, but we request that you always include the Welcome, Meeting Guidelines, the Preamble, Moral Inventory, and reciting the five training principles (in negative and positive form) in call and response, and the eight steps in unison. We also recommend that you end with Transference of Merit and the three-minute breathing space (AGE).

It is helpful to print the Welcome, Meeting Guidelines, Preamble, Moral Inventory, Eight Steps, and the AGE and Transference of Merit on cards or laminated paper so that different people can read them out aloud. Make sure you have someone signed up to chair each meeting. Also ensure you have enough printed paper copies of the eight steps and the Transference of Merit for everyone. Some groups create booklets for people.

The chair's role is to begin the meeting and end the meeting on time, and also ask for dana. Some of you will know this as the seventh tradition. Dana is an expression of generosity. Making a donation supports the group to continue holding meetings, and helps to pass on the teachings you have been given.

The chair opens the meeting with the Welcome.

Meeting format

Welcome

Welcome. My name is _____ and I will now lead the three-minute breathing space AGE):

- Become aware of your body; aware of sensations in the body; aware of thoughts; aware of emotions.
- Gather your breath on the upper lip, the chest, or in the abdomen, and let the contact of the breath soothe your thoughts.
- Expand the breath throughout the whole body. Let me hear everyone take a deep breath and expand it throughout the body.

We invite you to briefly introduce yourself and say why you are here this evening. Please take up to a maximum of thirty seconds; thank you. It is also okay for you not to say anything.

(After introductions, ask if there are any newcomers, and please welcome them.)

Will somebody now read the Meeting Guidelines?

Meeting Guidelines

I would like to remind all of us of our suggested meeting guidelines:

- If there is more than one person, there are enough people for a meeting.
- The only requirement to attend this meeting is the desire to live your life by the five precepts, which are training principles to help train the mind, and a desire to be free of your addictions and/or compulsive behaviors.
- Please respect people's personal sharing – let what you hear stay here.
- Be kind to yourself, and in turn be kind to others.
- Enjoy your recovery.

Will somebody please read the Preamble?

Preamble

This Eight Step Recovery Meeting explores recovery through the lens of the Buddhist teachings, and Buddhism through the lens of recovery. If you are attending twelve-step meetings, this can be your expression of your eleventh step and if you are not in a Twelve Step Program, it can be another way to approach your recovery. This is an extra meeting to complement your recovery, whatever that looks like.

For the next one and a half hours or two hours we are temporarily going for refuge to the Three Jewels. What we mean by that is, as best we can, we are placing the Buddha (the Awakened mind), the Dharma (the teachings of the Buddha), and the sangha (the spiritual community that has recovered and woken up to the truth) at the center of our thoughts. Those of us in recovery know too well that our addiction has often been at the center of our thoughts.

Will somebody please read the Moral Inventory?

Moral Inventory

So we begin with our moral inventory. We are turning our thoughts over to the Three Jewels. To the Buddha, the Awakened mind, which has gained liberation from suffering. To the Dharma, the teachings that point to the truth. And to the sangha, the spiritual communities, which have gained liberation. We will now recite the training principles to help train the mind in call and response. I will say a line and you repeat it.

1. I undertake to abstain from harming life. With deeds of loving-kindness I purify my body.
2. I undertake to abstain from taking the not-given. With open-handed generosity I purify my body.
3. I undertake to abstain from sexual misconduct. With stillness, simplicity, and contentment I purify my body.
4. I undertake to abstain from false speech. With truthful communication I purify my speech.
5. I undertake to abstain from taking intoxicants. With mindfulness clear and radiant I purify my mind.

We will now say the Eight Steps together.

Eight Steps

Step One: Accepting that this human life will bring suffering.

Step Two: Seeing how we create extra suffering in our lives.

Step Three: Recognizing impermanence shows us that our suffering can end.

Step Four: Being willing to step onto the path of recovery, and discover freedom.

Step Five: Transforming our speech, actions, and livelihood.

Step Six: Placing positive values at the center of our lives.

Step Seven: Making every effort to stay on the path of recovery.

Step Eight: Helping others by sharing the benefits we have gained.

Below are several formats that can take place at your meeting. Please decide which meeting format you will use before you begin your meeting.

1. Step Meeting
2. Book Study Meetings
3. Speaker Meetings

Once this part of the meeting is over, please always end with the following:

The chair will lead the three-minute breathing space (AGE):

AGE

- Become aware of your body; aware of sensations in the body; aware of thoughts; aware of emotions.
- Gather your breath on the upper lip, the chest, or in the abdomen, and let the contact of the breath soothe your thoughts.
- Expand the breath throughout the whole body. Let me hear everyone take a deep breath and expand it throughout the body.

Let's all say the Transference of Merit together.

Transference of Merit and Self Surrender

May the merit gained
in my acting thus
go to the alleviation of the suffering
of all beings.

My personality
throughout my existences,
my possessions,
and my merit in all three ways
I give up without regard
to myself
for the benefit of all beings.
Just as the earth
and other elements
are serviceable in many ways
to the infinite number of beings
inhabiting limitless space,
so may I become
that which maintains all beings
situated throughout space
so long as all have not attained
to peace.

Please ask at this point for dana (voluntary financial contribution) – nobody is paid. Dana is an act of generosity, showing an appreciation of the Buddhist teachings. However, there is no suggested fee, and nobody is turned away. There is no price to attend a meeting. And nobody should be made to feel uncomfortable if they don't put into the pot. This must come from each individual's generosity of spirit. Some people may give dana by offering to open up and put out chairs each week, and tidy up after. Being of service as dana is as valuable and generous as giving money.

Just as recovery is a process, so is the act of generosity. Dana will pay for your meeting space, for materials, books, non-alcoholic beverages, and anything else you need. If you have a surplus, you might wish to give money to a participant who wants to attend a recovery retreat.

At a future date we will also be introducing a donation facility on an appropriate website for Eight Step Recovery work in underprivileged communities, which will help some of the poorest communities in the world to deal with addiction, as well as helping to support people to go on recovery retreats.

Format 1: Step Meeting

(If you only have an hour – or there are a lot of people – we suggest you work through the steps weekly in the following way.) You could perhaps read a short passage from the step you are reflecting on before people answer the prompt question. Some groups go through one step a month, others one step a week, and once they have completed eight steps they just begin all over again.

Prompt questions for short meeting

Today we will focus on Step One: Accepting that this human life will bring suffering. What does it mean for you to accept that this human life will bring about suffering, in the context of your dis-ease?

Today we will focus on Step Two: Seeing how we create extra suffering in our lives. How do I create extra suffering in my life?

Today we will focus on Step Three: Recognizing impermanence shows us that our suffering can end. What do I need to let go of in my life today?

Today we will focus on Step Four: Being willing to step onto the path of recovery, and discover freedom. How willing am I to step onto the path of recovery today? or What is one aspect of freedom I have discovered since being on the path of recovery?

Today we will focus on Step Five: Transforming our speech, actions, and livelihood. How can I begin transforming or continue to transform my speech, or actions, or livelihood? Just choose one to focus on.

Today we will focus on Step Six: Placing positive values at the center of our lives. What are some of the things that tend to occupy my thoughts? What is the impact of having these thoughts at the center of my life?

Today we will focus on Step Seven: Making every effort to stay on the path of recovery. How can I make more effort to stay on the path of recovery?

Today we will focus on Step Eight: Helping others by sharing the benefits we have gained. What could I do this week to help share the benefits I have gained?

Another way of holding a short meeting is asking somebody to select a text that they would like to focus on from one of the steps, and read for fifteen minutes and then ask people to share on the reading.

End with the AGE and Transference of Merit and Self Surrender.

Format 2: Book Study Meeting

(This is for longer meetings of ninety minutes to two hours.)

For the next few weeks we will be exploring Step One. We will discuss every exercise, one exercise a week, and when a meditation or reflection comes up, we do the practice and discuss it afterwards. We will work through each step in this way, until we get to the end of the book, and then begin again. We suggest that, if you have the technology, you play the meditation or reflection out loud. They are hosted as a free download on the website – the link can be found at the end of the book.

Participants begin from the beginning of the book. They read a section for fifteen to twenty minutes, and then discuss the text. When a reflection or meditation comes up, either listen to it from the download or somebody leads it, and then discuss. Mark the page you finish on at each meeting so you can begin from the correct page at the next meeting.

There are several ways of holding this meeting. You can work through the book chronologically, beginning with the foreword. Once the book is completed you may choose to begin the book all over again. Or you may choose to study another book that is related specifically to Buddhist Recovery. For example, you could study Kevin Griffin's *One Breath at a Time* or *A Burning Desire*, Noah Levine's *Refuge Recovery*, or Valerie Mason-John's *Detox Your Heart: Meditations on Emotional Trauma*.¹

End with the AGE and Transference of Merit and Self Surrender.

Format 3: Speaker Meeting

In some meetings you may like to introduce a speaker by asking someone to tell their story of recovery, abstinence, sobriety, and their connection to the Buddhist teachings. Some groups like to invite people to their meetings and ask them to give a fifteen-minute talk on a topic concerning the Eight Steps. Sometimes groups choose the chair to speak on a topic concerning the Eight Steps. After the fifteen-minute talk, people are then asked to share their reflections, thoughts, and own journey with the steps.

End with the AGE and Transference of Merit and Self Surrender.

Should groups be closed?

Some groups may choose to be closed while working through the book and others may choose to be open. Some groups may choose to have the group just for a specific addiction, gender, or sexuality. Even if it is just for a particular addiction, such as alcohol, we do not say you cannot mention other addictions in the group. This is because everything is interconnected, and the only requirement to attend a meeting is to live your life in line with the five training principles, and a desire to be free of your addictions and/or your compulsive behaviors.

You can be creative with the formats, although every meeting needs to begin with the Welcome, Meeting Guidelines, the Preamble, and Moral Inventory and the Eight Steps, and then end with the AGE and Transference of Merit and Self Surrender.

Remember there are also meditations attached to the book, so for some meetings you could choose to listen to a meditation and then discuss how the meditation was for you. All the meditations in the book can be downloaded for free from bit.ly/eightsteprecovery or windhorsepublications.com/eight-step-recovery-audio (see p.ix). There are additional meditations on our website: insighttimer/vimalasara.

How to run meetings

We request that all meetings are free of any food and only serve soft beverages like tea, coffee, or water. If you want to mark

somebody's abstinent birthday, this can be done by the practice of rejoicing in merits, whereby you open the meeting up for fifteen minutes, and invite anybody to rejoice or celebrate in the good deeds or qualities of the person's whose abstinent birthday it is. We request that there is time for others to share about their hopes and struggles in the meeting too. So, while the rejoicing is to help inspire and motivate others, it needs to take up only fifteen minutes of the meeting. Cakes and cookies are not required. Rejoicing and celebrating someone's achievements is enough. In this way we learn to celebrate without a substance.

Many of you may know how to meditate, although many of you will not. Therefore we request you read the three-minute breathing space or remember it verbatim, so that everyone can feel comfortable in leading it. There is a logic to the three-minute breathing space, which is why it is important to stick to the script and not take up more than three minutes. We begin and end with the three-minute breathing space to allow us to pause and gather ourselves. This helps us to arrive at the meeting and to connect with how we are at the end of the meeting before going on with our day. It also helps us to get into the habit of stopping and checking in with ourselves. We recommend that the AGE practice is no longer than three minutes, although shorter is fine.

Meetings are peer led. Each group will decide, for example, on someone taking responsibility for making the Welcome and asking people to read the Preamble and lead the AGE, for a month or two. Make sure responsibility is shared.

You may want to close your meeting – this is the group's decision. You may want to set up Eight Step Meetings for specific addictions, or more generally for substance abuse. This again is the decision of the people who set up the group.

Abstinence and harm reduction

Some people will come to a meeting and ask: "Is Buddhist Recovery an abstinence-based program or harm reduction program?" Beware of this question. The teachings of the Dharma

do not tell people what to do. The teachings advise us to try for ourselves and see what happens. We clearly state in the Meeting Guidelines that the only requirement to attend a meeting is to live your life more in line with the five training principles to help train the mind, and a desire to be free of your addictions and/or compulsive behaviors. Therefore we start from where we are at in our recovery. The precepts are principles to train the mind. They clearly state that we undertake to abstain from specific behaviors, actions, and habits. So it is hoped that all of us in recovery are moving in the direction of letting go of harming ourselves and others, from taking the not-given, from sexual misconduct, from false speech and taking intoxicants. How you do this is up to you. We recommend avoiding telling people what to do. For example, saying it is okay to have a drink may be unproblematic for one person, but could be a matter of life and death for another. So please observe the above when asked this question. We are not professionals. We are a group of people in recovery sharing our wisdom.

Mentorship: The tool of asking for help (We do not have to do it alone)

The book lends itself to people being mentored through the Eight Step Recovery. You do not have to be a Buddhist or have knowledge of Buddhism to mentor someone through the program. We have put together some suggested questions for each step. It's a road map, and sometimes you will stray from the road map, because together you will notice something you want to pursue. However, always come back to the road, otherwise you will get lost. If you remember to come back to every exercise and reflection in the book you will not get lost. We suggest that if you want to mentor someone through the book that you first read the book and work through every exercise and reflection on your own or in a book study. If you take on a mentee, then it would be expected that you take the mentee through every exercise and reflection, and discuss the answers. We suggest that all mentees practice the twenty-one meditations for recovery, which are free and available on our website:

<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/eightsteps>. We recommend requesting that they practice one every day for three weeks.

We also suggest that mentees attend meetings. Meetings can include Eight Step Recovery, twelve-step meetings, or SMART (Self-Management and Recovery Training), Refuge Recovery Meetings, and any other meeting that supports recovery. Additional activities can include attending a Buddhist center weekly – but not as an alternative to working the steps. Same-gender mentoring is often helpful, although note that there are many different shades of gender beyond a rigid binary of just male and female.

Here are some questions for mentees to answer before beginning the step work to establish the agreement between you and the mentee – this is important before you begin the mentorship process:

The Agreement

- Are you prepared to go to any lengths to get your recovery? If someone asks “What do you mean by this?” then you can say: “Are you prepared to do every exercise and reflection in the book?”
- Are you prepared to give what I may suggest serious effort (as long it does not cause you physical, mental, or emotional harm)?
- Are you prepared to attend one or more recovery meetings – which could include going along to a twelve-step meeting, or a Refuge Recovery Meeting, or a Buddhist Recovery Meeting, or an Eight Step Recovery Meeting, or attend a therapy group or one-to-one session?
- What kind of support are you receiving? We ask all of this because we know from experience that support is a big part of recovery. Few people have cleaned up on their own. Some of your mentoring may come from the Twelve Step tradition and, if you state that someone needs to do forty meetings in forty days, then we suggest it’s a combination of the above as well as perhaps online meetings. Bring your experience of what has worked for you when you were sponsored or coached. Please find a meeting or meetings that work for you so you can commit to attending regularly. They are one of the most important tools of your recovery.

- Are you prepared to listen to the twenty-one meditations for recovery, once a day? These meditations are available on www.buddhistcentre.com/eightsteps and <https://www.insighttimer.com/vimalasara>. They are only fifteen minutes long. If the mentee already has a meditation practice this is additional and not instead of their usual practice. This gives the mentee fifteen minutes a day of practice for the first twenty-one days of you working together. You can send them one a day – or give them the link to the meditations. We suggest this so you can have day-to-day contact for the first three weeks, and it's not a deal breaker: you don't need to force the mentee to do the meditations, although we have found they have helped.

Once your mentee has said yes to all of this, then the mentorship process is ready to begin. Make sure your mentee is attending meetings, which can include online meetings if there are no meetings nearby, or has some other support. Meetings and/or support are an important part of help with recovery.

Once you have this agreement, we suggest that for all addictions you ask all mentees to do the following:

Record and send in daily everything they are eating and drinking; any pharmaceuticals; and what time they are eating, going to bed, and waking up. This is required for three weeks, so you as the mentor can talk over what has been happening with your mentee. You will notice if there is a lack of food and sleep (which could cause a relapse). Again, this is a suggestion and not a deal breaker. You may like to ask your mentee what they think they need to focus on in terms of personal care hygiene. However, when working with food addictions, sending in the food record daily for several months is part of the required mentorship process.

Together you are looking out for Hunger, Anger, Loneliness, Tiredness, and Stress (HALTS).

Together you are looking out for Don't Even Notice I Am Lying (DENIAL).

Together you are looking out for Fearing Events Again Repeating (FEAR), False Evidence Appearing Real (FEAR), and helping your mentee with fear, by Facing Everything And Recovering (FEAR).

You will notice patterns that can support someone's recovery. If the person is a food addict of some degree, including anorexia,

bulimia, compulsive overeating, then sending in a record of their food daily will be part of their long-term program.

During the first three weeks, while mentees are daily sharing their food and sleep health and listening to meditations, please ask them to reflect on the following questions:

What is your self-view?

Are you willing to let go of self-view to get your recovery?

(Self-view is all the identities people have been attached to for years, including “I’m no good, a piece of crap, a loser,” and all the stories people keep on telling themselves. Self-view also includes all the different rights and rituals, and the overwhelming doubt that debilitates people and hinders a person’s recovery.)

You can ask the two questions above face to face or via email. It is important you set up a regular time to meet. It can be face to face or on a social media platform. However, if you are working with someone with sex addiction or Internet addiction then it’s advisable to meet face to face as social media platforms can be one of their triggers.

Then ask your mentee to read the foreword and the introduction and then answer the following questions:

- What does addiction look like in your life today?
- What does recovery mean to you?
- Share your personal story of addiction. What are the early conditions in your childhood that you perhaps have struggled with? What are the events that have marked your addiction?

Discuss the answers – and then begin work on the steps.

If you are a Buddhist practitioner and have a good understanding of the Dharma then the following way to mentor is appropriate.

Ask the mentee to read a step, and then discuss with you what resonated for them, what came up for them. What buttons is it pushing? Just listen without judgment.

Then go back to the beginning, and work through each exercise and each reflection one at a time. Always discuss the

reflection and the exercises. Ask your mentee to email answers to the reflections so you can discuss when you meet face to face or on Skype. Be careful of doing all the work: your mentee needs to be doing more of the work. Be patient, as working these steps can take more than a year to complete, especially if you allow spaciousness and kindness. There is no need to rush. Life can also get in the way so, even if there has been a break, just get back on track and pick up from where you left off. If you complete all the steps, great, and if you don't complete all the steps, great. If you are finding it difficult to commit to working all the steps then you may need to consider working another program.

Once the step work has been completed, you may want to ask them if they would like to consider doing a set of twelve steps specific to their addiction. It is not a prerequisite but it can be useful if people are open to it. Or the mentee may ask to work the steps all over again. Once your mentee has completed Step Four and has abstinence, they can begin mentoring someone through the program.

When working with people who are compulsive eaters, or have bulimia, you will need to ask them to identify which are their binge foods. And then there will need to be an agreement about being abstinent from these foods.

When working with sex addicts you may need to ask what apps and websites they are going to abstain from, and if they are prepared to have a security lock placed on certain sites that they have visited in the past.

If you are stuck, you can always post a question on our website where we have a sobriety hangout: www.thebuddhistcentre.com/eightsteps.

If you are new to Buddhist principles and are not a Buddhist and are inspired to mentor people through the eight steps we encourage you to do so. Just make sure you have read the book, and have worked the steps, and follow the script of questions while mentoring. You too can be of service and great help.

Always begin with the agreement, and with the introductory questions and reflection on self-view. Then take your mentee through each question and exercise and reflection one by one. Ask them to reflect on each question before answering. You can

explore one question at a time face to face. Or one question at a time via email. If you notice something in a response, you can ask your mentee to explain, or ask how they are feeling before moving onto the next question. Please let all your mentees know that it's okay to use images and/or symbols to answer questions, and it's also okay to send in a recording of their answers too.

Step One: Accepting that this human life will bring suffering

There is suffering – what does that look like in your life today?
(Please read pp.25–6)

What physical suffering do you experience? (Please read pp.26–7)

What psychological suffering do you experience? (Please read pp.27–8)

What existential suffering do you experience?

Which one of these sufferings triggers your addiction and why?

Please do the Face your pain with the breath exercise (p.30) over a period of a week. Keep a daily journal or if that is too much, find a time to write about how this exercise has been for you.)

Read pp.30–2.

What are your addictive behaviors?

How has your physical body been affected by your habitual behaviors?

How has your emotional health been affected by your habitual behaviors?

What has changed in your life that you have resented?

What is the truth of your addiction?

What is the truth of your suffering?

Please do the Reflection: Counting the costs of addiction exercise (p.33), at least three times over a period of a week, answering the same questions.

Are you the only one in your life who is struggling, if not, who else is struggling with depression, obsessive compulsive behaviors, addictions, and who else is not happy?

Please take a week to reflect on the Four reminders reflection exercise (p.37) and answer the questions.

Ask yourself: What are the limitations of your addictive behaviors?

Practicing Step One may be challenging for you; remember the Buddha's last words: "With vigilance strive to succeed."

What vigilance do you need to take to begin working this step?

How helpful is the three-minute breathing space?

If the three-minute breathing space is too long sometimes, shorten it – and practice just stopping and taking one full breath.

Why is Step One positive?

What have you learned about yourself in Step One?

What's one thing you are prepared to let go of that has created your self-view?

Give the Mindfulness of Breathing exercise (p.40) a go. Meditation may be hard, and it may be easy. Just try it. If it doesn't work for you that is fine. We just ask that you practice the AGE (three-minute breathing space) daily while you are working the steps with a mentor.

Step Two: Seeing how we create extra suffering in our lives

How do you create extra suffering in your life?

Read pp.43–4.

What do you crave for in your life?

What do you have aversion toward in your life?

Read pp.44–5.

When you are hungry, angry, lonely, tired, stressed (HALTS), and/or triggered, how do you avoid this experience?

When you are HALTS and/or triggered, who do you blame?

When you are HALTS and/or triggered, how do you distract yourself?

What addictive behaviors do you turn to while distracting yourself from the HALTS or trigger?

What does self-pity look like in your life when HALTS and/or a trigger arises?

Now look at the diagram on p.45 and read pp.46–7, and then recall a recent time you relapsed, lapsed, or turned toward one of your addictive behaviors.

What was the trigger?

What were the feelings? (Was it pleasant/unpleasant/vague/neutral/uncomfortable?)

What thoughts did you have?

What were my actions?

What did I gain from picking up my distraction of choice?

What did it cost me picking up my distraction of choice?

How does this vicious cycle play out in your life?

Read pp.50–6.

What does craving for sensual pleasure look like in my life?

What does craving for existence look like in my life?

What does craving for non-existence look like in my life?

Please do the Noticing your triggers exercise (p.54) and list and name as much as you can. You may surprise yourself.

What is it like to be in the Hungry Ghost Realm?

Why is it difficult to be with HALTS, triggers, and/or painful experiences?

Read Bruce's story on pp.60–1. Can you think of a personal story when you were able to stay with discomfort and unpleasant experiences and not pick up your distractions? Please write it down. And then re-read it and underline all the things you were able to do which helped you stay with your experience.

If you did not turn away from your direct experience unfolding in the moment what could happen differently?

Read the example on p.63 and then see if you can write your own example.

Take your time doing the Which of these thoughts have you made fact? exercise (pp.64–5). Perhaps even do it together with your mentor. However, it is okay to do it on your own.

Remember to take a breathing space when you have completed it.

Read Darren's story on p.66. What small or big shifts have you noticed in your behavior since you have been working the steps?

Please try the Mindfulness of Breathing – turning toward difficulties meditation (p.68) at least once. If you like it take it on daily for a week. If it is a challenge then continue with AGE.

How could you begin to slow down in your life?

Choose one of the examples in Slowing down (p.72) to help you slow down and see what happens.

Becoming aware of the suffering we create in our lives (p.74) is a good exercise to do with your mentor, but again you can do it on your own too. Perhaps ask yourself why you are choosing to do all the exercises on your own (if that is what you are doing). Part of recovery is asking for help. You could ask a friend or partner to do the exercise with you. And then talk about it.

How is Step Two positive?

What have you learned about yourself in Step Two?

What's one thing you are prepared to let go of that has created your self-view?

Now do the Responding to the four basic needs of the heart exercise (p.76).

AGE – how is this three-minute breathing space becoming part of your life?

Step Three: Embracing impermanence to show us that our suffering can end

Do you believe that your suffering can end?

If no, why?

If yes, how?

If you don't believe your suffering can end, try to imagine the freedom and happiness you would have if your suffering did end and write what that would be like for you.

Read pp.81–3.

What do you need to do to change?

What would your life be like if you changed?

Read Pete's story – and then reflect on your own journey of addiction and when you had moments of insights and waking up to your reality.

Read Jackie's story, and then reflect on turning points in your own journey. Try and recall as many as possible. It doesn't matter if they were a long time ago.

Now do the Noticing change exercise (p.86). Allow yourself to reflect on this exercise for a week, and then record what you noticed.

Now do the Mirror-like wisdom exercise (p.87). This exercise could trip you up. Some people may not be able to find pictures of themselves when they were young. If this is the case, watch yourself moving away from this sad and challenging moment with avoidance, blame, distraction, or self-pity. If you can't find

a picture of yourself when you are young, do an AGE. Pick the youngest photo you have of yourself, and use this for the exercise.

Read Mohammed's story, then ask yourself:

What changes do you have to accept in your life?

What changes are you not accepting?

From the day your addictive behaviors began up to today, what are some of the many changes that have happened in your life?

Practice the Bringing kindness to craving exercise (p.89) daily for a week, and write down your experiences of reciting this phrase daily.

Read pp.90–1.

What are your thoughts about mantra?

Now do the Chanting mantras exercise (p.92).

If chanting a mantra seems strange, that is perfectly okay. You may have a mantra of your own. If mantras are an issue then say silently to yourself for the next five minutes, "I can change." Then complete the rest of the exercise by answering all the questions.

How is Step Three positive?

What have you learned about yourself in Step Three?

What's one thing you are prepared to let go of that has created your self-view?

AGE – how is this three-minute breathing space becoming part of your life?

Step Four: Being willing to step onto the path of recovery and discover freedom

We are asking you now: Are you willing to step onto the path of recovery and discover freedom?

If no, why?

If yes, why?

Whatever you answer we invite you to continue working through the steps.

Read p.95.

What hopes do you have for the future?

Read p.96.

We ask you to be really honest with yourself. What is your life like today? (If you are still using, relapsing, please write about that.) Get really clear about what is currently happening in your life.

What do you want more, your recovery or your addiction?

If your recovery, why?

If your addiction, why?

If you really want your recovery, how aware are you that every time you pick up your distraction of choice you are choosing your addiction over your recovery in that moment?

What really matters to you?

Are you choosing what matters or something else?

Read p.97.

What does your path of recovery look like?

Are you attending recovery meetings? Do you have a recovery coach? Are you in a rehab or detox unit, are you seeing a counselor? Or are you doing it on your own? (Write down exactly what your recovery plan looks like.)

If your life was heading in the direction of recovery, describe what that looks like for you – be imaginative and metaphorical. Use the first two paragraphs of p.97 to inspire you.

What do you need to make the decision to choose recovery? (Be as detailed as you can. Then look at the list and ask yourself how you can begin to make this happen.) What could you begin doing now?

What does kindness look like in my life today?
How am I kind to myself?
How could I be kinder to myself?

Read Tania's story (p.98), then ask yourself: What has been my approach to my recovery?

Allow yourself to do the Kindness reflection (p.99) daily for a few days.

Read pp.99–100.

How can I be more warm, sympathetic, and caring toward myself?
What thoughts of kindness could I have about myself?
How could I be more helpful toward myself?
If I was a better friend toward myself what could I be doing?

Read Angela and Bill's and Doris and Eve's stories, then ask yourself what acts of kindness you need to begin doing.

Now do the Creating a safe and kind space reflection (p.102).

Read pp.103–6 and then do the Weighing up the benefits and costs of our addiction exercise (p.105).

Read Molly's story (p.106), then list some of the positive and helpful things that you do in your life. That could be getting up in the morning, or taking care of someone who has overdosed, or feeding yourself. Be creative.

Now do the Compassion toward the costs of our addiction reflection (p.107).

Read pp.107–9, then do the Loving-kindness meditation.

Read pp.111–12, then find a quiet place to sit, and have the strong wish to be free of suffering. Experience this wish on a visceral level. Write down what comes up for you.

Compassion is action. Self-compassion is not wishing to harm yourself. So if you were not harming yourself, what things would you begin to stop doing?

Read Giles’s story (p.112), then ask yourself the following:

What friends do I have in my life who can help support me in my recovery?

What things in the past which I used to do, could be supportive if I began doing them again?

What is the meaning of my life?

Now do the Benefits and costs of recovery exercise (p.113). What do you notice about your answers?

Read pp.113–15.

What do I have gratitude for today?

What do I appreciate about my life today?

How can I cultivate more gratitude and appreciation in my life?

Now do the Making changes exercise (p.114) – please answer all the questions.

How ready am I to step onto the path of recovery and discover freedom?

How is Step Four positive?

What have you learned about yourself in Step Four?

What’s one thing you are prepared to let go of that has created your self-view?

AGE – how is this three-minute breathing space becoming part of your life?

Step Five: Transforming our speech, actions, and livelihood

This step focuses on your moral inventory. It is important that you have someone to support you in this: a sponsor, a mentor, a therapist, or a friend who is in recovery. It's important that you have self-kindness and compassion while doing this step. Remember to at least do AGE and perhaps the four basic needs of the heart or the kindness practice.

In relationship to your addictions, compulsive obsessive behaviors, and habitual patterns, please answer the following questions:

What thoughts have you had that have become spoken words?

What words have you had that have become actions?

What actions do you have that have become habits?

What habits have you had that have become your character?

How has your character become your destiny?

Read p.118.

What have been the consequences of your addictive behaviors?

Read James's story.

What subtle thoughts have you had in the past and how have they facilitated your addiction?

Read Transforming speech (pp.120–1).

What false speech have I made that has supported my addiction?

What harsh speech have I made that has been a result of my addiction?

What unhelpful speech have I made that has impacted others?

How has my speech caused disharmony in my life and in others?

Practice this refrain for a week.

Before speaking ask yourself these questions posed by blogger Jim McBeath, who points out that this guideline has been around for a long time (as far back as Socrates):

Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? Is it helpful?

Notice and report back (to a mentor or therapist) how it has impacted your speech.

Read Mumtaz's story.

How have you been like Mumtaz, and which part of her story resonates with yours?

Read Transforming actions (pp.122–4).

What memories still trouble you from your addictive past?
What are you still finding hard to speak about in your past?

What habitual behaviors are you choosing to do that distract you from actions in the past that you do not want to face?

What could you do to help clean up your life?

What actions do you still need to take to transform your life?

What ways could you act that would bring your life more in line with how you would really like it to be?

Read Transforming livelihood (pp.124–6).

How is your lifestyle supporting your addictive behaviors?

Do you need to change your livelihood?

Are you getting enough sleep?

Have you organized your lifestyle so that you don't have to get up early in the mornings?

How regularly are you eating?

What impact do your addictive behaviors have on your sleep and eating patterns?

What impact has Jennifer’s story had on you?
What are you doing to pay your bills?
If you are unable to pay your bills, how much of that is
because of your addiction?
How are you earning your money? (Is it legal?)
How willing are you to commit your life to recovery?

Read Training principles to guide our actions toward sobriety and abstinence (pp.126–30).

We suggest, like Valerie, that you take this up as a practice and recite them daily, as part of your recovery program. Learn them off by heart. At least recite them for one week.

Devise a training principle specific to your addictive behaviors. Just choose one. When you no longer need that principle, you can devise another principle to recite. And remember to include the action plan that will help you.

You can also think of an action plan for the five training principles that we introduce to you in the book. This will help you become more aware of them.

Make a list of all people you have harmed – and then radiate kindness toward yourself and to the list of people.

Make a list of all people, companies, and organizations from which you have taken the not-given – and then radiate kindness toward yourself and to the list of people.

Make a list of all people with whom you have committed sexual misconduct (this includes sexual fantasies about people you were not in relationship with, talking about people inappropriately sexually, touching someone or making someone touch you without their consent, non-consensual affairs, including those affairs where you may not have consummated it sexually but you were in a romantic relationship) – and then radiate kindness toward yourself and to the list of people.

Make a list of all people you have communicated false, harsh, useless, and/or slanderous speech to – and then radiate kindness toward yourself and to the list of people.

Make a list of all people you have harmed through taking intoxicants, including intoxicating thoughts that could harm other beings, too – and then radiate kindness toward yourself and to the list of people.

Now do the Reflecting on the five training principles exercise (p.130).

Read Coming to terms with past and ongoing unhelpful actions (and acknowledgment and regret) (pp.131–3).

What regret do you have regarding your addictions?
(Please remember that regrets are unhelpful actions for which you are willing to fully accept the consequences without berating or criticizing yourself.)

What things have you done in your life that you consider to be unforgivable? If you have named some things, then please say: “I forgive myself” after each thing you have named. For your own recovery, you need to find a way to forgive yourself, and that could actually mean you walk into a police station with a friend and confess. It may mean you that you have to sit down and tell your partner or your family the truth, and then have to face the consequences of their actions.

Read Making amends and A promise and a plan (pp.133–7).

Sometimes making amends may cause more harm than good. So, before you decide to make amends it is important to discuss this with your sponsor, mentor, coach, or therapist. This is called self-care. Making amends is an important part of your recovery, and we have to realize that the amends must be unconditional. Do not think just because you have made amends or an apology everything will be okay. Some people will be upset, others may choose not to hear your apology or accept your amends, and others may appreciate it. Whatever the response we can still purify ourselves. Making amends is a type of purification – it helps to lighten our emotional and mental load.

The first part of the amends is acknowledging unskillful actions.

Write down unskillful actions, and beside the action name whom you have harmed, always including yourself. Beside the names, state if you are able to make amends to these people. Then check it out with a confidante.

Amends and apologies can also be anonymous. For example, if you ripped somebody or a company off, you could send money in the post anonymously. There may be some things that you have done that have had a huge impact on a community of people, which involves the police. Only you can decide what is best to do. Only you can know what will lighten the emotional load. We have known people who have turned themselves over to the police, done their prison sentence, and come out of the whole process much happier and calmer. This is your process, and it is important to listen to your heart's whisper.

Now do the Making a promise exercise (p.135).

Read Ritual approaches to coming to terms with our past (pp.136–40).

We ask that you do all the things at least twice, even if it feels odd.

You can do the ritual on your own, in a special place for you. We ask that you find someone to witness your ritual, like a Buddhist chaplain, a Christian minister, a Muslim guru, a Hindu guru, or any other spiritual teacher or confidante. It is important to admit to another human being the exact nature of our actions and give ourselves forgiveness.

First write your version of the prayer admitting your faults with compassion.

Then choose one of the mantras to recite. If this seems strange then you could repeat the phrase: "May I be forgiven" or "May I be purified."

Read p.141.

List all the times you have had Great Indicators For Throwing Stuff out (GIFTS).

Read your list and see if any of these indicators are relevant today. In the midst of your day, is there an opportunity to do something different?

How is Step Five positive?
What have you learned about yourself in Step Five?
What's one thing you are prepared to let go of that has
created your self-view?

AGE – how is this three-minute breathing space becoming part
of your life?

Step Six: Placing positive values at the center of our lives

List all the things you spend most of your time thinking about.

How many of these things are connected to your addictive
behaviors?

Read pp.143–4.

What is your spiritual tradition?
If you don't have one, what do you believe in?
What are your values?

Now do the Connecting to our values exercise (p.144).

Now do the Imagining a party at the end of your life exercise
(p.145).

Read pp.145–7, then do the Placing what you value at the center
of your life exercise.

How does Janet and Bob's story (p.148) resonate with
your own life?

Read pp.149–55.

If you are able to place some of the qualities of the
Buddha at the center of your thoughts, what does this
inspire in you?

If you are unable to place any of the qualities of the
Buddha at the center of your thoughts, who else could
you think of to go to for refuge? Choose someone,
perhaps, who is not living, that you are inspired by.

If you are able to place the Dharma at the center of your

thoughts, what does this inspire in you?

If you are unable to place the Dharma at the center of your thoughts, what other teachings or values could you think of to go to for refuge?

If you are able to place the sangha at the center of your thoughts, what does this inspire in you?

If you are unable to place the sangha at the center of your thoughts, what other spiritual or social communities or like-minded people could you think of to go to for refuge?

Read Paramabandhu's story (p.153).

What assumptions do you have?

What expectations have you had?

When have you listened to your assumptions and been wrong?

How often do you expect things to be a certain way?

Read Sandra's and Elaine's stories (p.158).

How connected are you to the people in your recovery groups?

How often do you put yourself on the edge of social gatherings because of the assumptions: "I'm the only working-class person, I'm the only person of color, I'm the only woman, man, trans person. I'm the only queer or straight person. I'm the only person with a particular political, environmental, ecological view."

Now do the Becoming aware of what inspires us exercise (p.161)

How is Step Six positive?

What have you learned about yourself in Step Six?

What's one thing you are prepared to let go of that has created your self-view?

AGE – how is this three-minute breathing space becoming part of your life?

Step Seven: Making every effort to stay on the path of recovery

What effort is needed in your life to continue to stay on the path of recovery?

List all the things you can do to keep continuing your effort.

What are some of the things that have taken you off the path of recovery?

List all those things.

Do you want to stay on the path of recovery?

If yes, what do you need to do?

If no, what makes you continue to stay in this mentorship process or personal inquiry with yourself?

Can you admit that a part of you does want to stay on the path of recovery?

List those parts of yourself that want to.

Read Liam's story – ask yourself what this makes you feel and think.

You may or may not have a friend who died as a result of addiction, but you may have someone you know of who is struggling with addiction.

If you can believe the best thing to help your friend or family member is your own commitment to staying on the path of recovery, what do you need to do right now?

Now do the Breathing space, AGE, after a slip exercise (p.165).

Please do this exercise regardless of whether you have had a slip or not. If you have not had a slip, you can do this exercise after you have had a bout of stinking thinking.

What has it cost you if you have tried to get recovery on your own?

What has it cost you if you have avoided going to recovery meetings?

What has it cost you if you keep on relapsing?

Now do the Be kind to ourselves by asking for help reflection (p.166).

Read pp.167–74.

How can we prevent unhelpful situations that may trigger us to pick up our addiction and relapse?

Read Liam’s story – how can this story inspire you to do something different next time you realize you are in an unhelpful situation or are being triggered?

What types of thoughts do you have in your mental chatter?

What types of rationalizations do you make?

What hindrances do you need to watch out for if you want to eradicate unhelpful states of mind?

What impact does sensual desire have on your actions?

What impact does ill will have on your actions?

What impact do restlessness and anxiety have on your actions?

What impact do sloth and torpor have on your actions?

What impact does doubt have on your actions?

When one of these hindrances arises, what can we do to help ourselves?

Read Veronica’s story – how does her story resonate with your own?

Now do The hindrances exercise (p.174).

What can you do to cultivate more helpful states of mind?

Now do The four sublime abodes directed toward ourselves exercise (p.175).

What can you do to maintain helpful states of mind?

Read Tracey's story (p.176) – what can you learn from this story?

How willing are you to do what it takes to stay on the path of recovery?

How is Step Seven positive?

What have you learned about yourself in Step Seven?

What's one thing you are prepared to let go of that has created your self-view?

AGE – how is this three-minute breathing space becoming part of your life?

Step Eight: Helping others by sharing the benefits we have gained

Since you have been working these eight steps how have you been helping yourself?

How has your recovery changed from when you began working these steps?

Read pp.179–83.

Who has been the fourth sight in your recovery?

What qualities and values did this person have?

What was it that inspired them?

How can you be a fourth sight for someone else in the throes of addiction?

What qualities and values could you radiate without telling someone what to do?

How would you be living your life?

What actions could we do to help others in their recovery without being co-dependent or an authority?

When you have helped someone, what has that left you feeling? (If you think you were manipulated or used, then the helping was conditional and you had expectations. If you experience a positive impact on your own recovery, and you manage to stay sober and abstinent then the helping has come from the unconditional.)

What do you remember about the suffering of your addiction if you have had more than six months' abstinence?

If you have not had more than six months' abstinence what do you remember about the suffering of some of your past and recent relapses?

What help have you been given to support your recovery?

What were some of the qualities these people had who supported you?

What are some of the benefits you have gained in your recovery process?

How can you share some of these benefits with others?

Read pp.183–9.

What were you preoccupied with the past?

What is your sense of purpose?

Read Justin's story – how is this story inspiring?

Since working the steps what has changed in your life?

Before you began working these steps we asked: Were you willing to let go of self-view to get recovery?

Where do you stand today with this question?

How have you built a self-view?

How have your feelings become part of self-view?

How have rights and trials created your self-view?

How has doubt created your self-view?

How has your mind become part of self-view?

How have your thoughts become part of self-view?

How have your perceptions become part of self-view?

If the self is not fixed what is it doing?

What does that mean about your addictive behaviors?

Read Valerie's story (pp.185–6) – and then write your own story about realizing that there is no fixed self, and how you understand that the self you have created is an illusion.

What do you think is me, mine, and I?
How have you been trying to control and direct your life?
When you have reached out for help, has that dismantled
your self-view in any way?
What does wisdom look like in your life?
What does compassion look like in your life?

Read pp.188–9.

Now do the Helping others exercise (p.189).

Whose life have you been exploring while working
through these steps?
What are you dependent on?
What do you turn to when things get tough?
Does Winsome’s story (p.190) ring a bell? If yes, that is
okay, and the steps can begin right now. Ask yourself
who needs help. If the answer is you, that’s okay –
you may want to go back to Step One.

If Winsome’s story does not ring a bell with you, that is okay
too. With regard to helping others, please read Paige’s and
Marianne’s stories (pp.192–3) and then answer the questions
on p.192.

Read pp.194–9.

What has your journey of recovery been like? (Be
imaginative, use metaphor, images; you may want
to draw your journey and then share it with your
sponsor, mentor, coach, therapist, or confidante.)
What does faith look like in your life today?
What has been your journey of faith in this recovery
process?
How much energy have you needed to keep on the path
of recovery?
When you have lapsed or relapsed how much energy
have you needed to get back on track?
What can you do to harness your energy within?

List several things that will help tap into your energy.
(This could include having more sleep, eating less sugar, and eating more regularly.)

What does mindfulness look like in your life today?

How could you be more mindful?

List several things you could do to be more mindful.

How much concentration have you needed to work with
your craving, boredom, and negative mental states?

What more could you do to help narrow your focus in
your recovery?

Are you working at keeping abstinent and sober as if
your hair is on fire?

If yes, how?

If no, why not?

What wisdom have you experienced in:

Step One

Step Two

Step Three

Step Four

Step Five

Step Six

Step Seven?

How are you accepting the challenges on your recovery
journey?

Have you done every exercise, answered every question,
and shared with another person?

If yes (to earlier question), are you still using?

If yes, then don't give up. It doesn't mean you haven't
learned anything. It may mean you need to ask
yourself again: "What do I want more, my recovery or
my addiction?"

If it's the latter, acknowledge that and move on. If it's
your recovery, ask yourself what you need to do next.

If you haven't completed all the exercises, answered every question, and shared with another person, ask yourself why not. If you are still using, still relapsing, it may mean you need to stop reading books, stop listening to what we say, and just try for yourself. You can do that by working the steps and finding out for yourself.

How is Step Eight positive?

What have you learned about yourself in Step Eight?

What's one thing you are prepared to let go of that has created your self-view?

AGE – how is this three-minute breathing space becoming part of your life?

Now look at the Tools for recovery section (pp. 201–2) and decide which ones you will continue to use.

May you be blessed on your path of recovery.

May you find kindness on your path of recovery.

May you find forgiveness on your path of recovery.

May you find self-compassion on your path of recovery.

May you be liberated from the hell realm of addiction.

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