
SESSION I

Defining Self

The Journey Ahead

In the process of recovery, you will spiral through the question “Who am I?” many times. Each time, you grow closer to knowing who you really are and have another opportunity to let go of who you are not. In early recovery, you will need to begin with the acknowledgment “I am an alcoholic” or “I am an addict.” This becomes an essential part of your identity, although not all of it by any means. Breaking through denial about addiction to alcohol and other drugs (or other compulsive behaviors) is difficult for anyone. What may seem hardest is accepting that there is something you cannot figure out or control. The acknowledgment that you are an addict is the beginning of your opportunity to look at every aspect of what it means to be a man in our culture and to determine what you want to accept and what you want to reject. Ultimately, you get to choose who you want to be as a man and even who you want to be as a man in recovery.

Part of exploring one’s self is recognizing what one feels. Men who have problems with alcohol and other drugs often don’t know what they are feeling and have limited vocabularies for describing their feelings. Feelings are not “manly.” Anger, indifference, and sarcasm often become the catch-alls for the variety of feelings men have. Yet these can damage a man’s relationships as well as his physical, mental, and spiritual health. Therefore, in this module, you will be asked, “What are you feeling?” and “How did you feel?” Learning the language of feelings is an essential part of recovery. It is also the foundation for developing healthy, intimate relationships.

Group Agreements

At the beginning of Session 1, your facilitator will explain some group agreements that will be maintained during the group sessions. When everyone agrees to them, the sessions will have the most benefit for all group members. Typical group agreements are listed here for your reference; the ones presented in your session may differ somewhat because of the requirements of the program sponsors.

1. **Attendance.** We're all committing to show up at all the sessions. Your commitment to attend regularly helps to stabilize the group and creates an environment of mutual support. If you must miss a group meeting, please let the facilitator know well in advance of that session. If you end up missing too many sessions, it may affect your ability to stay in the group.
2. **Confidentiality.** No personal information revealed in this room is to be repeated outside the room. We need to know that we can trust one another, and there can be no trust if information about a group member is given to outsiders or if group members gossip about one another outside the group. There are two exceptions to this rule of confidentiality: (1) The facilitator may have to communicate with other members of your treatment teams as part of your ongoing care; and (2) the facilitator is required by law to break confidentiality when a member's personal safety or the safety of another person is at stake. You, as group members, will be responsible for maintaining confidentiality among yourselves.
3. **Safety.** It is important that each of you feels safe in this group. It is not easy for men to admit when they do not feel safe. We do not often talk about safety. You may be thinking that safety is about defending yourself or protecting yourself from harm. But safety is also about feeling emotionally safe, feeling grounded and comfortable when sharing your thoughts and problems with others. The facilitator's commitment is to make sure that this is a safe group, and he needs that same commitment from each of you. In order for this to happen, all group members need to agree that there will be no verbal or physical abuse here.
4. **Participation.** Everyone should have a chance to join in the discussion. It is not helpful if some people dominate the conversation and if others remain silent. Also, please share all remarks with the whole group. Your comments, questions, and opinions are of interest to all members, and side remarks from one individual to another tend to distract and divide the group. Sometimes the facilitator will ask a question and want everyone to respond. He may call on you to respond to a specific question or share about a certain topic. We would all like

to hear what you have to say. However, if you are unwilling to talk about a particular subject, you always have the option to “pass.”

5. **Honesty.** We’re here to tell the truth. Nobody will pressure you to tell anything about yourself that you don’t want to talk about, but when you do talk, tell the truth about where you’ve been and how you feel. The facilitator may ask questions to better understand what you are saying or support you in telling your whole truth. It will be more helpful if you talk about your personal experiences, rather than about people in general, so speak with “I” statements rather than saying “you” or “we.”
6. **Respect.** When you tell the truth about what you think, please do so in a way that respects others in the group. That means no criticizing, judging, or talking down to anyone. If you think that someone is showing disrespect to someone else, please say so respectfully. If someone is dominating the conversation, the facilitator will referee so that everyone gets a chance to talk. If you think he is not doing his job as a referee, let him know. If you feel uncomfortable or angry at some point and do not want to participate, do not disrupt the group. You can choose to be quiet until you feel more comfortable and are ready to participate again.
7. **Questions.** There are no dumb questions or wrong answers, as long as you speak about what is true for you. Ask whatever is on your mind. Please respect one another’s honest questions and opinions.
8. **Staying on Task.** We’re here to talk about a program of recovery. Please stick to that topic. If we start to go off task, the facilitator will direct us back to the topic at hand. If you think that we’re getting off the topic and he’s not doing anything about it, or if you think that he’s headed off on a tangent, please feel free to refocus us.
9. **Punctuality.** We’ll start on time and end on time. The times of our group sessions are _____. If you are late to the group, we will start without you. The facilitator may also challenge you to be accountable for being late. Being late is almost always a choice and an expression of how you are conducting yourself in recovery.
10. **Abstinence.** We do not want to assume that there are any expectations for this group that are simply “understood.” It is important to be abstinent (or sober) when you come to each session. If you come while under the influence, the facilitator will ask you to leave that day, and your status in the program will be evaluated. If you use mood-altering chemicals between treatment sessions, it is essential that you inform the facilitator or another staff person as soon as possible.

Feeling Okay

There are times when you may feel uncomfortable or anxious in the group. This happens to everyone at various times, especially in unfamiliar settings and with new experiences. A lot of the time, we keep these feelings to ourselves. We do not know how to deal with excitement, anxiety, and feeling uncomfortable, so we attempt to relieve our discomfort by using alcohol or other drugs. Here are three techniques that you can use at any time to help you to relax or calm yourself and feel more grounded. Being grounded means detaching from your inner, emotional discomfort by becoming more aware of the physical world and being present in the here and now. These exercises will help you to deal with your feelings, so that they do not control your behavior and take you back to using.

Palms Up/Palms Down

1. Sit up straight in your seat, with both feet on the floor and your eyes closed.
2. Hold both your arms outstretched, with the palms of your hands turned up and touching side by side, as though someone was about to put something in your hands.
3. Visualize a list of all the thoughts and feelings that are bothering you right now.
4. Now imagine placing all your cares, concerns, problems, troubles, and painful memories into your hands. All these negative emotions and thoughts are out of your body and lying in your hands.
5. Imagine the weight of holding all these problems, these negative thoughts and emotions, in your hands. Feel the strain of carrying them.
6. Go back inside yourself and find any remaining pain, discomfort, and stress. Then slowly move these sensations out through your arms and into your hands.
7. You may feel the weight of the emotional and physical distress pushing down on your hands.
8. Now, slowly and carefully turn your hands upside down, so that your palms face the floor. Let all the problems, stresses, bad feelings, and negativity fall to the floor. For now, drop your burdens.

Relaxation

1. Relax again. Take a deep breath. Let it out.
2. You are going to tense up certain parts of your body and then let the tension go. If you want to make a sound when you are letting the tension go, that may help you to connect more to your body.

3. Hold your hands out in front of you. Make a fist as tight as you can. Now, open your hands and let them relax.
4. Now tense your arms . . . and relax.
5. Now tense your feet . . . and relax.
6. Tense your legs . . . and relax.
7. Tense your stomach . . . and relax.
8. Tense your jaw . . . and relax.
9. Tense the muscles in your face . . . and relax.
10. Now see if you can tense your whole body.
11. And relax it.

Deep Breathing

Another helpful exercise is learning to take very deep breaths, from all the way down in your abdomen, not just from your upper chest.

1. Put one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach.
2. Take a couple of normal breaths. You probably will find that you are feeling these breaths mostly in your chest.
3. Try moving your breath deeper into your lower abdomen, so that your hand on your stomach moves as you breathe.
4. Close your mouth and press your tongue lightly to the roof of your mouth. Let your jaw relax.
5. Take a breath slowly in through your nose, counting to three.
6. Slowly exhale and feel the breath leaving your nose as you count to three one more time.
7. This exercise is called Deep Breathing. Try it again. You will find that you are breathing more slowly and more completely than usual.
8. As thoughts come up, acknowledge them and then return your focus to your breathing.
9. Keep breathing deeply, but blow the air out of your mouth, rather than out of your nose. Let your abdomen fill with air each time.

The goal of relaxation and grounding exercises is to get your mind off other concerns and help keep you focused on what you are trying to accomplish. Learning how to calm ourselves when emotions start to take over is a skill that we all can use. You can use these techniques when you are feeling stressed or uncomfortable.

3. What can you do to help yourself get what you want?

Introduction to Feelings

Whether we like it or not, our feelings are essential parts of who we are. How we respond to our feelings is an important issue for men. Denying our bad feelings or trying to get away from them by using alcohol and other drugs does not make them go away. Using doesn't help to keep the good feelings, either.

As a result of the work you do in this session, you may experience some intense feelings over the next weeks and months that have been avoided and denied for a long time. Becoming more aware of your feelings and responding to them appropriately will be critical to your staying sober and achieving a meaningful recovery.

Name the two or three feelings that are the most difficult for you to handle effectively. You may refer to page 19 to help you get started in answering this.

As you continue in the program, try to be aware of when you are experiencing these feelings and ask for support in learning how to cope with them in a healthy manner.

Who Am I?

Most of us have been taught to think of ourselves in terms of our roles as providers, fathers, husbands, relationship partners, employees, teammates, and so on. There is nothing wrong with this—in fact, our connections with others tell us much about who we are. However, our roles do not tell the whole story about who we are. In recovery, it is important to develop our relationships with others—our outer selves—and our relationship with our inner selves—our thoughts, feelings, values, and beliefs.

We are often uncomfortable focusing on our relationships and our inner selves. We may have been brought up to consider these things to be unmasculine. So we ignore how we feel and how the other people in our lives feel. We focus on work, sports, or possessions and tend to define ourselves according to our successes in these areas.

The questions in this section will help you begin to get to know yourself and your fellow group members better.

1. Think back to when you were about ten years old. How would someone who knew you at that age have described you?

2. Think of three things about you *now* that answer the question “Who am I?” Here’s the hard part: none of your answers can refer to your work or your identity as a husband, boyfriend, son, lover, or partner. This isn’t about the sports you play or your favorite leisure activities. Think about qualities or characteristics that you have. You may want to refer to the Possibilities Page (page 19) to help you answer this question and the next one.

3. In the group, you were asked to share three words that describe who you are. These can be your feelings or beliefs or qualities. For instance, a feeling might be "I feel angry." A belief might be "I believe it is important to work hard." A quality might be "I am funny" or "I like to play basketball." In the space provided on this page and the next, please add to your list of three words. Try to write twenty sentences that describe your thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and qualities. You can again use the Possibilities Page (page 19) to find words to help you describe your inner self.

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Possibilities Page

Feelings

angry
joyful
sad
anxious
thoughtful
nervous
happy
afraid
amused
hurt
bitter
jealous
calm
lonely
mad
contented
miserable
disappointed
pleased
discouraged
depressed
relieved
embarrassed
grateful
grieving
ashamed

Beliefs

honesty is best
family is important
loyalty is important
hard work is good for you
monogamy is best
there is a God
save the earth
save money
stay young at heart
fatherhood is rewarding
life is tough
expect the best
you are what you eat
anger is dangerous
have safe sex
reincarnation happens
don't trust the government
think before you speak
trust your friends
I'm full of good ideas
I'm good with words
I'm good with numbers
I'm good at making things
I'm good at fixing things
I'm capable of changing
I'm a good listener

Qualities

sense of humor
dependable
sincere
good-natured
trustworthy
smart
compassionate
streetwise
gentle
strong
creative
survivor
wise
funny
warm
honest
passionate
resilient
sensible
energetic
brave
quick learner
sensitive
tough
determined
attractive

Answering these questions is a good start in exploring your inner self. As you continue in this program, you will learn much more about who you are and who you want to be. In the space provided on this page and the next, and over the course of your work in this program, you can record all the insights that you gain about yourself. Write down things that you learn in group sessions, things that you learn from the other men in your group, things that you learn from this workbook, and any other thoughts or feelings you have between sessions.

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Assignment

At the end of each session, you will be given an assignment to be completed by the next session. These assignments are designed to help you practice the new skills that you have learned. It is important that you put your best effort into these and come prepared next time to share what you have accomplished. In addition, practicing the grounding exercises will also be helpful.

The assignment to be completed before the next session follows:

Choose a friend, a trusted advisor, or a family member who is not aware that you are in treatment. Tell this person a little bit about why you have entered this program. Ask this person if it would be all right for you to keep him (or her) informed about what you are learning and how you are doing. At the beginning of the next session, you will describe who you talked to and how it went.

Reflections on Recovery

In this session, you have begun the process of looking at yourself and answering the question “Who am I?” This task will take you on a journey of exploring your inner feelings, thoughts, and beliefs, as well as looking at your relationships and the roles you play. The group will create a safe place in which you can learn to trust and, with the help of other men, begin to get clearer pictures of yourself. You may even get a glimpse of what your true purpose in life is.

This session is the beginning of an ongoing process. There is no miracle cure for addiction and no quick fix for most of the problems caused by addiction. But this program will give you many tools and techniques that you can use in your recovery even after you have completed the program.

Use the space that follows to record any thoughts you have about the material covered in this session.

Into Action

During this program, the facilitator and the group will talk about a lot of topics that may be new for you and may feel uncomfortable or be confusing. Every one of these topics is connected to your recovery. Being in this program is a little bit like being in a laboratory; you get to experiment with new ideas and behaviors. Some of these you will want to practice in your daily life to see if they work for you. Practicing also will help you to take advantage of one of your great qualities as a man: your ability to take action. Taking action allows you to learn. As you learn, what seems foreign or difficult will become natural to you. The Into Action activity is an optional assignment but it is a great way for you to practice the behaviors that ultimately will help you to stay sober.

If you choose to take some specific action between now and the next session, use the space below to describe what that action step will be. You also can record what results were achieved. Your action step can relate to a topic that was covered in Session 1 or it can be some other activity or behavioral change related to your recovery.

Examples of action steps are

- Practicing one of the relaxation/grounding exercises every day
- Making a commitment to eat healthier foods
- Making a commitment to exercise at least three times per week
- Taking a few minutes each evening to talk about your day with your partner

Recovery Scale

Please take a few moments to mark the degree to which you do each of the following things. You can make an "X" or a circle on each line to indicate your response.

You will complete this form again at the end of this module on Self to see how you have changed. You will not have to compare your answers with anyone else in the group, nor will you be judged on how well you are doing. This is not a test but an opportunity for you to chart your own progress in recovery.

	Not at All	Just a Little	Pretty Much	Very Much
1. I keep up my physical appearance.	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. I exercise regularly.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. I eat healthy meals.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. I get restful sleep.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. I regularly go to work/school.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. I can adapt to change.	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. I keep up my living space.	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. I take constructive criticism well.	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. I can accept praise.	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. I laugh at funny things.	_____	_____	_____	_____
11. I acknowledge my needs and feelings.	_____	_____	_____	_____
12. I engage in new interests.	_____	_____	_____	_____
13. I can relax without alcohol or drugs.	_____	_____	_____	_____
14. I value myself.	_____	_____	_____	_____