

Recovery in Real Life

Building a Life You Don't Want to escape From

**RECOVERY
ADVOCACY
WORKS**



Why This Conversation Matters

- People don't relapse because they forget the consequences
- Knowledge doesn't equal sustainability
- Relapse is often about escape, not desire

Many people including myself know exactly what relapse costs us, our kids, our freedom, our dignity and our health. And yet, knowing isn't enough. When life feels unbearable, the brain looks for relief. Not permission, not logic just ESCAPE!!!!!!

Have you ever done everything “right” in recovery and still felt miserable?

- You don't have to raise your hand or share out loud. Just notice what comes up for you. That question alone tells us something important, abstinence alone doesn't equal well-being. While stopping use is an important first step, it is not the finish line. We can be abstinent and still struggle with unresolved trauma, isolation, emotional pain, or lack of purpose. True recovery is about building a life that feels livable and meaningful. A life that includes connection, safety, coping skills, hope, and a sense of belonging: a life that we don't want to escape from!

The Big Myth

- “If they wanted it badly enough, they’d stay sober.”
- “You relapsed; you must not be ready or serious about your recovery”

These beliefs quietly fuel shame not only for the clients but the professionals as well.

It ignores trauma/when trauma is unaddressed, abstinence can remove the one thing that helped the body feel regulated, leaving the nervous system exposed and flooded. This keeps people from asking for help and reinforces the idea that people are only worthy when they’re doing right.

It ignores the nervous system/activates threat, not change.

It ignores loneliness, grief, exhaustion, and being overwhelmed.

Wanting recovery and being able to live in recovery are two different things.

3 Very Different Things

- Abstinence: Not using.
- Compliance: Following rules.
- Recovery: A life that feels worth staying present for and not worth escaping from.

You can be abstinent and miserable

You can be compliant and completely disconnected

Recovery –the kind that lasts- has livability built into it!

Why People Escape

- Emotional pain with no relief
- Loneliness without connection
- All obligations, no joy
- Identity loss
- Chronic survival mode

When we label these as “resistance” or “lack of motivation” we miss the point.

From a trauma informed lens, escape makes sense when staying feels unsafe.

Emotional Pain Without Relief

- Feelings without skills
- Shame, grief, anger, and boredom
- Numbing becomes a solution

Early recovery often strips away coping without replacing it.

We tell people “ don’t use” but we don’t always teach them how to sit with the pain.

Substances weren’t the problem; they were the solution that worked.....until it didn’t!!!!

Loneliness in a Room Full of People

- Attendance vs connection
- Being known vs being present
- Safety before accountability

We can go to meetings, groups, court, treatment and still feel very invisible.

Compliance asks, “Are you following the rules?” Connection asks, “Do you feel safe enough to be honest?”

Humans heal in connection, not compliance

Identity Collapse

- “If I’m not the addict... who am I?”

Addiction gave me identity, even though it was painful, it provided belonging and organized life around survival. When the substance use stopped, my identity fell and left a huge void. This is why early recovery can feel disorienting even when I was doing everything right. I grieved the loss of my old identity before I built a new one. This is a necessary and often unspoken part of recovery. When rushed, we often cling to old patterns. When this is honored, it creates space for an identity rooted not in survival, but in values, connection and self-trust.

Trauma Informed Reframe

- Escaping makes sense when staying feels unsafe.

This is where there must be a shift in narrative “why would they do that” to “what were they trying to survive” Healing doesn’t come from shaming escape; it comes from helping the body and the brain learn that **staying can become safe. As safety, regulation, and connection increase, the need to escape naturally decreases, not through force but through trust!**

Building A Life You Don't Want to Escape From

- Recovery must work in real life, not just on paper.

The question is not “ How do we stop relapse?” It’s “ How do we make staying easier than escaping?” We do this by creating safety, regulation and connection that the nervous system can trust, not by control or consequences. Staying is easier by building a life worth staying present for. Ultimately, *I stopped escaping not because I was forced to, but because staying no longer felt like a threat and that's when my recovery became sustainable!*



The REAL-LIFE recovery Pillars

- Regulation/ the ability to notice what's happening in my body and calm the nervous system enough to stay present instead of escaping.
- Emotional Literacy/Learning to name, tolerate and express emotions without being overwhelmed or numbing them.
- Attachment/Experiencing safe consistent relationships where I am seen, valued, and not abandoned for being human.
- Livelihood & Purpose/Stability, structure, dignity, routine, independence, knowing my life has meaning beyond survival which I found mine through values, service, growth and creativity.
- Little Joys/ Small, accessible moments of pleasure and relief that remind my brain life contains goodness, not just effort.

These pillars don't replace my meetings, therapy, or accountability.

They make those things survivable!

What Helps You Stay?

- One safe person
- One regulating routine
- One thing to look forward to
- One Boundary

Recovery for me does not require clarity about the future, it begins with finding a single reason today: myself, a person, a promise, a moment of peace, and hope. That's why I believe One Day at A Time is so influential. Focusing on just one day reduces me being overwhelmed, calms my nervous system, and makes staying feel possible when forever feels unbearable. One day at a time honors how change actually happens, through small, survivable choices that slowly add up to a life worth not escaping from!!

CLOSING

- Recovery happens when the war inside quiets, when effort loosens its grip, and your inner world becomes a place you no longer need to escape from.
- You don't need a perfect life; you need a life that feels safe enough to finally live inside yourself!

I live by these simple words: Don't ever let someone's inability to see your worth ever decrease your value. This means my value is inherent, it is not created or taken away by someone else's perception, understanding, or limitations. In recovery and in life, people may project their pain, fear, or blindness on to you, but that does not define who you are. Worth is not earned through perfection or approval; it exists simply because you exist!

Final Reflection

- What's one small shift you're willing to make? For me it's even the smallest change can become the beginning of something sustainable which in turn makes a life worth not escaping from.
- That's how real recovery is built in safety, in honesty and in the moments where you let yourself be seen and still choose to stay!

Thank You



Patsyanna Torres, CCAR, CPRC, CADDC-DP