

A NEW HARBINGER SELF-HELP WORKBOOK

the mindfulness workbook for addiction

A Guide to Coping with the Grief, Stress, and
Anger that Trigger Addictive Behaviors

An
integrative
approach using
ACT, CBT &
DBT

REBECCA E. WILLIAMS, PhD
JULIE S. KRAFT, MA

"*The Mindfulness Workbook for Addiction* is a brilliant blend of psychology and spirituality. Williams and Kraft have written a breakthrough manual, clearly and intelligently laid out, that blends the most current understanding of addiction with the powerful practices of mindfulness. One of the best books on living with integrity we have read in years."

—Michele Hébert, author of *The Tenth Door*, and Mehrad Nazari, PhD,
director of the Raja Yoga Institute

"What a gift! This wonderful workbook will help you understand how addictions function as a false remedy for negative feelings. It is packed with stories, metaphors, worksheets, and activities that will teach you how to befriend your mind and use it as a resource for recovery and fulfillment. The authors use everyday language to describe the complexities of the human condition, and help you systematically learn and practice skills to accept your feelings, live with integrity by honoring your values, and enrich your relationships. The workbook can be used by individuals or groups and will make a great adjunct for psychotherapy."

—Heidi A. Zetzer, PhD, director of the Hosford Counseling & Psychological Services Clinic
at the University of California, Santa Barbara

"Refreshing, unique, and practical. *The Mindfulness Workbook for Addiction* is an impressive synthesis of Eastern and Western techniques designed to help those struggling with addiction find a path towards healing and transformation. Through the use of mindfulness practices, cognitive-behavioral exercises, case examples and relevant metaphors, the authors entice readers to actively participate in their own recovery. This workbook offers creative, new ideas and practical recovery tools designed to facilitate real and lasting change. I can't wait to use it with my clients!"

—Phylis Wakefield, PhD, psychologist, specialist in addiction and trauma and
coauthor of *Couple Therapy for Alcoholism*

"With warmth and patience, *The Mindfulness Workbook for Addiction* guides the reader step-by-step through a journey toward self-understanding, self-acceptance, responsibility, and healing. With practical knowledge of how painful emotions drive us to act against our own well-being and how to free ourselves from this struggle, Williams and Kraft have provided an invaluable resource for people in recovery and the therapists who aid them. Mental health professionals are offered a comprehensive map of the emotional ground traveled in recovery from addictions and other self-defeating behaviors, with spot-on teaching stories that illustrate each stage of the process."

—Laura E. Forsyth, PhD, supervisor of psychological counseling at Moorpark College
and psychologist in private practice serving adults with ADHD, depression and
anxiety in Camarillo, CA

“With an engaging and conversational tone, Williams and Kraft show you how to change the energy of addiction. Their practical strategies allow addictive personalities to dig deep and tackle the genesis of their destructive behaviors and trigger positive-mindset solutions for living a more powerful life.”

—Stacey Canfield, author of *The Soul Sitter Handbook*

“*The Mindfulness Workbook for Addiction* is a practical, easy-to-read book that addresses addictions of all varieties. The workbook is rich in offering tools and insights that everyone can benefit from, whether they struggle with an addiction or not. The authors nicely use case examples and metaphors to bring the concepts alive. This will be a valuable resource to anyone seeking to learn new skills for overcoming an addiction.”

—Lee Williams, PhD, professor of marital and family therapy at the University of San Diego and co-author of *Essential Assessment Skills for Couple and Family Therapists*

“Williams and Kraft teach readers in a clear, compassionate, and concise way how to observe painful feelings as they arise. By learning how to tolerate and investigate their present-moment experiences, readers can stop harmful behaviors and make more valued life choices. This guide will be an essential addition to the library of anyone struggling with addiction and difficult emotions, and for all therapists who want to utilize an effective approach to help people live fuller, healthier lives.”

—Shoshana Shea, PhD, clinical psychologist focusing on mindfulness-based cognitive therapy in San Diego

“The authors have created a tool that can benefit all people who are dealing with addictions. *The Mindfulness Workbook for Addiction* integrates our best treatments for addiction and the emotional suffering that comes with it. This is a clear, step-by-step approach that will help readers move from trying (and failing) to avoid pain to living the life that they want to live, consistent with their values and free from the substance to which they are addicted. The focus on a nonjudgmental stance and acceptance of one’s self while also facing challenges and changing behaviors provides readers with the key tools needed to change their lives.”

—John R. McQuaid, PhD, associate chief of mental health at San Francisco VA Medical Center, professor of clinical psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco and coauthor of *Peaceful Mind*

“Here is a book that tells the truth about addiction—that it is driven largely by emotional pain. And here finally is a book that provides the mindfulness tools that will aid in recovery from pain and addiction.”

—Matthew McKay, PhD, professor at the Wright Institute in Berkeley, CA and coauthor of *Thoughts & Feelings*

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To my husband, my constant source of love and encouragement.

—Rebecca E. Williams

*To Andrea Bishop, for her endless compassion,
To Sean Markley, for laughter and love,
and to Mom, for everything.*

—Julie S. Kraft

Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction.	1
Getting Started •	2
Who Can This Book Help? •	2
How to Use This Workbook •	3

Part 1

Getting to Know the Main Concepts and Skills

1	Emotions.	7
	The “No Feeling” Contract •	8
	Loss and Emotion •	8
	Unraveling Your False Beliefs about Emotions •	11
	Emotion Dodging •	15
	Getting to Know Your Feelings •	19
2	Thoughts	27
	How Thoughts Connect to Emotions •	27
	Repeat-Offender Thoughts •	29
	Why Is Your Thinking Misleading? •	36
	Considering the Evidence •	37
	Distracting Thoughts •	41

3 Behaviors	47
A Ghost Fleeing Bullets •	47
Self-Fulfilling Prophecy •	48
Choosing the Opposite •	51
Values •	58
Learning More about Choosing the Opposite •	64
4 Mindfulness	69
Observing Your Mind without Judgment •	70
Imaginary Lions •	71
Practicing Mindfulness •	72
How to Breathe •	75
Radical Acceptance •	76
The Serenity Prayer •	78
Fight, Flight, or FLOAT •	79

Part 2

Looking at Your Losses

5 Loss	85
What Is Loss? •	86
Why Look at Old Losses? •	86
Taking a Look at Your Losses •	88
Exploring the Impact of Your Losses •	93
Connecting Your Losses •	98
6 Addiction	103
What Is an Addiction? •	104
Uncovering the Time Line of Your Addictive Behavior •	115
Switching to Another Addiction •	119
Journey to Wellness •	119

7	Connecting Addiction and Loss	123
	The Loss-Addiction Cycle • 124	
	The Addiction and Loss Time Line • 126	
	Loss Anniversaries • 129	

Part 3

Moving Forward

8	Mindful Grieving	141
	Coping after a Loss • 143	
	Nothing Works? • 145	
	Radical Acceptance Revisited • 148	
	Personal Resiliency • 150	
	Grieving the Loss • 151	
	Resiliency in Action • 153	
9	Relationships	155
	Basic Communication Skills • 157	
	Identifying Unhealthy Relationships • 164	
	Healing Broken Relationships • 168	
	Building a Healthy Social Support System • 178	
	Managing Social Discomfort • 180	
10	Recovery, Relapse Prevention, and Beyond	185
	Nutrition • 186	
	Sleep • 189	
	Fitness • 192	
	Work • 195	
	Fun • 198	
	Resources for Your Journey	205
	References	213

Exercises

1	Emotions	7
	Exercise 1.1 Journal Questions • 10	
	Exercise 1.2 Identifying Your False Beliefs about Emotions • 12	
	Exercise 1.3 Emotion-Dodging Methods • 16	
	Exercise 1.4 Consequences of Emotion Dodging • 18	
	Exercise 1.5 Learning about Your Feelings • 21	
	Exercise 1.6 How Would You Feel? • 22	
	Exercise 1.7 Connecting Emotions to Life Situations • 23	
2	Thoughts	27
	Exercise 2.1 Identifying Your Repeat-Offender Thoughts • 32	
	Exercise 2.2 Where Did Your Repeat-Offender Thoughts Come From? • 34	
	Exercise 2.3 Consider the Evidence Worksheet • 39	
3	Behaviors	47
	Exercise 3.1 Reflecting on Your Behaviors • 50	
	Exercise 3.2 Practice Choosing the Opposite • 56	
	Exercise 3.3 The Birthday Toast • 58	
	Exercise 3.4 Uncover Your Values • 59	
	Exercise 3.5 Reflecting on Values • 63	
	Exercise 3.6 Making Decisions Based on Values • 66	

4	Mindfulness	69
	Exercise 4.1 Observe Your Mind •	70
	Exercise 4.2 Imagine the Space •	72
	Exercise 4.3 Study an Object •	73
	Exercise 4.4 Count the Sounds •	73
	Exercise 4.5 Be Focused and Fascinated •	74
	Exercise 4.6 Be in Your Body •	75
	Exercise 4.7 It Is What It Is •	77
	Exercise 4.8 FLOAT Worksheet •	80
5	Loss	85
	Exercise 5.1 Losses Checklist •	89
	Exercise 5.2 Identifying Your Losses •	92
	Exercise 5.3 How Resolved Is Your Loss? •	94
	Exercise 5.4 Loss Impact Worksheet •	97
	Exercise 5.5 Your Responses to Loss •	99
6	Addiction	103
	Exercise 6.1 Identify Addictions Worksheet: Alcohol, Drugs, and Caffeine •	105
	Exercise 6.2 Checklist of Addiction Signs: Alcohol or Drugs •	110
	Exercise 6.3 Identify Addictions Worksheet: Other Troubling Behaviors •	112
	Exercise 6.4 Checklist of Addiction Signs: Troubling Behaviors •	114
	Exercise 6.5 Time Line of Addictive Behavior •	116
	Exercise 6.6 Wellness Script •	121
7	Connecting Addiction and Loss	123
	Exercise 7.1 Creating Your Addiction and Loss Time Line •	127
	Exercise 7.2 Reflecting on Your Addiction and Loss Time Line •	128
	Exercise 7.3 The Loss Anniversary Calendar •	132
	Exercise 7.4 Specific Triggers Worksheet •	134

8	Mindful Grieving	141
	Exercise 8.1 Being an Observer •	144
	Exercise 8.2 Ignore vs. Accept •	146
	Exercise 8.3 Leaves Down a Stream •	147
	Exercise 8.4 The Gift to Yourself •	149
	Exercise 8.5 The Personal Resiliency Quiz •	150
	Exercise 8.6 Don't Be a "Calm Fighter" •	152
	Exercise 8.7 Walking with Words •	152
	Exercise 8.8 Your Resiliency in Action •	153
9	Relationships	155
	Exercise 9.1 List of Common Social Problems •	156
	Exercise 9.2 Practicing "I" Statements •	158
	Exercise 9.3 Practicing Your Listening Skills •	161
	Exercise 9.4 Qualities of Relationships •	164
	Exercise 9.5 Identifying Your Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships •	167
	Exercise 9.6 Letter of Invitation •	170
	Exercise 9.7 Healing Conversation Format •	173
	Exercise 9.8 The Commit to Quit Agreement •	177
	Exercise 9.9 Keep Track of Your Thoughts •	182
10	Recovery, Relapse Prevention, and Beyond	185
	Exercise 10.1 Food Journal •	188
	Exercise 10.2 Sleep Improvement Worksheet •	191
	Exercise 10.3 Sleep Journal •	192
	Exercise 10.4 Exercise Journal •	194
	Exercise 10.5 Work as a Gift •	197
	Exercise 10.6 Pleasant Activities List •	199

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Introduction

Tony and Carmen Gomez are married for nineteen years before “it” happens. They’ve had mostly good times, with the normal rough spots here and there. The miscarriage of their first child was a hard time, as were Carmen’s breast cancer scare and the time Tony spent without a job a few years back. But all in all, they weathered the storms of life pretty well. That was until last year, when their son, A.J., was killed in a car crash at age seventeen.

Suddenly it was as if something dark had crept into their house. It drapes itself over Tony, Carmen, and their twelve-year-old daughter, Tina, like a fog. Neither Tony nor Carmen can shake that fog. They can’t find a way to talk about “it,” even though they can see that Tina needs answers. She spends more and more time away from home, hiding away at friends’ houses or staying late at school to do homework. It’s as if something has infected the Gomez family, and time isn’t healing these wounds. As time goes by, things only seem to be getting worse.

Tony sleeps a lot more during the day, misses days at work here and there, and shows up late. The boss is starting to notice. Tony has always been a drinker, especially when he was in the navy, but he can’t remember it ever being *this* way before. More and more, he finds himself reaching for a drink. One never feels like enough. He hates the days at work because he feels itchy and stressed. It seems as if his thoughts will overwhelm him if he doesn’t have a few drinks at lunch to take the edge off. At night, he drinks in front of the TV until he passes out. It’s the only time he can pretend that things are normal. It’s the only time he doesn’t think about screeching tires or the way A.J. used to smile just like his father.

Things have changed for Carmen too. She spends more and more time in the little office off the living room, her eyes glued to the computer. It seems that she can spend hours clicking through websites looking for shoes, purses, clothes. She was never such a spender before; she has always been careful with their money. Carmen tells herself she deserves some nice things and isn't hurting anyone. Still, she finds herself acting in strange ways. She goes to great lengths to hide the credit card bills from Tony. Sometimes she won't even open the boxes that arrive, and shoves them away in the guest-room closet instead. Something inside her feels restless, uneasy; it's hard for her to sleep. Carmen starts sneaking out of bed to shop online. It seems like the only thing that can quiet her mind.

Tony and Carmen are both filled with fear. They can feel the ground falling out from under them. But how can they give up the things that have given them just the slightest bit of peace since A.J.'s death? How can they stand facing that loss with nothing to keep the feelings in control?

Tina's school counselor calls her parents in to discuss a short story she has written. It tells how empty and frightened Tina feels inside, and how distracted and distant her parents now seem. It mentions how her parents fight about money, forget about dinner, and move like zombies through their house. Tina's story describes addiction and how it is destroying her family.

Tina's counselor suggests this workbook to Tony and Carmen. Feeling scared, upset, and helpless, they drive to the bookstore in silence. They buy two copies of this workbook, two notebooks, and a new box of pens.

Getting Started

Much like Tony and Carmen, you may find that your addictive impulses and behaviors confuse, overwhelm, or even control you. Congratulations for starting this workbook and making a move toward recovery! It is certainly possible to get back to the life you really want. There is a way out of addiction, and you are taking the first step!

At the end of each chapter, you will find a section called "A Visit with the Gomez Family." You will be able to check in with Tony and Carmen as each works through the new skills and concepts that you are learning. You will see the healing they experience as you move through this journey together.

Who Can This Book Help?

This workbook is for you if you struggle with *addictive behaviors*. Addictive behaviors are things that you keep doing, even though they are hurting you, and that you just can't seem to stop doing even when you want to. This workbook will help you if you are new to recovery, or if you are

already in long-term recovery and hope to improve your social and emotional worlds and prevent relapse.

This workbook is designed to help you find long-term wellness and recovery. This means that you will not only work on the symptoms you have now, but also get down to the source of them. You will get to know your thoughts, feelings, and behavior patterns. You will also reflect on your losses. Your losses are those events in your life that have had a lot of impact on you, that have led to strong emotions, and that are likely driving you to do the things you are addicted to. The exercises in this book will guide you through the process of learning what your losses are and healing from them.

The goals of this workbook are to:

- Decrease or stop the behaviors you are addicted to.
- Teach healthy coping skills.
- Discuss the causes behind your addictions and promote healing where it matters most: at the source.
- Teach positive interpersonal, self-awareness, and communication skills to help you improve your relationships and have long-term emotional growth.
- Give you hands-on, easy-to-do exercises and activities that will guide you toward the life you desire.

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is filled with useful information, case studies to help you relate to new ideas, and exercises designed to give you the tools to change your life. The best way to become handy with these tools is to *use* them!

Reading a thousand fitness magazines won't get you into shape, right? You have to take action and do the work yourself. With that in mind, you will get the most out of this workbook if you:

- Work through the book chapter by chapter. The chapters go in order for a reason, and each one will build on the skills that came before.
- Complete the worksheets and practice the exercises. You may even want to copy some of the worksheets to use more than once. This is what it's all about!
- Keep a journal. A journal is a great place to reflect on what you are learning and explore how you are feeling as you move through the healing process. There is space in the

workbook for you to answer journal questions, but we strongly suggest keeping a journal as you go through this workbook.

- Talk to a counselor or therapist. This workbook is designed for you to do the work yourself, and you will get results that way. But having a professional to explore things with as you move through the process will take you to an even deeper level.

Always keep in mind that the effort you put into this healing process defines what you will get out of it. It's up to you how much work you put in and how much you take away from this process—and you are worth the work! You are starting a healing journey that will lead you out of addiction and into peace. Let's get started!

Part 1

Getting to Know the Main Concepts and Skills

Chapter 1

Emotions

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

Long ago, something taught you that feelings aren't safe. You learned that grief, rage, frustration, stress, loneliness, and guilt were your enemies. Maybe you started to believe that they had superpowers, like the power to completely overwhelm you or the power to make you destroy all that you love. Maybe these feelings seemed to have the ability to knock you off your feet for good so that you can't live your life. Maybe it seemed that once the feelings got you in their grasp, you could never tell what you might do. Maybe you learned that you would never be okay unless you found a way *not* to feel.

So, naturally, you went looking for a solution. Maybe you've spent your life shadowboxing, always ready to throw a counterpunch against a feeling that tries to rise up inside of you. Maybe you've thrown other things at your feelings: a drink, a drug, a gallon of ice cream.

It's as if you've made a little contract with yourself:

I, _____, will do whatever it takes not to feel my feelings. I am sure that emotions are the most dangerous things in the world. To win the war against my feelings, I am willing to live a life that is limited. I will never be my whole self. I will avoid my feelings by _____ (drinking, using, sleeping, having sex, gambling, cutting, eating, watching television, and so on) as much as possible; the more, the better.

Feeling my feelings will surely kill me. So I will give up most of my life rather than let my feelings exist.

The “No Feeling” Contract

In signing this contract, you have also made a deal with your addiction. You’ve said:

- *I will let my addiction dominate me, control me, rule my life.*
- *I will let my addiction take everything from me.*
- *I will give up on my dreams.*
- *I will give up on being the person I want to be.*
- *I will give up real happiness, real love, and good health.*
- *I will let my addiction destroy me.*

Just don’t make me feel. Promise? Why would anyone make a deal like this? Maybe you didn’t know what you were really signing up for when you started. You probably didn’t read the fine print. Most addictive behaviors don’t start off bringing the awful consequences and pain that they do later on. As one addict put it, “Long before it was a problem, it was my solution.” Your addictive behaviors probably started as a “solution” for you, too.

Does this sound strange? Maybe you are thinking, *How was my addiction a solution to my problems? It couldn’t bring back the people or things I lost. It definitely didn’t solve my financial problems. And if anything, it made my relationships even harder!*

Certainly, drinking alcohol, overeating, using drugs, or doing other addictive behaviors did not solve your immediate problems. Life is full of hard times, tragedies, and losses, and not one of them goes away when you get drunk. But the truth is, you aren’t trying to solve your *actual* problems with your addictive behaviors. The problems you are trying to solve are your *emotions*. You are looking for a way to escape them, bury them, hide from them, or try to turn them into something else. Your addiction let you do this for a while. It’s your temporary solution to the problem of feeling.

Loss and Emotion

Throughout this book, you will be thinking about loss. Looking at the losses that have happened in your life will help you see why you do your addictive behavior, and give you more power in your fight for recovery. But why, specifically, are we looking at loss? Because loss, by its very nature, brings up emotions. When you are experiencing loss, and throughout your life as you cope with old losses, you may feel angry, sad, stressed, or fearful. You may feel helpless, lonely, or betrayed. Sometimes you may even feel relieved, detached, or numb. It’s likely that you will experience a whole range of feelings: sometimes three at once, sometimes twelve in the course of one day. At times, feelings will seem to hit like a tidal wave, knocking you to the ground from behind. At other

times they may seem like a dog nipping at your heels hour after hour, desperate to get your attention. At other times, these feelings may be tiny fleas that leave you squirming and itching all over.

One of the primary aims of this book is to help you to *accept* and *tolerate* your feelings. Notice that we didn't say *change* your feelings. Trying to change, decrease, control, or avoid feelings is part of what led to the addictive behavior you are trying to stop. Once you have worked through this book, you will probably feel less angry, stressed, hurt, hopeless, and afraid. Some of these feelings may even go away. But the most important point is that your feelings do not have to change for you to be okay. You are already okay.

This may sound like a radical idea. We can understand that. As we will explain later, you have learned a lot of things about feelings that aren't true. Part of the work ahead of you will be to unlearn the lessons that have been leading you astray. Keep an open mind; changing your mind will change your life!

Embracing the Dog

A moment ago, we noted one way you might experience emotion: as a dog nipping at your heels. Let's explore that a little further so you can better understand how you may be responding to emotions in your life.

Picture your emotions as this dog: a mangy mutt you have no interest in adopting but who has somehow set up residence in your life. You have tried everything to get rid of this pesky beast. Why wouldn't you? There he is, day after day, under your desk at work, pulling at your pant leg, jumping up on you in the grocery store, distracting you when you are trying to drive. He doesn't smell great, either. You ask a coworker to take him off your hands. She politely says no, that she already has a few dogs of her own. You try locking this dog out of your house or keeping him in the garage. You even try leaving him at the park—not just any park, the one all the way across town—but there he is on the doorstep when you get home. He just sits there, waiting for you.

There are mornings when you wake up certain that this dog isn't going to bother you today, but within a few hours, he turns up, barking outside your shower door or pawing at you on your lunch break. Every day, you are getting more frustrated, more and more convinced that until you get rid of this dog, you'll be living in hell. You think, *I won't be able to stand another day of this*. You think, *If this dog doesn't leave me alone soon, I'm going to go crazy*.

It never occurs to you to *embrace* the dog. He is here to stay, after all. He is a part of your life, like it or not. You may not have invited him into your world, but he sure isn't leaving it. Can you accept that? Can you accept this dog?

Now imagine that you take a deep breath, exhale slowly, and take a good, long look at this dog. He isn't *scary*, really—more irritating than anything else. He just seems so *needy*, always scrambling for attention. Something in you begins to surrender. You give up. You shrug your shoulders, bend down, and pet the dog.

The strangest thing happens. He calms down. He stops nipping at you, stops pulling at your pant leg, and rolls over. Mystified, you stroke his belly for a minute and then make him a small bowl of food. He eats, finds a place near where you are sitting, curls up, and falls asleep.

This goes on for months. The dog is always near you; he never fully leaves you alone. A couple of times a day, you have to feed him and show him some affection. If you don't, he goes back to his old ways. He starts nipping and snarling, and driving you nuts. But as long as you notice him when he needs to be noticed, he isn't that much of a bother. He's always there, but not so much of a nuisance—just a part of life.

Think of all the time you might have wasted battling that dog, maybe days, weeks, or even months! You waste just as much time and energy trying to get rid of your emotions. Just like that dog, they are here to stay. They are a part of your life.

Exercise 1.1 Journal Questions

1. Does this metaphor fit for you: your emotions as a pesky dog that you are avoiding?
2. If not, take some time to brainstorm and come up with an image that makes sense for you. Write about it in as much detail as you can. Be creative! Seeing your emotions in new ways will change your relationship to them.
3. If the metaphor does fit for you, how do you picture your dog? Is he a Chihuahua, a Great Dane, a pit bull? How aggressive does he get when he needs your attention?
4. When you try to ignore your dog, where is he most likely to turn up? While you are working, driving, eating? When you are alone, or with others? Does he wake you up at night and make it hard for you to sleep?
5. Have you ever tried embracing your dog? What is the result when you give him some attention?

Your Dog and Your Addiction

After you've had a loss, whether it was a recent event or a loss from years ago that you've never dealt with, you may find yourself with a whole truckload of dogs to deal with. You may try to ignore those feelings, even as they become more and more bold at demanding your attention. When you try to avoid, ignore, or dismiss your natural emotions that come up, you do more of the things that bring short-term relief. You may seek refuge in things like gambling, drinking, abusing prescription pills, having sex on impulse, or overeating. These and other addictions give you short-term relief

by letting you ignore your emotions, but the long-term results are terrible. Over time, you fall into the clutches of addiction and are flooded with even more negative emotions, such as fear, disgust, loneliness, or helplessness. Your addiction turns that one dog into a wolf pack, snarling at your door. Believing that you can't stand these feelings either, you retreat even further into the things you are addicted to. Little by little, you disappear from your own life.

Could the answer to getting you back on the right path be as simple as embracing the dog?

- **Jim's Story**

Jim suffers a spinal-cord injury that leaves him in a wheelchair at age forty-two. His loss of mobility and sudden need for more support from his wife leave him feeling frustrated, vulnerable, and afraid.

As a child, Jim was left in charge of his three younger siblings because his mother abused drugs and alcohol. He learned not to ask for help from his mother, which would only have led her to reject or abuse him.

Since being injured, Jim finds himself pulling away from his wife. He has started watching pornography on the Internet; it is soothing to pay attention to that computer screen, rather than risk his wife seeing the pain and struggle inside of him. Jim's pornography use increases rapidly, finally moving up to six or more hours each day.

Feeling baffled, rejected, and alone, Jim's wife insists that they go to couple's counseling. In this setting, their therapist begins to unravel the false messages Jim learned as a child about feelings of need, pain, and fear.

Jim starts to notice an urge to look at pornography whenever feelings rise up within him. It's that "No Feeling" contract he signed, in which he agreed to give up his life for addiction just to avoid his emotions. Being aware of this gives Jim the chance to make other choices, ones that can lead him out of the cage of addiction.

Unraveling Your False Beliefs about Emotions

If you or someone you know thought this book might help you, it's likely that your "solution" to your emotions has become a problem. That can be a scary, painful, and embarrassing thing to realize. Hang in there. There's a road out of addiction, and you are taking the first step. An important part of the work ahead is for you to understand how you relate to emotions and for you to change any harmful ways that you relate to them.

Think about it: what was it that made you choose to give up everything for your addiction, even as it stopped being your solution and became the greatest source of problems in your life?

Let's look at some of your *false beliefs* about emotions that have led you to avoid them at the expense of your life.

Exercise 1.2 Identifying Your False Beliefs about Emotions

Here are some of the false beliefs about emotions that may be misleading you. Take a look at the list and see if any of these ideas has influenced you. Check the ones that sound familiar, and then add any others that come to mind.

- ___ *If I let myself grieve, I will be sad forever.*
- ___ *If I let myself be sad, I will become depressed and suicidal.*
- ___ *I won't be able to stand losing this good thing. I have to get rid of it now.*
- ___ *If I tell others how I feel, they will use it against me.*
- ___ *If I tell others how I feel, they will think I am weak.*
- ___ *Mood swings come and go with no warning.*
- ___ *If I take the time to feel this feeling, it will mean putting my entire life on hold.*
- ___ *Other people don't feel this way. There must be something wrong with me.*
- ___ *Only an immature person would get so emotional.*
- ___ *Anxiety is not a natural response; I have to get rid of it.*
- ___ *A good, strong, healthy person would not feel this way.*
- ___ *If someone else is having a different emotional reaction than I am, my emotional reaction is wrong.*
- ___ *If I let myself feel this pain, it will kill me.*
- ___ *A strong person is fearless.*
- ___ *Letting myself feel bad would mean falling to pieces, being a total mess, or wallowing in self-pity.*
- ___ *Good people don't get angry.*
- ___ *Being an adult means not getting carried away by emotion; I'm supposed to be rational!*
- ___ *If I had better self-esteem, I wouldn't be nervous.*
- ___ *Having emotions means I'm a "drama queen."*
- ___ *If I feel this emotion, I will lose all self-control.*

_____ *Emotions like anger, hurt, and fear are destructive and dangerous.*

_____ *Feelings can come out of nowhere.*

_____ *I'm stupid for feeling this way. I should just suck it up!*

_____ Others: _____

Taking a Closer Look

Let's explore some of these false beliefs in more detail.

If I let myself grieve, I will be sad forever. This particular false belief about emotion has perhaps caused more pain than any other. Loss is a part of every human life. No one is immune to loss. In fact, for most of us, losses are scattered across every chapter of our life stories. You will read about this in greater detail later in the book, but for starters, let's address this idea, this false belief, that grieving will somehow go on forever.

You may have heard people say something like: "Well, I *can't* fall apart right now; I have kids to take care of." That may be true, but what makes us think that giving ourselves the time and space to experience a loss will cause us to "fall apart"? In truth, you are more likely to "fall apart" when you try to stuff your natural emotions into a closet. You are also much more likely to reach for your addictive behavior to try to keep that closet door shut.

The idea that you will be in a never-ending state of grief is reinforced when you do not let yourself mourn. This is because the feelings in that closet are likely to sneak out. Remember that pesky dog? The feelings try to force you to face them time and time again until you really do.

The truth. Grief is a natural, healthy, and important part of healing. If you let yourself experience it, it will pass in good time.

I won't be able to tolerate losing this good thing; I have to get rid of it now. Many people create situations in which they can never have the things they want most. Why on earth do people do this? Because

they are so afraid that they will not be able to handle the way it would feel to lose those things they love. This simple fear can lead to more isolation, and less and less joy in your life. If you have fallen for this belief, you may not even realize it. You may actually toss aside or deny yourself some of the best gifts that show up on your doorstep: a wonderful, healthy relationship with someone great, an exciting new job, even moments of self-care, like a much-needed coffee break. You may be avoiding the greatest pleasures in life because you think it would be best that way. You are convinced that losing these good things would be too hard.

The truth. You can tolerate your feelings! Loss is a normal part of life. The real tragedy is denying yourself the joy that is part of life too.

Other people don't feel this way; there must be something wrong with me; a strong person is fearless; good people don't get angry. Thoughts like these send you the message that feelings are unnatural. They make you believe that you are somehow flawed for experiencing emotion. Being alive, being human, means experiencing the full range of human emotions. Trying to discount the less pleasant emotions or expecting yourself not to have them does nothing but increase your frustration and decrease your sense of self-worth.

The truth. Emotions are healthy and natural. It is our attempts to stop feeling that are unnatural and lead us to unhealthy and addictive behaviors!

Feelings can come out of nowhere. As we will see later, feelings don't come out of nowhere; this is a myth that never holds true. Still, it can certainly seem true! It may seem to you that you are minding your own business and these emotions come along like a pack of thugs to steal your day. It may seem that your mood swings any way it chooses, and there you are, clinging helplessly to the pendulum, hanging on for dear life. But the truth is, your emotion is coming from somewhere: it's coming from your mind. As you move further into this chapter and later ones, you will learn to notice and observe what your mind is up to. You will soon be able to predict your moods and trace your emotions back to their source. This will help you understand your experience, so that you are not left feeling hijacked by intense and unpredictable emotions.

The truth. Emotions do come from somewhere; they come from your mind. You can learn to connect thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

Remember, you don't need to blame anyone for the false beliefs you learned about feelings. Chances are your parents, grandparents, siblings, and neighbors were all told the very same lies. Maybe your parents told you that feelings made you weak because they, too, thought feelings would harm you. They thought it would be best to teach you not to feel. Or maybe they tried to teach you to have only "nice feelings," leaving out the trickier ones like anger, rage, sadness, loneliness, and anxiety. It's no surprise that you believed these messages about feelings and that you signed that

“No Feeling” contract and gave your life away. Now you are unraveling those false beliefs. This is the first step on your journey to reclaim your life.

Emotion Dodging

At this point, it is beneficial to get a better understanding of the *ways* you have been trying not to feel certain emotions. Some of these methods may be related to your addictive behaviors. Others may seem pretty harmless; the trouble arises only when you use them again and again to hide from your feelings. Remember, locking that pesky barking dog in the garage may work for a while, but the only way to find permanent peace is to accept him as a part of your life.

Exercise 1.3 Emotion-Dodging Methods

Look at some of the ways people try to control or get away from their feelings. Have you ever used any of these methods to dodge a feeling? Write a check mark next to any you have tried.

- ☐ Watching too much TV
- ☐ Smoking cigarettes
- ☐ Turning off your phone or staying away from friends
- ☐ Exercising too much
- ☐ Eating too much
- ☐ Gambling
- ☐ Worrying over and over again about something you can't control
- ☐ Drinking alcohol
- ☐ Using drugs
- ☐ Using medications in ways your doctor did not prescribe
- ☐ Cutting or harming yourself in other ways
- ☐ Storming out to avoid a conversation
- ☐ Lying about how you feel
- ☐ Skipping work
- ☐ Sleeping too much
- ☐ Staying in bed
- ☐ Complaining too much to others
- ☐ Placing blame
- ☐ Telling yourself, *Suck it up* or *It's no big deal*
- ☐ Shopping when you have no money
- ☐ Others: _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Next, let's look at an example to help you pinpoint ways that people dodge emotions and what the results might be.

- Jerry's Story

Jerry, a thirty-three-year-old construction worker, was married once before, to his high-school sweetheart, who divorced him after his reckless driving during an argument caused them to get into a serious car crash. Jerry has been married to his current wife for three years, and the couple is expecting their first child in a few months. Jerry recently lost his job and lost a good friend, when he and the friend got into a fight at a job site.

Jerry comes to treatment with some very clear goals in mind. "I get so mad sometimes," he says. "I start to shake inside, actually shake, like having a tremor. My wife is scared of me." He looks away from the counselor sitting across from him and stares at the wall instead. "I need to be less angry," he decides.

Jerry goes on to explain that he has been working hard to control his emotions, and for a while now, he has "succeeded" at controlling his anger. Success for Jerry means not yelling, cursing, or verbally intimidating his wife, and not breaking anything or causing damage to their house. Jerry achieves this in two ways: by avoiding his wife as much as he can, sometimes hardly speaking to her at all and never about anything that might frustrate him, and by smoking large amounts of marijuana daily.

In Jerry's work in therapy, it soon becomes clear that his biggest fear is of getting angry. He will do just about anything to prevent this. In his experience, feeling anger means acting out, getting out of control. It simply isn't safe. He is sure his anger will destroy the thing that matters most to him: his relationship with his wife. "If it keeps happening, I know she'll leave me," he says. "I have to smoke weed to stay calm. I'm thinking about getting a medical marijuana card. It's just better if I'm numb."

When Jerry reports that he *has* to smoke marijuana to be numb instead of angry, what is he really saying? He is repeating the messages he has always heard about feelings: that his only choices are to be knocked to his knees by his own feelings or find a way to "succeed" at not feeling them at all.

Remember, life brings emotions no matter what. Along with joys and pleasures, life includes pain and struggle (whether we like it or not). Hiding from these feelings and experiences, or trying to ignore or control them only increases our pain and unease in the long run. Jerry's attempts to dodge emotions are doomed to fail in the long run, due to the simple fact that his attempts aim to *get rid of* his feelings, rather than accept and deal with them. Once Jerry learns to notice his frustration, he can use it as a guide and begin to address what's really bothering him in a calm way.

Exercise 1.4 Consequences of Emotion Dodging

Now it's your turn to take a good look at the ways that you have been dodging emotions and what the results of those methods might be.

Look back at the list of "Emotion-Dodging Methods" (see the previous exercise) to see which ones you have been using in your own life. It's likely that you have used several, but for now, choose the five most common methods you use. Write each of your five methods in the following spaces, and after them, write any consequences to using these methods that you can think of. Start with your favorite emotion-dodging method. But first, think about Jerry's example for guidance.

Jerry's Emotion-Dodging Strategies and Consequences

Jerry's emotion-dodging strategies: smoking pot, avoiding difficult conversations, avoiding my wife
(perceived trigger of emotion)

Jerry's consequences: loss of money (spent on drugs), not applying for certain jobs due to drug testing, decreased motivation to do social activities, distance from wife, lack of relationship with her, fear of not being a good dad to my child

Your Emotion-Dodging Strategies and Consequences

1. Your emotion-dodging strategy: _____
Possible consequences: _____
2. Your emotion-dodging strategy: _____
Possible consequences: _____
3. Your emotion-dodging strategy: _____
Possible consequences: _____
4. Your emotion-dodging strategy: _____
Possible consequences: _____
5. Your emotion-dodging strategy: _____
Possible consequences: _____

Getting to Know Your Feelings

Remember, the reason you started using these strategies was that you thought dodging your feelings was the solution. The false beliefs you learned about emotions made you think you had to avoid, decrease, or get rid of them.

Part of the trouble here is that you likely don't know what you are dealing with. Most of us have been avoiding our feelings for so long that we may not be able to tell *what* we are feeling at all. You may not know what's normal in the world of feeling, like grief, and when you may need outside help—maybe therapy or other treatments—like for depression. It isn't surprising that emotions are not familiar to you. Think about the following analogy.

Imagine that you have a neighbor who has lived next door to you for thirty years. After thirty years of living so close to one another, you would assume that you and he would have some kind of relationship. But you are not even sure what his name is! You don't know what he does for work or even if he has children. How can this be?

Well, at some point early on, you heard a rumor about him. You heard that he was a dangerous criminal, a heartless killer. It isn't true; he's a heck of a guy. But nobody told you that. In fact, all the neighbors got the same misinformation that you got. For thirty years, you have avoided this man at all costs, pretending not to hear him call out, "Good morning," from across the lawn; keeping your head down when he pulls into his driveway; never meeting his eye. Come to think of it, you're not even sure what this guy looks like.

It may seem ridiculous to be so out of touch with your emotions that you can't even give them a name, but if you think about this example, it's not surprising. No matter how long you have lived with your feelings, if you have never looked them in the eye and shaken hands, if you have run to your addictive behavior at the very sight of them, your feelings may very well be strangers to you.

The following pages will help you get to know your feelings. Remember to take it easy on yourself; don't worry if you have trouble identifying what you are feeling at first. Like everything in this workbook (and in life!), this is a process. It's all about being *willing* to learn and practice your new skills.

Common Emotions

Think about the following list of common emotions. There are several more, of course, but this is a good starting place. Use this list as a reference whenever you have trouble identifying the emotion you are feeling. The list may help you name the emotion. When you are really in doubt, go back to the basics: afraid, sad, glad, mad, or ashamed. Most of the following emotions fall into one of those categories. Having at least a general sense of whether what you feel is fear, sadness, happiness, anger, or shame will give you a good initial guide.

Table 1.1 List of Common Emotions

Afraid	Sad	Glad	Mad	Ashamed
anxious	blue	appreciative	annoyed	degraded
frightened	brokenhearted	content	betrayed	devalued
horrified	closed off	delighted	bitter	embarrassed
nervous	depressed	elated	enraged	frozen
numb	disappointed	excited	frustrated	guilty
paralyzed	discouraged	grateful	furious	hopeless
scared	empty	honored	hateful	humiliated
shaky	heavyhearted	joyful	indignant	judged
shocked	hopeless	moved	irritated	regretful
shy	hurt	proud	jealous	remorseful
startled	lonely	relaxed	out of control	ridiculed
suspicious	remorseful	relieved	resentful	used
terrified	tearful	serene	stunned	worthless
worried	uncertain	thrilled	vengeful	wounded

Exercise 1.5 Learning about Your Feelings

As we said before, sometimes all your emotions really need is some attention. In this simple exercise, we ask you to bring your *full attention* to the emotion you are feeling in a certain moment. This is your chance to really get to know your feelings. Remember, you're not running from your emotions anymore, so why not turn around and shake hands?

This is not about the mind or whatever is flying around in there; now is the time to pay attention to the *physical sensation* of the emotion you are feeling now. Your thoughts are interpretations. Don't interpret! There's no need. Your only job here is to *notice*. Your job is to *observe*.

Start by finding a comfortable place to sit. Sitting upright is best, but you can lie down if you need to. Try to find a quiet place with few distractions. When you are ready to get started, close your eyes. You are taking a journey into your body. Imagine that you are a scientist, looking for as much detailed data as you can find.

As you move into your body, ask yourself these questions:

1. *Where is the feeling? What parts of my body are holding the feeling?*
2. *What size is the feeling?*
3. *Where are its edges?*
4. *What color is the feeling? Does it change color as I pay attention to it, or does it stay the same?*
5. *Is the feeling heavy? Is it light?*
6. *Is the feeling hard or soft? Is it rough or smooth? If I could touch this feeling with my hand, what would I notice?*
7. *Do I know what the feeling is? Can I identify it? (Give it a name: Red Glare, Chest Pincher, and so on—whatever is a fit for you.)*

Keep exploring the feeling in this way for at least five minutes. When you feel that you have reached a level of comfort with and understanding of this feeling, open your eyes. Slowly bring your attention back to the room you are in and your position in the room. Shake your arms and legs lightly. This is a good time to use your journal to write about the experience.

As you do this exercise again and again, introducing yourself to different emotions and getting to know them, you may want to record the experience so that you can remember it. This will let you compare the sensations of different feelings. For example, is anger held in the same place in your body as sadness? Or is it somewhere else? It will be especially helpful to keep track of the names you give to the various feelings. That way, if the name Chest Pincher keeps popping up, you can keep track of the times this emotion seems to arise.

Exercise 1.6 How Would You Feel?

This exercise is designed to help you identify the feelings that might come up in different situations. It may seem pretty simple, but it's worthwhile. Remember, the more you interact with your emotions, the less they are strangers. And the less your emotions are strangers to you, the more likely you are to engage with them freely, instead of dodging them the way you used to do.

For each of the following situations, identify an emotion that could arise. Write it in the blank space next to the situation. If you think of more than one emotion, choose the one that you think you would be most likely to feel. Use the "List of Common Emotions" (table 1.1) to give you some suggestions when you need them.

1. *The person I love is in love with someone else.* _____
2. *I find five dollars in a pocket of my jeans.* _____
3. *I forgot my mother's birthday.* _____
4. *I am lost in a bad neighborhood.* _____
5. *I see a full moon.* _____
6. *My dog is hit by a car.* _____
7. *I am waiting for a call from someone special.* _____
8. *My favorite team wins the Super Bowl.* _____
9. *I finish a project at work.* _____
10. *My car breaks down.* _____
11. *I am on a plane to Paris.* _____
12. *I am on a plane to visit my family.* _____
13. *I can't find my car keys.* _____
14. *My closest friend is moving away.* _____
15. *I wake up from a bad dream in the middle of the night.* _____

Exercise 1.7 Connecting Emotions to Life Situations

Using this worksheet, identify times in your past when you felt each of these emotions. Doing this will help you connect emotions with specific situations. You don't need to choose examples of times when your emotions were intense. For now, keep it simple. For example, you may have felt sad when you ripped your favorite shirt or angry when someone cut ahead of you in line.

*A time I felt **angry** was:*

*A time I felt **sad** was:*

*A time I felt **happy** was:*

*A time I felt **scared** was:*

A time I felt **ashamed** was:

Good job connecting your emotions to life situations. You will need this skill as we forge ahead in making other important connections.

Review the introduction on page 1 for your first visit with the Gomez family.

A Visit with the Gomez Family

Tony faces a lot of challenges as he works through this chapter. So much talk about emotions seems silly to him, even worthless at times. Tony's years in the navy didn't include much talk about feelings, after all. And he has gotten by just fine, hasn't he? Other times it just feels overwhelming for him to look at all this stuff. *The past is the past*, he tells himself. *Why sit around thinking about it?* At one point Tony shoves his workbook in a drawer. *Maybe I overreacted*, he thinks. *Maybe my drinking isn't that bad*. Still, Tony can't help but notice that the things he has read make sense. It's hard to argue with good logic. He knows in his gut that he isn't drinking away his nights and risking his job and his family because it feels good. This hasn't felt good in a very long time. He is hiding. He is running from his feelings and hiding in his addictive behavior, just as the book says. He signed the "No Feeling" contract without reading the fine print. That's a tough thing to swallow. But it helps a lot to see the list of false beliefs about emotions.

Tony especially identifies with the false belief that letting himself feel things would mean that he was wallowing in self-pity, something he was raised never to do. He can also see how his family and his time in the military taught him that strong people don't feel scared or hurt—or if they do, they sure don't show it! But it makes a lot of sense to Tony that seeing things that way has led to *emotion dodging*, particularly the urge to drink that is taking over his life. Tony takes his workbook out of the drawer and slowly begins to give emotions a chance.

Carmen feels a bit more comfortable dealing with emotions, but she begins to notice that she is not quite as familiar with her feelings as she thought. This becomes very clear when she looks at the list of emotion-dodging methods. She knows that her compulsive online shopping is a problem; that's why she picked up the workbook in the first place. What she didn't notice was the half a dozen other ways she avoids her feelings. Carmen starts to see how whenever she tries not to shop, she overeats or watches TV for hours on end. She has been avoiding her friends, even turning off her phone for days, since A. J.'s death. Hardest of all to notice is how this emotion dodging also causes her to dodge something she never wanted to avoid: her relationship with her daughter, Tina.

Thinking about all of this is painful. In fact, Carmen's online shopping increases dramatically for a little while as she grapples with what she is learning in the book. What she finds most helpful is picturing her emotions as a pesky mutt that just won't go away. She decides to embrace her dog by drawing a picture of him in her journal and giving him a name. When feelings come up that she wants to dodge, she takes a deep breath and imagines petting that dog. She thinks about giving her feeling of sadness some attention. It is pretty surprising how quickly Carmen notices a difference. Paying attention to the sadness doesn't make the feeling worse; it makes it pass faster! Experimenting in this way gives Carmen the hope she needs to keep working through the book, and she looks forward to seeing even more progress in the future.

Conclusion

Like Carmen and Tony, you have likely had some ups and downs while doing the work in this chapter. Maybe there have been times when you wanted to quit or when your addiction got worse. You may have lost faith at that point or thought, *This won't work for me*. All of that is *normal*. This is a process, and you are only at the beginning. You are on your way to lasting change and recovery; keep up the good work!

Chapter 2

Thoughts

*We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts, we make our world.*

—The Buddha

Now that you have a better sense of what emotions look like and when certain feelings are most likely to arise, it's time to start considering your thoughts. Remember that two of the common false beliefs about emotions are *Feelings can come out of nowhere* and *Mood swings come and go with no warning*. If you believe either of those things, you probably feel really helpless and uncomfortable when faced with feelings. Your emotions seem hard to predict. They seem to arrive out of the blue, and there you are, a boat in the storm, just waiting for the wind to die down again.

The truth is (thank goodness) that your emotions are not that unpredictable. Your emotions are intricately connected to your *thoughts*.

How Thoughts Connect to Emotions

The connection between feelings and thoughts was first explained by Aaron Beck (1976), a psychiatrist known for founding cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Since then, CBT has helped countless people to cope with anxiety, depression, eating disorders, alcohol and drug problems, and more. Understanding this connection will make a difference in your life, too.

Here's what usually happens:

1. A situation arises.
2. You have a *thought*.
3. The thought stirs up an *emotion*.
4. Your emotion triggers *more and more thoughts*, which trigger *stronger and stronger emotions*.
5. Your *behavior* follows these thoughts and emotions. You act in ways that bring about similar situations, which then reinforce your negative thoughts, and the cycle repeats itself.

The trouble usually begins around step 2. In looking back at difficult situations in your life, you may be able to identify step 1, the trigger: *A man cut me off on the highway*, and step 3, the emotion: *I'm furious*. But how well can you pinpoint what happened in between: at step 2? After the trigger and before the emotion—sometimes so fast you don't even register it—there was a thought. In fact, there were probably several: *That guy is a jerk. He thinks he owns the road. He thinks he's better than I am. I don't have to put up with this. It isn't fair.*

Most of the time, you are probably unaware of what your mind is really up to, so when an emotion arises, you can't see the chain of events that led to it. Later on, you will learn skills for observing your mind. But for now, let's begin with an example. (The examples in this workbook may not fit you completely. Everyone's experiences are different. However, there will probably be some similarities. Try to focus on the ways you *can* relate, rather than look for ways to see yourself as different.)

- ## Sandra's Story

Sandra has no plans for the weekend. On Friday night she is exhausted from the workweek and content just to eat some dinner, drink a bottle of wine, and go to bed. Saturday morning she sleeps in a bit and later has time to run some errands. It's all going well until she has the thought that she has been alone all day on Saturday. She begins to feel lonely.

So, here it is: an emotion. Perhaps Sandra has learned some of the strategies you are learning, and can accept and tolerate this emotion for what it is. But let's assume she's stuck in the usual, unhelpful pattern many people are caught in. What happens then?

In response to the emotion, Sandra's mind kicks in and tries to be helpful. It tries to explain why she is feeling what she is feeling (in this case, lonely) by throwing thought upon thought into the situation. Here are just a few of the many thoughts that begin to churn in Sandra's mind:

- *Everyone else is out doing something fun.*
- *Why don't I have any friends? What's wrong with me?*

- *If I had just done things differently...*
- *I must be too boring or unattractive.*
- *Everyone else has someone to spend time with right now, and I am alone. Again, what is wrong with me?*
- *Nobody likes me. That kid from fourth grade was right; I am a loser.*
- *I can't spend every weekend like this for the rest of my life. Who could live that way? I'll be miserable all the time!*
- *There's no point in calling anyone; they won't want to spend time with me. I don't need to feel rejected on top of everything else!*

By this point, Sandra has concluded that she is feeling lonely right now, and she will be lonely forever. And because of the meanings her mind has attached to this feeling of loneliness, Sandra will likely take actions that might cause her belief to become more and more of a reality.

You will learn more about Sandra and the actions that keep this negative spiral going when we focus on behaviors in chapter 3. For now, let's look further into what Sandra's mind is up to.

Repeat-Offender Thoughts

The irony is that when Sandra's mind kicks in to address her loneliness, it is really doing its best to make things better for Sandra. It determines that there's a problem, and it systematically seeks answers. It wants to figure out what's "wrong" with Sandra so she can fix it.

The trouble is, of course, that Sandra's mind may be looking in the entirely wrong direction. Her mind has limited the source of the "problem" to herself, specifically to what she perceives as her flaws. Because she has likely thought these very same thoughts a thousand times before, the pathways in her mind are already connected in a way that heads right for those thoughts in any new situation. They are her "go-to" thoughts. And because her mind already has these thoughts to head for, it has stopped looking for any new, realistic, alternative thoughts. It has stopped looking at the big picture. It has become locked into a rigid, narrow way of viewing things.

All of us have deeply ingrained views that make up our *core beliefs* about ourselves, about our relationships, and about the world around us. These core beliefs can be positive. If most of yours are positive, it's likely that you have a natural feeling of peace and comfort in the world. You learned that the world is usually a safe, happy place in which people can be trusted and you are valued and loved. People whose core beliefs are positive have a sense that everything is okay. Their thoughts reflect this positive viewpoint too:

It'll turn out all right. I can handle this. Maybe he didn't mean that the way it sounded; I should give him the benefit of the doubt and ask him.

For many people, however, core beliefs tend to be negative. These negative core beliefs come with repetitive negative thoughts, which we refer to as *repeat offenders*. Often hidden or disguised, these thoughts underlie many of the thoughts that go through your mind during the day. If you have a sudden change in mood, it's likely that one of your repeat offenders is at work. You may not even notice your repeat offender thoughts until your emotions let you know that these thoughts are there.

How Repeat-Offender Thoughts Are Born

These repeat-offender thoughts have probably been with you since childhood, when you were learning how the world works and what your place in it would be. You believed certain messages and kept them locked in place, even as they kept hurting you. It's as if you did not know where to find the key to unlock these repeat offenders and let them go.

To help you understand this concept, think about the following examples.

- **Janet's Story**

Janet has been told all her life that good girls never complain. She has learned to smile brightly no matter what she feels inside. Ever since her parents divorced when she was ten years old, Janet has worked hard to contain the heartache that came over her. Her repeat offenders include *You are too ungrateful; you should be happy* and *Don't bother anyone; deal with it yourself and do it quietly*.

While being grateful and taking care of yourself are wonderful qualities, when taken to these extremes they are destructive and devastating. No human being can be happy or grateful *all* the time. Janet's attempts to be that way have led her to secretly cut herself on the inside of her thighs, where no one can see. She also has begun abusing painkillers like Vicodin (hydrocodone bitartrate and acetaminophen) and OxyContin (oxycodone) to try to numb the feelings she tells herself she shouldn't have. Janet harms herself to avoid revealing to anyone that she feels pain.

- **Doug's Story**

Doug's father left the family when Doug was four years old. When Doug was six, he and his mother and brother moved to a new city, and his mother remarried. Doug's stepfather was violent and verbally abusive. He often told Doug that he had better be good at

football, because all he had was “brawn and no brains.” Doug’s older brother was praised as the “brains” of the family.

Doug’s main repeat offender is *I’m stupid*, but whenever he is around other people, it becomes *I’m not as smart as they are*. This insecurity around groups of people really contributes to Doug’s cocaine addiction. He starts using drugs to fit in and to distract himself from the thoughts that make him feel so bad about himself.

- Sarah’s Story

Sarah is the youngest of five children. She remembers her family being happy and healthy. When Sarah was eight, her uncle was killed in a convenience-store robbery. From then on, she has been terrified of dying. No one in the family wanted to upset Sarah’s father, who took the loss especially hard, so they didn’t talk about her uncle’s death or show the emotions surrounding their grief. Sarah learned that death was a frightening, unnatural event that had turned her whole family into zombies. She became a nervous child who withdrew more and more. Sarah developed compulsions to relieve some of her anxious feelings.

In adulthood, Sarah’s secret food addiction is one way she tries to cope with her obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors. Sarah’s repeat offenders include *The world is not a safe place*, *Don’t talk about how you feel*, and *I am not okay*.

Breaking Away from Repeat-Offender Thoughts

As you will begin to notice, these messages (and the core beliefs that came out of them) are unrealistic and skewed. Your views about yourself and the world, interpreted through your eyes when you were a child, are cloudy. Yet they became set in stone and followed you into adulthood.

Finding your own repeat offenders will help you to notice when they are at work. Once you know your repeat offenders are there, you can break free from them and find a new, more balanced, and more realistic perspective.

Exercise 2.1 Identifying Your Repeat-Offender Thoughts

Consider the following list of common repeat offenders. Check any that make sense for you. Then, add any others that come to mind.

1. *I am not smart enough.* _____
2. *I can't do it.* _____
3. *It's not fair.* _____
4. *I am not safe.* _____
5. *I never get what I want.* _____
6. *I'm not good enough.* _____
7. *I will fail.* _____
8. *They won't like me.* _____
9. *I won't like them.* _____
10. *I am better than they are.* _____
11. *I am not as good as they are.* _____
12. *It won't work out.* _____
13. *This isn't how it's supposed to be.* _____
14. *I'm not attractive enough.* _____
15. *I can't handle this.* _____
16. *I am going to be alone forever.* _____
17. *It's all my fault.* _____
18. *It's all their fault.* _____
19. *I'm not supposed to feel this way.* _____
20. *No one cares about me.* _____
21. *I am too damaged to be loved.* _____

22. *I can't have the good things other people have.* _____

23. Others: _____

WHO SAYS?

When you hear your repeat offenders and really listen, you may notice that they take on the voice, accent, or way of speaking of someone you know or used to know. This could be a parent or grandparent, a sibling, a teacher, a coach, or anyone else who had an influence on you as you grew up. There may be times when you can't connect a *person* to the repeat offender, but you can recall an *event* or something that happened that may have caused you to form a certain core belief. Tracing your repeat offenders back to where they started can be very healing. It takes the power out of them and lets you see them for what they are: lies you accepted as facts a long time ago.

Exercise 2.2 Where Did Your Repeat-Offender Thoughts Come From?

Use the following space to think about possible sources of your own repeat offenders. Remember, this isn't about blaming others. This is *your* path to healing; it's about gaining understanding for yourself so that you can move forward. Use the list of common repeat offenders from the last exercise if you need help identifying your own, and then write each in the following space. Consider possible ways that you first developed these ideas. You don't have to figure it all out. These are just ideas, whatever comes to mind. There's no right or wrong answer. Just let yourself explore and see what you find.

Example A

Repeat offender/core belief: *I'm never going to be able to do this job; I know they are going to fire me! I will fail.*

Person or event that may have led to the belief: *I can remember my grandfather telling me when I was ten that I shouldn't bother doing my homework because no one in my family ever graduated anyway; during my first job as a waiter when I was sixteen, the manager fired me one day and never said why.*

Example B

Repeat offender/core belief: *There's no point in trying to explain to my husband how I feel; people care only about themselves anyway. I just have to handle it on my own.*

Person or event that may have led to the belief: *My mother used to tell us that we could depend only on ourselves, especially after my dad left. She used to say, "You can't think people will be there when you need them; you have to grow up and learn to do things for yourself in this world!"*

Your Responses

Repeat offender/core belief:

Person or event that may have led to the belief:

Repeat offender/core belief:

Person or event that may have led to the belief:

Repeat offender/core belief:

Person or event that may have led to the belief:

Repeat offender/core belief:

Person or event that may have led to the belief:

Repeat offender/core belief:

Person or event that may have led to the belief:

Why Is Your Thinking Misleading?

Earlier we discussed how your repeat-offender thoughts are often—in fact, almost always—inaccurate. This is because they developed when you were a child and your thinking was simple.

A good way to see the difference between children's thinking and the way we think as adults is to look at entertainment. Children's movies always have a *good guy* and a *bad guy*. The bad guy is often dressed in dark colors; he speaks in a sinister tone, and everything he does is selfish and cruel. The good guy, on the other hand, is attractive and engaging. If he makes any mistakes, they are minor and short term, he regrets them very quickly, and he learns from the consequences with the help of friends and family. Any three-year-old can tell you who is the good guy and who is the bad guy in a children's movie. But what about us, as adults?

The adult world is not so clear cut. It's full of gray areas. Our movies depict criminals who love their families, who can be vicious in one scene and tender toward loved ones in another. Take *The Godfather* (Puzo and Ford Coppola 1972), for example. In this film, we can sympathize with Michael Corleone (played by Al Pacino) as a family man, even though he's also a ruthless criminal. One of our most important tasks as we enter adulthood is to develop the ability to

weigh information, look at a situation from many angles, and make a balanced judgment. We can consider many possibilities, including the reasons or motives behind someone's behavior, rather than put everything into a specific category like "good" or "bad."

Unfortunately, your repeat-offender thoughts were created when you still had only a limited understanding of the world. That's why, when you made mistakes, you were "bad." If someone yelled at you, you didn't imagine that the person was having a bad day or acted out of her own fears. You immediately decided that it was because there was something wrong with *you*.

You also listened closely to what the adults in your life were saying. You believed they knew better, maybe even that they knew everything, so what they said must be the truth. This is because you were young; you needed the adults in your life to know everything about the world so that you could trust them to keep you safe. Now, as an adult, you know that nobody gets everything right. But back then, you took what the grown-ups said as gospel. What they taught you, whether it makes sense now or not, likely shapes your repeat-offender thoughts even after all this time.

Considering the Evidence

We all know the importance of evidence, because the United States justice system was founded on the principle that people are innocent until they have been proven guilty. We consider any evidence that a person might be innocent (is there an alibi?) and take into account many factors when deciding what the punishment should be (is this a first offense?). Without this process, we might make horrible mistakes in judgment. Innocent people may be sent to prison for crimes they did not commit.

You have thoughts running through your mind all day long. Sometimes they are lightweight, easily passing thoughts:

I like that red shirt.

It looks like it might rain.

Sometimes you grab hold of these thoughts and make them heavier:

Why can't I afford a shirt like that?

Driving in the rain later will be so dangerous.

And sometimes they become your repeat offenders and really weigh you down:

I never get what I deserve.

I am going to get hurt.

Learning to consider the evidence will be a powerful skill for you when you have to deal with your repeat offenders and negative core beliefs. This skill will allow you to make the kind of balanced, realistic interpretations that lead to good decision making and a healthy sense of self.

Finding Balance in Your Thoughts

Mistaken thinking can be pretty strong. And, as we said earlier, because your mind has been reaching for the same thoughts over and over for so long, it may be hard for you to start thinking in new, more realistic ways. To help you with this, here are some examples of *balanced evaluations* that you may want to use in the upcoming “Consider the Evidence” worksheet.

- *I'm only human.*
- *Nobody's perfect; I can understand that they made a mistake.*
- *This is something about myself that I am willing to work on.*
- *That person did hurt me, but it might not have been intentional. I wonder what was going on for him right then.*
- *I am not all good or all bad.*
- *Sometimes things don't go my way, and that's frustrating, but I can take it.*
- *Everyone makes mistakes; I can learn from mine and move forward.*
- *It's good for me to assert myself; I just need to do it in healthy ways.*
- *I can manage this; I have managed hard times before!*
- *No one is 100 percent to blame—not me and not the other person.*
- *I act badly sometimes and do things I regret, but I can always try to remedy the situation.*
- *Next time I will handle things differently.*
- *There's no such thing as “always” or “never.”*
- *Making mistakes doesn't mean I'm stupid, broken, weak, or bad.*
- *I have a lot of blessings in my life to be grateful for, despite the hard times.*
- *Maybe I'm being too hard on myself or somebody else.*

Exercise 2.3 Consider the Evidence Worksheet

When you identify a repeat offender at work in your mind, use this worksheet. It would be a good idea to make several blank copies of this page. You could also do the work in your journal and use this worksheet as a guide.

You are likely to have many thoughts moving through your mind at once. Choose one to focus on at a time. You can then go back and do the exercise again with the other thoughts.

Before getting started, think about the following examples. Review the previous “Balanced Evaluations” as needed.

Example A

Thought: *I’m not a nice person.*

Evidence that this is true: *I snapped at the waiter at lunch. Dave is mad at me for not visiting Mom’s grave on Mother’s Day. I was tired and didn’t take out the trash when my wife asked me to last night.*

Evidence that this is not 100 percent true: *I helped Aunt Joan move last month, even though I was busy and my back hurt. I think about Mom and pray for her whenever I see her picture. I am usually a good tipper and friendly to people. I try to be helpful around the house.*

Balanced evaluation: *Sometimes I’m rude when I am having a bad day, but nobody’s perfect. Going to Mom’s grave would have been too painful for me right now; I can grieve in my own ways. I don’t always help around the house as much as I should, but that doesn’t make me a bad person; it’s just something I want to work on. I’m human.*

What, if anything, could you do to improve this situation? *I could call Dave and ask him how the visit went, and maybe even explain why I chose not to go. I can practice being friendly and patient with others, and maybe apologize to the waiter. I can do something nice for my wife, like clean up the kitchen as a surprise.*

Example B

Thought: *Nothing ever goes my way; it isn’t fair!*

Evidence that this is true: *I didn’t get the job I wanted, even though I am qualified. Our car broke down again. My best friend never has to struggle with her weight like I do, and her husband makes so much money that they never have to worry like we do.*

Evidence that this is not 100 percent true: *We’ve been making ends meet ever since I lost my job, and we aren’t going to end up on the streets. I may not be skinny, but my health is good and I’m lucky I haven’t gotten the diabetes that runs in our family. I have a loving husband and kids to cherish.*

Balanced evaluation: *Sometimes things don’t turn out the way I want and I don’t get the things I think I need, but we always get through it. It doesn’t matter what other people have; some people have more and some people have less than I do. I have a lot to be grateful for.*

What, if anything, could you do to improve this situation? *I can keep a gratitude list to stay focused on the positive. I can keep putting out applications and living in a healthy way, whether I get what I want or not.*

Your Responses

Use this worksheet to balance your unbalanced thoughts.

Thought: _____

Evidence that this is true: _____

Evidence that this is not 100 percent true: _____

Balanced evaluation: _____

What, if anything, could you do to improve the situation? _____

Distracting Thoughts

Remember, our repeat offenders, by their very nature, are inaccurate. These types of thoughts may distract you and prevent you from getting closer to your goal. Distracting thoughts can sidetrack you, leading you down a wrong path. These thoughts divert you from reaching your full potential. That's why observing and identifying your distracting thoughts is so important.

Neuroscientists at the Kavli Institute for Systems Neuroscience at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology have found what the brain uses to filter out distracting thoughts and focus on a single bit of information. They compare your brain to a radio. You're turning the knob to find your favorite radio station, but the knob jams and you're stuck listening to that fuzzy sound between stations. It's incredibly frustrating. According to researcher Laura Colgin and her colleagues (2009), tuning in to the right frequency is the only way to really hear what you're trying to hear. This requires concentration and practice. By identifying and changing your distracting thoughts, you are actually changing how your brain works for you. You are tuning in to the thoughts you want to focus on and tuning out your distracting thoughts. You are changing your mind!

It's helpful to be aware of the *types* of distracting thoughts. Take a look at the five common "thought distractions" that follow. Notice the ones that seem familiar to you.

All Good or All Bad Thinking

You see everything in one of two categories: something or someone is either all good or all bad; there is no in between. If your boss doesn't give you that raise, she is all bad, even though she supported your time off work when your father was ill last year. The idea of a person or experience having both good and not-so-good qualities surprises you. Is "all good or all bad" thinking distracting you from making the most of your experiences and relationships?

Write down examples of your "all good or all bad" thinking:

Wet Blanket Thinking

You put a huge, heavy wet blanket of negativity over all events, regardless of the outcome. If your cousin doesn't repay you the money you loaned her, you think, *No one ever repays loans, so why bother helping anyone out?* It takes too much energy to get out from under a heavy, wet blanket. It's easier to just leave yourself covered in the negativity. Is this type of thinking distracting you from heading in the right direction?

Write down examples of your "wet blanket" thinking:

Can't See the Upside Thinking

You reject positive experiences by insisting for some reason that they "don't count." You can usually provide a strong argument to support your negative beliefs. If a coworker compliments you about your work today, your first thought is, *That assignment was a joke.* You don't have a place in your mind to put positive experiences or interactions. To make space for something positive would require you to give up something negative. You're not sure you're willing to give up the negative "real estate." Is this type of thinking distracting you from recognizing your strengths?

Write down examples of your "can't see the upside" thinking:

Disaster Forecaster

You go quickly and directly to punish yourself with a negative thought. You haven't even had a chance to slow down and explore other options. It feels as if you have already arrived at the negative conclusion, even without all the facts. If you think your doctor is about to give you bad news about your illness, you arrive at a negative conclusion without waiting to hear the facts. Is this type of thinking distracting you from looking at all the facts in a situation?

Write down examples of your “first to the finish line” thinking:

Should or Shouldn't Thinking

You try to motivate yourself with “shoulds” and “shouldn'ts,” as if you need to be disciplined before you can be expected to do anything. “Musts” and “oughts” can also be thoughts that distract you with anxiety and fear. When you direct “should” statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment. And when you direct them at yourself—if, for example, you believe you should have more money in your savings account but you keep buying things you don't need—punishing thoughts arise. Instead of having compassion for yourself and learning how to manage your money, you beat yourself up on a daily, if not hourly, basis. All these “shoulds” and “shouldn'ts” lead to anger and sadness. Is this type of thinking distracting you from following through with your plans for success?

Write down examples of your “should or shouldn't” thinking:

“Of Course, I’m Responsible” Thinking

You see yourself as the reason a bad event happened, when, in fact, it had little or nothing to do with you. Thinking of yourself as responsible for all negative events actually gives you the illusion that you’re in control. But there’s a toll: you will feel exhausted and even depressed. Thinking that you are responsible for your mother-in-law’s decision not to visit during the holiday could lead to feelings of confusion and sadness. Are there other ways to think about this situation that don’t make you the reason for someone else’s decision? Is this type of thinking distracting you from focusing on your own life path?

Write down examples of your “of course, I’m responsible” thinking:

Remember how the brain is like a radio. Identifying and decreasing your distractions is like allowing yourself to tune in to one station at a time. Being aware of the distracting thoughts that are influencing you will be a terrific aid in healing. Your perceptions of the losses in your life can create powerful negative emotions. This makes it harder to tolerate the way you feel, which reinforces the false belief that you cannot accept and tolerate your emotions. That’s the kind of false and distracting belief we have been trying to unravel in this workbook so far.

A Visit with the Gomez Family

Using this chapter, Carmen and Tony begin the difficult work of watching, recognizing, and adapting their thoughts.

Carmen finds out she has been carrying several repeat offenders from her childhood, including that her ideas aren’t good enough and that she doesn’t have anything to contribute. It’s painful for Carmen to explore the origins of these negative thoughts. She hesitates at first, realizing that it will mean looking back into her childhood and knowing that her parents, even if they didn’t know it, gave her negative messages about herself. But in looking at the past, she can see a brighter future. She starts to notice the messages she might be sending to

her daughter, Tina. It's a relief to know that as she encounters her own negative thoughts and finds more balanced views, she very naturally begins to relate more positively with Tina. Somehow, breaking the cycle of negative thinking is freeing her in her relationships too.

Tony, too, has a good experience with learning about his thoughts and the influence they have on him. He takes comfort in rationally following how his thoughts trigger his emotions. He doesn't have to feel so out of control of his moods. That makes it easier not to reach for a drink when stress or sadness comes over him. He can see now that in the past, the thoughts built on themselves repeatedly, making the emotions so intense that they seemed unbearable. Now he is beginning to catch his repeat-offender thoughts as soon as they strike. Knowing where they came from and that they aren't rational allows Tony to break free from their spell.

Tony enjoys using the "Consider the Evidence" worksheet to uncover a more balanced perspective. He finds this especially helpful in arguments with Carmen, when an unbalanced thought places all the blame on her or tells him she doesn't care about him. Using this worksheet, Tony begins to see that those thoughts are not based in reality. He finds himself less angry at Carmen and better able to reach out to her after a fight.

Tina seems to notice a change in Tony too. She stays home for dinner more often. In fact, one night the whole family plays a board game together. That's something they haven't done in a very long time. Tony has a sense that the family is coming back to life, little by little.

Conclusion

Remember, it isn't just your emotions or even your thoughts that truly cause problems in your life: it's the way you *respond* to them. As you saw in chapter 1, your emotion-dodging strategies not only were doomed to fail, but also often made things worse. Responding to your thoughts and emotions in new ways will be the key to changing your life. For this reason, the next chapter is devoted to your behavior.

Chapter 3

Behaviors

We learn something by doing. There is no other way.

—John Holt

Congratulations on the work you have done so far! Like the Gomez family, you have already come a long way in changing the patterns that have kept you stuck in your addiction and pain. Remember, this is a learning process. It's important to first understand the ways you have avoided feeling your emotions and why. Then you must understand what your mind has been up to and the ways your thoughts are holding you back. That is why the chapters go in a certain order; you create a foundation of skills that allows you to move forward. But the simple fact is that understanding is not enough. Real change will happen only when you begin the next part of your journey: *behavior change*.

A Ghost Fleeing Bullets

In the classic movie *Ghost* (Rubin 1990), starring Patrick Swayze, a young man is killed but remains on earth to solve his murder and help his girlfriend move on from the loss. He goes through many experiences that shock him: suddenly no one can see or hear him, he can walk through walls, and people even walk through him! Still, it doesn't quite sink in for this man that he is a *ghost*, not a human being. It takes him forever to understand that the rules he used to live by don't apply anymore. When a gun gets fired in his direction, he panics. He experiences this as if it were a

dangerous, life-threatening event. He is still operating under his old beliefs. He forgets that the bullets can't do anything to him; they pass right through him!

In your life, feelings are just the same. If you are living by your old beliefs, you may be convinced that those feelings are going to rip through you and leave gaping holes. It's no wonder, then, that the way you respond to emotions may be to flee from them the way the character in *Ghost* flees bullets. But the truth is, as you have learned, your emotions are just as harmless to you as gunshots are to a ghost. If you pause and wait quietly, if you bring some attention to the feelings (yes, the exact opposite of what you have been trained to do), those feelings will move right through you, often with no more disturbance than a breeze through the trees.

Much as for the character in *Ghost*, knowing the truth will not be enough for you. Even with your new understanding of emotions and thoughts, it may take a while for you to *respond* differently to your feelings. It may take a long time for your behaviors to change. But with the work you have done in previous chapters—getting to know your emotions and learning to track your thoughts—you are gaining an understanding that will enable you to make the lasting behavior change that truly transforms your life.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

In chapter 2, you read about Sandra, her loneliness, and the thoughts that came with it. Now let's explore this example further, looking at the behaviors resulting from Sandra's thoughts and feelings, and how they have an impact.

- Sandra's Story, Revisited

Recall that Sandra was spending a pleasant weekend by herself when, suddenly, her mind kicked in and told her she had been alone for a long time, causing her to start to feel lonely. With that emotion came even more thoughts as her mind looked for solutions to the problem at hand. Her mind tried to offer up explanations like *I'm a loser*. Her mind also tried to protect her from further pain with thoughts like *There's no point in calling anyone; they won't want to spend time with me*. These thoughts triggered more emotions, including depression and hopelessness.

For this example, let's assume that Sandra has not yet learned the skills from chapters 1 and 2 that you have learned. It does not occur to her to “embrace the dog,” and she does not stop to check the evidence and find a more balanced set of thoughts.

What is Sandra's behavior as a result of her thoughts and emotions? She decides to close the curtains, turn off her phone, and spend the rest of her weekend smoking pot and drinking wine in front of the TV. Retreating into addictive behaviors allows Sandra to block out some of the thoughts and feelings that are so distressing to her. These are

emotion-dodging strategies that give temporary relief but cause her even more trouble in the long run. Let's see how these behaviors end up making things worse for Sandra.

Her decision to stay isolated all weekend, instead of calling someone and trying to find some company, increases her feeling of loneliness. The behavior she chose to manage her loneliness is actually making it worse! Even more upsetting is that Sandra has been trying hard to cut back on her pot use. Now she is flooded with thoughts about how *weak and stupid* she is for spending another weekend that way. Her mind is creating a story line in which Sandra is a loser no one would want to spend time with.

As Sandra's self-doubt continues to rise, she may make less and less eye contact or conversation with people at work. Her coworkers may think that Sandra is pulling away from them and assume she would rather be left alone. This is what's called a *self-fulfilling prophecy*. A self-fulfilling prophecy is when the actions you take lead to the exact situation you feared would happen. You made your fears come true. Sandra's behaviors are actually *creating* the situations she dreaded most! Being human themselves, Sandra's coworkers don't like rejection either. One of them may decide it would be best not to invite Sandra to the Christmas party he is throwing, because she probably wouldn't come anyway. When Sandra finds out about the party she has been left out of, it will seem to confirm exactly what she has been telling herself. *I knew they didn't like me!* she'll think. *It's a good thing I stayed away from them, or this would hurt even more.*

Exercise 3.1 Reflecting on Your Behaviors

Take some time to write down your reflections on the following questions. You can use the space provided here, or expand on your thoughts by writing in your journal. As you consider your own experiences, remember that you have just begun a journey of making lasting changes in your life. If your old behaviors and life experiences seem troublesome, don't worry! You are in the process of building a new way of life. You won't need to behave in those ways anymore if you don't want to.

1. Describe a time when you experienced loneliness.

2. Did you isolate and keep to yourself, like Sandra, or did you reach out to others?

3. If you isolated, what were the specific *thoughts* that held you back from reaching out?

4. What *feelings* did those thoughts create? (Feel free to review the list of common emotions in chapter 1 for ideas.)

5. Whatever *action* you chose (isolating or reaching out), what was the outcome?

6. How did the action affect you in the long run?

7. How could your action lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where your own behaviors bring about exactly what you feared would happen?

Choosing the Opposite

It's easy to see how Sandra's responses to the thoughts and feelings she was having would lead to more problems. These behaviors—isolating, staying inside all day, using drugs and alcohol, and distancing herself from her coworkers—create situations that make Sandra's life harder and keep her from getting where she wants to go. So what would happen if Sandra made different choices? What if she moved in the *opposite* direction? Where would she end up?

This leads us to an important skill that we'll call *choosing the opposite*. This skill is based on a concept from *dialectical behavior therapy* (DBT), created by Marsha Linehan (1993). DBT has proven to be highly effective at helping people who struggle with strong emotions and have a history of making impulsive and unhealthy decisions. If you find that the choices you make as a response to your thoughts and feelings are leading you in the wrong direction, this skill will make a world of difference in your life. Choosing the opposite means acting *against* your automatic response. It gives you the chance to get somewhere different.

Over time you have developed certain ways of responding to the experiences in your life. When you feel angry with someone, you might yell, cry, storm out, or get quiet. When you feel tired, you might lie around the house, take a nap, or exercise to increase your energy. You may choose different behaviors at different times, but it's likely that you have a usual way of responding that is your first impulse. On the one hand, that way of responding might have worked well for you in the past. On the other hand, like Sandra's responses, your behaviors may be taking you in the opposite direction of where you want to go.

You can probably see examples in your own life of times when you were driven by emotions (and the negative thoughts that went with them) and acted in ways you later regretted. Our *behaviors* are more important than our feelings or our thoughts. This is because our behaviors influence the world around us; they alter our personal relationships, shape our experiences, and set the course of our lives. As you have now learned, behaviors are the result of your thoughts and feelings. So what can you do when negative thoughts or powerful feelings make you want to act in ways that will harm you? That is when choosing the opposite is the best course of action.

Here's a list of common responses to emotions and ways to choose the opposite response. You will choose the opposite only if that is the best course of action. Ask yourself, *Will choosing the opposite action bring positive results?*

Guilt or Shame

Usual response	Opposite response
Dwell on the situation and think increasingly negative thoughts about yourself.	Figure out <i>specifically</i> what is your part in the situation.
Act in ways that hurt you, like engaging in addictive or compulsive behaviors.	Use your “Consider the Evidence” worksheet (exercise 2.3) to balance irrational thoughts.
Avoid the source of the feeling (a person, a situation, God or your higher power).	Apologize for what you did wrong. If it’s not possible or not a good idea to apologize directly—for example, if it would be harmful to you or others—write a letter of apology that you do not send.
Stop reaching for good things in life, like health and happiness, because you decide you don’t deserve it.	<p>Ask or figure out if there’s a way to make things right, and do so if possible.</p> <p>Learn from your mistake and remind yourself that life is a learning process; you don’t need to be perfect! You have the chance to make a different choice next time.</p> <p>Forgive yourself and move forward. Strive for good things and continue to grow.</p>

Depression or Sadness

Usual response	Opposite response
Isolate. Avoid friends and family. Avoid social gatherings.	Agree to spend time with friends or family members even if you don't feel like it.
Stop doing things you used to enjoy, because they are less enjoyable now.	Try "stopping by" social gatherings, even if only for a few minutes. Showing up shows people that you care about them.
Stay inside and watch TV or sleep all day.	Smile into the mirror, even if you are faking it.
Eat poorly (too much, too little, or unhealthy foods).	<p>Get active. Take a walk, take an exercise class, or use an exercise DVD at home. If you can't imagine taking a long walk, just put on your sneakers. Walk around the block and see how that feels. Walk a little farther if you feel up to it after that.</p> <p>Find a way to be of service to others. Remember that you have a lot to contribute. You can start by calling a friend and asking what's new in <i>her</i> life, or if there is anything you can do for her. Get outside of yourself and see where you can be helpful.</p>

Anger or Frustration

Usual response	Opposite response
Try to convince someone that you are right. Keep saying the same thing over and over to beat it into his head that you are right.	Look at the situation from the other person's perspective. Take in his side of the argument. Listen and see if any part of what he is saying makes sense to you. Remind yourself of the saying "Would you rather be right or be happy?"
Spend a lot of time telling the other person or yourself your own side of the argument and why she or the situation is wrong, bad, or stupid.	Try to see where the other person is coming from. Give her the benefit of the doubt.
Yell, shout, scream, growl, bark.	Take slow, deep breaths.
Throw things, hit things, break things.	Let go. Accept the situation or person as it or he is right now (even though you don't like it).
Storm out, leave, or avoid the person.	Instead of lashing out, work on self-soothing. Remind yourself of what helps you relax and unwind.
Shut down, get quiet, act distant, ignore the person you're mad at. Give her the "silent treatment."	Once you feel ready to handle things calmly (in ways you can feel proud of), address the situation. Discuss your frustration openly and honestly, without attacking.

Fear

Usual response	Opposite response
Avoid! Stay away from the things that make you anxious.	Approach! Do the things that make you anxious.
Don't try new things, don't go new places, don't socialize, don't share things, don't get close to anyone.	Do these things over and over again even though it feels uncomfortable. Take the risk. Be aware of the feelings that come up, and remember that you can tolerate them. Try new things, meet people, risk getting rejected. Live life fully!
Get angry (it feels safer than being scared), and then act in the ways noted under "Anger or Frustration."	Sit with the fear. Let it be. Understand that fear is a natural part of life, part of being human.
Dwell on the irrational or unbalanced thoughts that your mind is creating as it tries to make sense of things. Believe what your mind is telling you without checking the facts.	Use your "Consider the Evidence" worksheet (exercise 2.3) to balance your thoughts. Decide for yourself whether your fear is justified, a creation of your mind, or maybe a little bit of both.
Engage in one of your unhealthy emotion-dodging strategies, including your addictive behavior.	Respond to your fear, instead of <i>reacting</i> to it. Trust your judgment and the skills you have been learning.

Remember, different actions bring different outcomes! Choosing the opposite response to an emotion may lead you to a whole new way of life.

Exercise 3.2 Practice Choosing the Opposite

Now think of five situations in your life where your usual responses aren't getting you where you want to go. They could be little things that seem to mess up your day (like not being able to find a parking space or being woken up early by a noisy neighbor), problems at work, or maybe trouble in one of your relationships. Basically, you'll want to choose areas of your life that don't seem to be running smoothly. Use the following space to think about these situations and the feelings they bring up in you (it may be helpful to look back at chapter 1 and the exercises you did to get to know your emotions better). Next, note the results of your usual behavior, what your behavior would be if you chose the opposite response, and the likely results of the opposite behavior.

1. Situation: _____
Emotions: _____
Usual response or behavior: _____
Result: _____

Opposite behavior: _____
Likely result: _____

Likely emotions: _____

2. Situation: _____
Emotions: _____
Usual response or behavior: _____
Result: _____

Opposite behavior: _____
Likely result: _____

Likely emotions: _____

3. Situation: _____

Emotions: _____

Usual response or behavior: _____

Result: _____

Opposite behavior: _____

Likely result: _____

Likely emotions: _____

4. Situation: _____

Emotions: _____

Usual response or behavior: _____

Result: _____

Opposite behavior: _____

Likely result: _____

Likely emotions: _____

5. Situation: _____

Emotions: _____

Usual response or behavior: _____

Result: _____

Opposite behavior: _____

Likely result: _____

Likely emotions: _____

Now that you know a little bit about choosing the opposite reaction, it's time to focus on *when* to use this skill. How will you know when it's time to choose the opposite and when to respond in your usual way?

Values

To figure out whether your behaviors are getting you where you want to go, or whether it's time to start choosing the opposite action, you must first get a clear idea of your *values*. Keeping focused on your values is a key component of *acceptance and commitment therapy* (ACT). Created by Steven Hayes (2005), ACT is designed to help people live a life based on their values, despite difficult thoughts and feelings. The next part of this chapter is devoted to helping you uncover and clarify your values. Knowing what you view as most important will keep you grounded and on track; it will guide your life every step of the way. This is your chance to figure out who you really want to be and what kind of life you are working toward, so take your time and really think things through as you work through the next few pages.

Exercise 3.3 The Birthday Toast

If you find it especially difficult to see clearly where your values lie, you might want to start with this exercise. Imagine that you have lived a long, full life. It was a life that you are deeply proud to have lived. Now that you are well into old age, a birthday party is being thrown in your honor. Imagine yourself there, surrounded by family and friends. Someone stands up, moves to the front of the crowd, and begins to deliver a speech. This person will describe the way that you have lived, the people you have loved, the experiences you have shared, and what you mean to people. This person will tell the story of *who you are*. What do you hope the person would say? How would you want to be described? What kind of life would you want to have lived? It would be helpful to use your journal to write the speech yourself.

What does this exercise tell you about what you really value? Use the following space to jot down your thoughts:

Exercise 3.4 Uncover Your Values

As you work through this exercise, remember that this is all about creating the life you *want*. You may have let many of these parts of your life fall by the wayside, especially when you've been trapped in the disease of addiction. That doesn't mean you don't value them. For example, you may have lied again and again to the people you love when you were doing the things you were addicted to. That does not mean you don't value honesty! You are in the process of committing to a new way of life, and you are learning how to make that new life happen. This is your chance to map out for yourself what's most important to you and what you value most in your new life.

Use the space below each of the value categories to write down what each value means in your own life. For example, under "Health" you might write, "Remembering to take my medication every day," "Going to the dentist," or "Exercising." Under "Family" you might write, "Playing with the kids on weekends" or "Calling my mom once a week." Under "Faith" you might write, "Reading the Bible" or "Daily meditation." Remember, this doesn't have to be what you have been doing. This is based on how you plan to structure your new life around *your values*.

To begin this exercise, take a look at the following list of value categories. Use the examples for each category to jump-start your thinking. After thinking carefully about each value, choose the top three most important values in your life. They can all be of equal value; you don't need to rank them in order. Next, rank the rest of the value categories from second most important (2) to least important (11). You probably value many, if not all, of these parts of life. The goal here is to get clear about what's *most* important to you. This will help you to stay focused.

Value Categories

____ Family

- *Spending time with family often, putting needs of family members first, creating a healthy and happy home life, working to keep and improve family relationships.*
- *What it means for me:*

____ Work Ethic/Success at Work or School

- *Showing up on time, working hard, taking pride in my work, gaining success.*
- *What it means for me:*

_____ Financial Responsibility

- *Paying bills on time, paying off debt, making good financial choices, saving money, not buying things I don't need.*
- *What it means for me:*

_____ Learning/Growth/Development

- *Continuing to learn new things, improve myself, and grow as a person.*
- *What it means for me:*

_____ Honesty

- *Telling the truth no matter what, being honest with myself and others.*
- *What it means for me:*

_____ Faith

- *Keeping up my spiritual life, staying active in my spiritual community, feeling spiritually sound and fulfilled.*
- *What it means for me:*

_____ Sobriety

- *Keeping away from the things I've been addicted to.*
- *What it means for me:*

_____ Respect

- *Being treated with respect by those around me, feeling respected, respecting others.*
- *What it means for me:*

_____ Friendships/Social Connection

- *Making time to nurture important relationships, spending time with friends, making the needs of friends a priority.*
- *What it means for me:*

_____ Romantic Love/Intimate Relationships/Marriage

- *Finding, maintaining, or improving a healthy relationship with a partner.*
- *What it means for me:*

_____ Service Work/Volunteerism

- *Giving back to the world, being of service to my community, contributing to society.*
- *What it means for me:*

_____ Community

- *Spending time as part of a community, such as my church or temple, clubs, sports teams, and other community gatherings.*
- *What it means for me:*

_____ Adventure/Spontaneity/Fun

- *Taking time to smell the roses, placing a high importance on enjoying life, trying new things, making time for fun activities.*
- *What it means for me:*

_____ Health

- *Eating right, exercising, getting enough sleep, keeping up with fitness, going to the doctor as needed, placing a high importance on my physical well-being.*
- *What it means for me:*

Exercise 3.5 Reflecting on Values

Look at the top three value categories you selected as most important in your life and respond to the following questions for each one. As always, you may want to expand on your reflections even further by writing in your journal.

1. What actions have you taken in the past that show that this is valuable to you?

Action a: _____

Action b: _____

Action c: _____

2. How can you change your life *today* to place more focus on these things that you value?

Action a: _____

Action b: _____

Action c: _____

3. In thinking about times in the past when you behaved in ways that took you off course, what actions would you have chosen instead that would have been in line with your values?

Action a: _____

Action b: _____

Action c: _____

- Kyle's Story

Kyle has reached his sixty-third day of sobriety when he loses his job. Getting laid off is completely unexpected. Finding out that his boss has known for weeks that this was probably coming infuriates Kyle even more. Kyle's usual response would be to curse out his boss, throw his chair to the ground on his way out the door, and then head for the bar. This would be a situation where Kyle would probably drink all night, close down the bar, stumble to a buddy's house to rag on the boss, and drink some more.

It's all Kyle can do to stand up and walk out of his boss's office without saying a word. He just keeps repeating to himself, *Stay calm, stay calm; you need a letter of recommendation from this guy; stay calm*. Not reacting in his usual way gives Kyle a sense of control that he

isn't used to feeling, and it feels great. But he still doesn't know how he will get through the night, let alone the next few days, without drinking.

Kyle sits down on the couch when he gets home, turns on the TV, and starts wondering how bad it would really be to just have a couple of beers. Maybe it won't be like before. And besides, who could blame him on a day like today?

Kyle notices his workbook sitting on the coffee table under some magazines. It has been a while since he worked on his recovery, long enough for the book to be a little dusty. Still, he has filled in a lot of the pages already. Kyle flips through the workbook casually until he gets to the section on values. Something comes over him strongly as he rereads all that he wrote about valuing his family: how if he had more time, he would drive out to see his nephews, how important those kids are to him. *It all comes down to choices*, he thinks. *I might be craving some beer right now, and yeah, that's the action I would always take before: go to the bar. But I can do something different. I can call my sister tonight and schedule a visit. I don't have to act in the same old ways. I can be the guy I want to be, instead of the guy I was.*

Learning More about Choosing the Opposite

Now that you have a better understanding of your values, let's revisit the concept of choosing the opposite. Remember, choosing the opposite is a skill you will use when your automatic response to an emotion or thought would not be in line with your values. When your usual behavior would take you away from the life you want—the aspects of life you value most—choosing the opposite is the best course of action.

Let's consider skydiving as an example. When you think about jumping out of a plane, you may experience a strong emotion: fear. Most people respond to fear with *avoidance*, staying far away from whatever is causing the fear. Avoidance is the instinctual behavior for most people who are afraid. Choosing the opposite of fear, therefore, would mean heading right for the source of your fear. How do you know which is the right course of action? Let's look at two examples, James and Stewart, to figure that out.

EXAMPLE: JAMES

Trigger: Skydiving.

Emotion: Fear.

Usual response to this emotion: Avoidance.

Opposite response to this emotion: Approach.

Values involved: Family (*just had a new baby, wife doesn't want me to go*), Health (*recent heart problems*), Friendship/Social Connection (*seems like a good bonding experience with my friends; will get teased if I don't go*), Adventure/Fun/Spontaneity (*could be a great experience, not sure it's for me*).

Decision in keeping with values: *Listen to my instincts; don't go.*

EXAMPLE: STEWART

Trigger: Skydiving.

Emotion: Fear.

Usual response to this emotion: Avoidance.

Opposite response to this emotion: Approach.

Values involved: Friends (*always wanted to share something like this with my best friend*), Learning/Growth/Development (*a new way to challenge myself*), Adventure/Spontaneity/Fun (*wouldn't hurt to have more excitement in my life and experience something new even if it scares me*).

Decision in keeping with values: Choose the opposite, move through the fear, and go for it!

As you can see, James and Stewart had to make a choice about the same thing (to go skydiving or not) and had the same feeling about it (fear), but, in the end, made two different decisions. By sorting out his values, each man was able to pick the path that was right for him.

Exercise 3.6 Making Decisions Based on Values

Now use this worksheet to sort through choices that you need to make in your own life. This is a chance to practice thinking about your values and what you can do to stay on track toward the life you want.

Example

Choice to make: *Let my sister-in-law stay with us while she looks for a job, or not.*

Value categories involved and how: *Family (I think families should take care of each other; I also want to make sure that our family is happy, so I need to know she's not going to bring too much stress into our home), Financial Responsibility (we are just getting out of debt, and that's so important to me; would helping her strain us too much?), Respect (I will feel used and that she doesn't respect me if she doesn't try hard to find a job; I need her to help around the house and to show that she is serious about getting back on her feet).*

Possible behaviors: *Agree to let her move in but resent it and end up making her feel she isn't welcome; tell her she can't stay with us; agree to let her move in after talking to her about how I expect her to help out, look for work, and get along with the family.*

Behavior you choose based on your values: *I choose to let her move in after having an honest talk with her about my worries, what I value, and what I expect from her. That way, if it isn't working out and I need her to leave, at least I will know that I was clear and honest from the start.*

Your Responses

Choice to make: _____

Value categories involved and how:

Possible behaviors:

Behavior you choose based on your values:

Conclusion

Remember, it will be up to you to decide if a certain behavior fits your values or not. You have every right to choose what kind of life you want for yourself. As you worked through this chapter, you got a good sense of the ways you normally respond to emotions. You got a clear idea of whether those behaviors are getting you where you want to go. You got a clear sense of your values and began to see how important your behavior really is in shaping the course of your life.

The goal of the next chapter, “Mindfulness,” is to give you skills that will help you cope with painful feelings and stress. As you read, do the writing exercises, and try the suggested activities in chapter 4, you will find a sense of calm that will keep you going when times get tough. You will be able to choose your responses, instead of being driven to respond to emotions in a way that hurts you. You will be able to make the right choices even in hard times. With these skills in place, you will be even better prepared to make choices that lead you to the life you value.

A Visit with the Gomez Family

Using this chapter, Tony and Carmen work hard at identifying their behaviors and figuring out which behaviors have been leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy instead of getting them where they want to go.

Tony has been resisting writing in his journal; it isn't something he is used to doing, and he has several thoughts that tell him that keeping a journal is not something that men do. But when he shares this with Carmen, she reminds him that it's up to him whether or not he wants to do the writing, but that he might as well try it once and see if it helps, as the book said it would. Tony gives it a shot and finds that it actually feels pretty good. Seeing things on paper helps him see how the new skills, like choosing the opposite action, make more sense. And the writing itself seems to slow down his thoughts, which helps a lot. On stressful days Tony's thoughts seem to rush so fast that he can hardly keep up with them. Using his journal, Tony really feels the concepts sink in. He is better able to start using the ideas he has learned and experience the changes his new behaviors are bringing to his life.

What's most useful for Carmen in this chapter is exploring her values. It's upsetting, at first, when she begins to look at her values and can see how far off track she has gone from where she really wants to be. She does a lot of extra writing in her journal to process the emotions that come up. She also makes commitments to herself about the ways she can take action right now to begin getting back on track. For the "Financial Responsibility" value category, Carmen decides to focus on paying off her debt little by little. She knows it will take a long time, but she also knows she can make small decisions every day to behave according to this value. She also combines her goals for the "Health" and "Family" value categories by starting a family walk around the neighborhood every night after dinner.

At times Carmen feels tired of doing this work and wishes she could just zone out in front of the TV instead. Then she finds a picture that Tina drew in brightly colored markers: Carmen, Tony, and Tina on a family walk, all smiling. And there is A. J., floating above them in the clouds. Carmen cries for a long time the night she finds the picture, but she doesn't try to escape those feelings. She lets herself think about A. J. and how much she valued him; maybe she valued him so much that when she lost him, she lost her way. She can see that her family is moving forward now, and this gives her the energy to keep taking the very next step.

Chapter 4

Mindfulness

You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.

—Jack Kornfield

You have just spent quality time getting to know your thoughts, feelings, and actions as they relate to your health and well-being. Now we are going to take a moment to look at another important skill you can use to recover from troubling behaviors and to help you deal with your feelings about loss. The skill is called *mindfulness*. Mindfulness has been around a long time. The idea started with the Buddhists as part of their meditation practice. Over thirty years ago, Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005) noticed that mindfulness skills helped ease the stress of cancer patients, and he founded the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School for that purpose. Other health providers began using mindfulness to help with all kinds of other problems. Some problems that have been shown to improve with mindfulness skills are deep emotional problems, depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, chronic pain, grief, and even behavior problems in children and teens.

This chapter will give you specific skills for learning mindfulness. You will learn more skills in chapter 8, but the ones provided here will lay the groundwork and get you started. Understanding mindfulness will help you to more quickly receive the unbelievable benefits these skills have to offer. (We also include a meditation and mindfulness reading list in the resources section in the back of the book so you can look further into this practice.) Let's get started.

Observing Your Mind without Judgment

When scientists discover a new species on earth, they are overjoyed. There's nothing more exciting than having an entirely new creature to explore. Curiosity is awakened, and the scientists begin to observe. They look at the whole life of this newly discovered animal: how it is born, how long it lives. They carefully, attentively observe what it eats, where it sleeps, the way it interacts with the world. They do not label this creature as "good" or "bad." They simply stand in fascination. They study it with the utmost attention and, without judgment, proclaim: "So, *that's* what you are up to."

To begin your journey into mindfulness practice, you must be the scientist who discovers your own mind. Imagine yourself stumbling upon your mind for the first time. Imagine watching the way your mind works: how it responds to different situations, the influence it has over your mood. You are now the curious observer of your mind. To get started with this skill, try the following exercise. Observing without judgment may not be easy at first. In fact, it will probably be very challenging. This (like all the new skills you are learning) will take a lot of practice.

Exercise 4.1 Observe Your Mind

You will practice this exercise for five minutes. Set an alarm or keep a clock nearby, but try not to be too concerned with time. Sit comfortably in a chair, or lie down if you prefer. Close your eyes and bring all of your conscious attention to your thoughts.

Now, imagine that you are a scientist in the jungle. You are perched behind a tree, watching a clearing. You wonder what animal will pass through next. You wait patiently, calmly, and with curiosity.

Now imagine that the clearing is your mind. You are watching for your very next thought.

When the thought comes, notice it. Do not judge it, criticize it, or try to change it. Look at it; observe it. Let it pass through the clearing. Now, wait for the next thought. Remember, it will be natural for you to struggle with this at first. It's likely that you will follow one of those animals (thoughts) into the jungle, and before you know it, you will realize that you've lost sight of the clearing altogether! That's okay. Just find your way back, settle in, and continue watching. Your only task is to observe without judgment.

Imaginary Lions

Human beings are incredible. We have the ability to dream, to imagine, to contemplate, to create. Without these incredible abilities, human beings could never have envisioned the vast cities in which we live or created the plans that built them. Without the ability to reflect on and ponder the past, we wouldn't be able to learn from our mistakes or use past experiences to guide us in making decisions. Memories and imagination are wonderful gifts. But there are times when they do more harm than good. This is when they pull us from the present moment and send us time traveling.

Consider anxiety. Anxiety is a natural response to threat. Your *amygdala*, an almond-shaped structure in your brain, is triggered by danger and begins the process that enables your “fight-or-flight” response. It prepares your body to either fight the danger or flee it, by speeding up your heart rate and breathing. This was quite useful when we were living among the lions! Being able to successfully flee a predator was a pretty handy skill. But chances are there aren't many jungle creatures threatening your path. Most of your anxiety—the fight-or-flight response that makes you sweat and shake and pant—is a reaction to a *perceived* threat in the mind. These thoughts, which we will call “imaginary lions,” are usually a sign that you are time traveling.

Consider these imaginary lions:

Yesterday's meeting went so badly; I felt so embarrassed!

What if I don't get that job? I'll have to move in with my parents for sure!

I'm running late; I know they are all going to be mad at me. I can already see their faces!

She looked so upset last night; is she going to break up with me?

Notice that none of these thoughts is about an *immediate* problem; the problem occurred in the past or might potentially occur in the future. Daily imaginary lions can leave you stressed to the point of exhaustion. Your body experiences every single one of those thoughts as a *threat*, a cue that you are in danger. Imagine if we did live in the jungle and there were a lion every step of the way! No wonder so many people feel overwhelmed by their day-to-day lives, even when they are healthy, comfortable, and safe.

When you are stressed or anxious, ask yourself, *Am I being chased by imaginary lions?* Ask yourself if there is an *immediate* problem that requires you to either fight or flee at this moment. Often, when you check in with yourself, you will notice that, surprisingly enough, there is nothing wrong. You are simply sitting in a chair in a room indoors; you are not in the freezing cold or burning heat; you are not starving to death, bleeding to death, or covered in boils. Your life is not in immediate danger. In fact, you may find that you are quite comfortable. This is a good time to breathe and acknowledge that those lions are imaginary. You are safe, and all is well.

Practicing Mindfulness

The best way to avoid imaginary lions is to stop time traveling. The only way to do this is to connect with the present moment.

You can achieve present-moment awareness by practicing mindfulness. In the next few pages, you will learn some basic mindfulness activities that will allow you to remain present and “be here now.” This is a fantastic way to decrease stress, because chances are that right here, right now, you are lion free. You can find exercises like these, as well as other useful mindfulness skills, in *The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Workbook: Practical DBT Exercises for Learning Mindfulness, Interpersonal Effectiveness, Emotion Regulation, and Distress Tolerance*, by Matthew McKay, Jeffrey Wood, and Jeffrey Brantley (New Harbinger Publications, 2007).

Exercise 4.2 Imagine the Space

Sit quietly in a room with no distractions. During this exercise, it will be helpful if you draw the shades to any windows and close the door to the room. You are going to fully examine the space in this room, so it will be easier if the space is limited.

Pay close attention to the room around you. Do not think about the objects in the room, but rather the space around those objects. Think about the space under things, above things, and between things. Think of the space between tiny cracks and the space that flows over the furniture. Think of the space from the floor to the ceiling. Focus intently on this space. Feel how much space there really is around these objects. See how the space flows from one end of the room to the other. Think about the space around your own body. Then, think about the space within your body. Think about your lungs and nostrils and ear canals, all filled with space. Think of the connections between the space in this room and the space in your body. Think about the air in this room flowing in and out of your body with every breath.

Practice this for five minutes daily. The more often you practice it, the more you will begin to sense the connections between yourself and the space around you. Feeling this connection will help you to stay grounded and to remain present, even when imaginary lions try to frighten you.

Exercise 4.3 Study an Object

Choose an object in the room. Choosing something ordinary is just fine; in fact it may even be beneficial. You do not have to touch the object at first. Use your eyes to study the object. Study its edges, its shape, and its size. Try to decide whether it would feel smooth or rough to the touch, hot or cold, heavy or light. Examine every inch of the object with your eyes. Find every color it holds. Now, pick it up, or just touch it if it can't be lifted. How does it feel to hold it? Were you right about its texture, its weight? Does it seem bigger or smaller than you expected when you were just looking at it? Are there parts of it you didn't notice with your eyes? Pay attention to those parts now. Study them; feel them. Run your hands over the object as if you have never seen it before.

Exercise 4.4 Count the Sounds

It's easy to get distracted by your thoughts when you first begin to practice mindfulness. In fact, this will always be a challenge. Remember how you observed your thoughts as if they were animals passing through a clearing in the woods? Chances are there are times when a whole herd of animals comes stampeding through your mind. It's pretty difficult not to end up chasing one through the jungle and getting lost along the way. The practice of mindfulness isn't about never getting distracted by your thoughts; it's about bringing your attention back once distractions occur. Because it's especially difficult to focus your attention for any length of time in the beginning, this exercise is sometimes a helpful way to start.

Sit in a chair for five minutes. It may help to have a timer so that you do not have to pay attention to a clock. Now, close your eyes and *listen*. Pay close attention to the sounds in the room. Count each sound you hear. If your mind wanders, bring it back to this moment. Continue to focus on the sounds around you. Remember, you are not judging the sounds. Just notice and count them. Continue to practice this until your time is up.

Exercise 4.5 Be Focused and Fascinated

There are many day-to-day activities that probably no longer fascinate you. They have become commonplace and you pass through them without attention, letting your mind time-travel instead. But if you were new to this earth, experiencing everything for the first time, you would be endlessly fascinated. That's part of the joy of spending time with children; they are delighted by some of the simplest things, like finding an autumn leaf on the ground, or the sounds and sensations of driving through the car wash. Children have the gift of living in the present moment. If you bring this kind of fascination and focus to commonplace activities, you will experience the present moment in all its wonder.

Take a shower. Feel the heat of the water on your body; listen to it splash; notice as it lands on each part of you. Put the soap in your palm and really *feel* it there. Feel its weight, its shape, what it's like to hold it. Smell the way the soap mixes with the water; what does it smell like? Breathe the steam into your nostrils and throat.

Wash the dishes. Wash one dish at a time. Focus only on the dish in your hand, not the others in the pile. Feel the weight of the dish as you wash it; feel its edges. See if it's smooth or rough. Feel the water on your hands; feel the temperature; notice the soap bubbles. Notice where you are standing, where your body is in the room. Plant your feet and be there. Notice the sounds as you wash the dish. Be there fully for every moment.

Work in the garden. Feel the soil in your hands. Notice its texture, its temperature, and whether it's wet or dry. Smell the scents of the earth and the plants. Feel the sensations of the fresh air, the breeze, the sun on your body. Breathe the air in deeply.

Now that you have the idea, think of three other activities you can engage in fully and be truly present for in your own life:

Activity A: _____

Activity B: _____

Activity C: _____

Exercise 4.6 Be in Your Body

The body has a tremendous gift of mindfulness because it is incapable of time traveling. The body is always exactly where it is, no matter what your mind is up to. Use your body as often as possible! Move inside your body. Feel the sensations in every part of it. Begin with your toes. Wiggle your toes; sense them. Use your toes to feel the inside of your socks or shoes. Then, notice your ankles. Notice the energy in them as you move up your legs. Are they tingling, calm, heavy? Pay attention to your knees. Bend and stretch them. Feel the joints in motion. Feel your midsection and back. Sense them. Are they warm or cool? Is your stomach gurgling and churning, or silent and still? Is your back aching and tender, relaxed, strong, tense? Feel your breath moving the air in and out of your body. Feel your heart beating in your chest. Notice your neck and shoulders. Are they tense or relaxed? Feel the sensations of your arms and wrists. Wiggle your fingers. Make a fist and let it go. Notice how letting go feels. Feel your throat and the energy there. Is it tight or soft? Feel the inside of your mouth. Feel your tongue and your teeth. Notice your nose, eyes, and eyelids. Blink slowly. Feel the energy in your ears and the top of your head. Be aware of all of you now—your entire body—and feel alive.

Practice this for five minutes daily. Similar to the other mindfulness exercises, the more often you practice it, the more you will begin to sense yourself in your body. Experiencing your body will help you return to the moment and will add a sense of calm to your day.

How to Breathe

Imagine the feeling of swimming deep underwater. Imagine the sudden realization that you are almost out of breath, the sensation of kicking your way to the surface. Imagine how it feels to burst back into air, into breathing. You bring that air into your lungs, and you are restored. That first breath is a gasping, powerful expression of your love for life. Breath is life. Without it, we are lost.

Unfortunately, many of us are breathing in ways that limit the power and healing of breath. Do this test to see how you are breathing: sit in a chair and place one hand on your heart and the other across your belly button. Breathe normally. Which of your hands is moving or moving more than the other? Is it the hand on your belly or the one on your chest?

If you are frequently stressed or anxious, it's likely that you are breathing from your chest. Breathing in this way keeps your breath shallow and thin, limiting the amount of life-giving oxygen you receive. Learning to breathe from your belly will significantly decrease the stress in your life, because you will naturally be calmer and more at ease.

To practice, sit in a chair and, again, position your hands so that one is on your heart and the other is on your belly. Pay close attention to the hand on your belly; your goal is to have this hand moving in and out with every breath. It may be helpful not to think of taking “deep” breaths for

this exercise, because this sometimes leads people to gasp in air quickly. Instead, repeat to yourself, *Slow and low, slow and low*. Let the air ooze in through your nose and down low into your belly. Feel your belly expand as the air sinks deeply into it: *Slow and low*.

Begin by practicing this activity in a quiet place without distractions. Start with one minute at a time. Do it daily for at least a week. Next, increase the duration to five minutes at a time. After another week, begin to pay close attention to your breathing when you are out of the house and more likely to be distracted. Repeat to yourself, *Slow and low*, in line at the bank, in a meeting at work, or during dinner with friends. When you feel yourself getting stressed, frustrated, or anxious, check your breathing. Chances are you have gone right back to your chest. Take a moment to focus on your breathing and bring that breath back to your belly.

Radical Acceptance

Radical acceptance is a concept borrowed from Zen Buddhism. It was first widely introduced by clinical psychologist and professor of psychology Marsha Linehan (1993), working with clients who were experiencing strong emotion and destructive behaviors, needed a way to help clients manage life challenges. She developed the idea of radical acceptance to help clients experience the world without judgment. In 2003, Tara Brach, also a clinical psychologist and a teacher of Buddhist mindfulness meditation, expanded the concept to help others learn the skills of not judging others, yourself, your feelings, or any part of the present moment. Mindfulness, as you have been learning, is about observing without judgment. Radical acceptance is your ability to bear what *is* in a kind and sympathetic way.

- Kristy's Story

After Kristy's husband has an affair and moves out, she finds herself especially irritable. A long line at the bank or not enough parking at the grocery store can quickly leave her mad and frustrated. When Kristy begins practicing mindfulness, she learns the idea of radical acceptance and slowly starts to pause during moments of agitation to accept her current situation as being just as it needs to be. The long line at the bank becomes something she can endure and accept. Instead of getting frustrated when she can't find a parking space, she observes this experience without judgment and simply keeps moving forward. When she accepts rather than resists her day-to-day experiences, Kristy finds greater peace. Her irritability fades. In time, Kristy's regular practice of radical acceptance allows her to accept not only the minor frustrations of daily life but also the painful loss of her marriage. She begins to accept this experience as a part of her life's journey, not one to be judged or struggled against but simply another experience to walk through with serenity and grace.

One way to practice radical acceptance is to repeat this phrase: *It is what it is*. To begin, do the following exercise. It will be helpful, at first, to practice it when you are not feeling intense anger or frustration. In the future you will be able to practice radical acceptance during times of high emotion, but while first learning this skill, it's wise to start with minor irritations.

Exercise 4.7 It Is What It Is

Close your eyes. Move your attention to your chest. Feel your breath moving into your lungs; feel it moving out. Remind yourself: *This is what it is. It may not be what I would choose, but this is what it is. I can tolerate what is. To deny what is would be a waste of my energy. I can and will accept that this situation is exactly as it needs to be, even if I do not understand the purpose or meaning of it.*

Practice this exercise for only one minute when you feel a rush of strong emotions. This mindfulness exercise allows you to walk into acceptance of the situation or event without judgment. You can practice it many times in one day. In the book *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005, 8) says it best: mindfulness practice is “simple but not easy.” This exercise teaches you to catch yourself before you automatically race down a path that is hot with emotion. The more you use this practice, the smoother your day will go, freeing your energy up for healthier choices.

Why is acceptance so important? Because to deny, or to battle or argue with, the present moment is nonsense. You may kill time that way, but it will only be a waste of energy. *It is what it is*. You will likely need to remind yourself of this many times a day or even many times an hour. Frustrations arise frequently in our day-to-day lives. We don't get what we want. Worse, we don't get what we think we need. Something inside of us decides to push against what is, to decide that there's something wrong with the present moment, that we have to change it, reshape it, mold it into something else in order to be okay. We exert energy, even to the point of exhaustion, convinced that we will be all right only if we can repaint the world in the colors of our choosing. And the end result of all that frustration and effort? It's usually nothing but greater frustration, less energy, and no peace.

In *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle (2004) points out that there are only three possible responses to a situation that have any merit at all: to *leave* the situation, to *change* the situation, or to *accept* the situation. That means, of course, that there are certain times when acceptance alone is not the answer. There are times when you will need to put your energy into changing something in your life. But then how will you know when to practice radical acceptance? This leads us to the next lesson of this chapter: the Serenity Prayer.

The Serenity Prayer

This prayer is used regularly in 12-step programs.

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

Many people have described it as “the perfect prayer.” Using this prayer in whatever way fits for you can get you closer and closer to the much-needed balance between acceptance and change. It can be an incredible self-soothing technique too.

Read the prayer aloud to yourself. If you feel uncomfortable using the word “God,” feel free to change the wording around so that it makes sense for you. You might say, “I am seeking the serenity...,” or “May I remember to accept the things I cannot change, find the courage to change the things that I can change, and be able to tell the difference.” What’s important is the *message* in this prayer, not saying it perfectly. Feel it out and see what works for you.

Next, take a piece of paper and write out the prayer. If you decide to change the wording, write it out in the way you want to say it. Take up the whole sheet of paper. Use markers, crayons, colored pencils, or anything else you can think of to make the prayer stand out. Hang this prayer on your wall, refrigerator, bathroom mirror, computer workstation—anyplace where you will be likely to see it throughout your day. You may also make another copy to fold up and keep in your wallet, purse, or car.

Say these words out loud to yourself every morning. Say them again before you go to sleep. Pretty soon you will have them memorized, and then you will be able to say them when you need them the most. This is usually when something out of your control is making you frustrated (like traffic, bad weather, someone else’s behavior) and the best thing you can do is accept it, or when there’s something within your control that you should be focused on changing (the way you are treating the people around you, engaging in unhealthy behaviors, and so on) and the best thing you can do is remember your values and take action toward aligning with them.

- John’s Story

John lost his house because of his gambling addiction. His children have both gone away to college. No longer living in the home his family shared makes the children seem even farther away. One night, John finds himself driving to his old neighborhood after a stressful day at work. He pulls his car up in front of his old house and finds himself flooded with pain and anger when he sees that the new owners have let the yard become neglected and overgrown. He took such pride in their home!

Just as John begins to feel overwhelmed, he remembers the Serenity Prayer. He takes a copy of the prayer out of his glove compartment and reads it aloud. Breathing quietly, he repeats it again and again to himself until calm returns to him. John knows he has to

accept that this is no longer his home; there's nothing he can do about that fact, and he has to let go. John also thinks about the little apartment he now shares with his wife, and how his shame and despair at living in the run-down building have kept him from taking any pride in their new home. John decides that this is something he can change.

He takes out a piece of paper and makes a short list of ways he can improve the place: fresh paint, an area rug, potted plants for the living room, and flowers for the window boxes. He decides to ask his wife if she, too, has any ideas for things she would like to change in the apartment. Last, John thinks about his children and how he has distanced himself from them more and more since losing their childhood home. He makes a promise to himself to call each of them the next weekend, no matter what. John drives home feeling a sense of peace, as if a weight has been lifted off his chest.

Fight, Flight, or FLOAT

Do you remember when we talked about your fight-or-flight response? Well, now we will introduce a *third* choice you have when you get in a rough situation; it's called *FLOAT*. This is the idea of taking a moment to rise above the challenging situation you are in and observe what's going on without reacting or judging. As you can imagine, it's quite a useful skill to float above the problem instead of responding instantly. Here's an easy way to remember *FLOAT*:

F stands for *Find your silent place*. Even in the midst of crisis or conflict, there's a quiet place where you can go in your mind. Going to this silent place allows you to breathe and regroup.

L stands for *Let go of judgment*. As we have already learned, holding on to judgment about yourself or others has a way of holding you back from being in the present moment. Letting go of judgment is an ongoing skill that will take you a long way toward your goal of long-term recovery from addictive behavior.

O stands for *Observe your thoughts*. You may have already started to do this earlier in the chapter. Here, we would like for you to observe your thoughts and notice that they are not permanent. Thoughts come and go. Having this knowledge can be incredibly empowering.

A stands for *Awareness of your environment*. With this tool, you will become more aware of what's going on around you.

T stands for *Thankful for the experience*. In every experience, there's a lesson to be learned. What if you decided to appreciate the experience instead of being angry about it? Being thankful is another piece of the puzzle needed to develop your new ability to cope with life's challenges.

Are you ready to *FLOAT*?

Exercise 4.8 FLOAT Worksheet

The “FLOAT Worksheet” may help you learn this new skill. You can use it when you are in the middle of a tough situation, or even before or after experiencing a tough situation. Practice FLOAT today and daily for the next week. Add FLOAT to your toolbox of new skills.

Find your silent place. Write a check mark next to the tools you will use to find your silent place. Add two of your own ideas to the list.

_____ *I’ve decided not to respond right away to a negative comment.*

_____ *I’m going to take a sip of water before I react.*

_____ *I’m going to see how long I can sit without saying anything.*

_____ _____
_____ _____

Let go of judgment. Write a check mark next to the tools you will use to let go of judgment. Add two of your own ideas to the list.

_____ *I will make an effort to be less hard on myself.*

_____ *I’m willing to avoid being critical of others for today.*

_____ *I’m going to give one person the benefit of the doubt.*

_____ _____
_____ _____

Observe your thought. Write a check mark next to the tools you will use to observe your thoughts. Add two of your own ideas to the list.

_____ *I’m going to just sit and watch what my next thought is.*

_____ *I’m willing to avoid fighting with my own thought.*

_____ *I’m not going to run away from a scary thought.*

_____ _____
_____ _____

Awareness of your environment. Write a check mark next to the tools you will use to be aware of your environment. Add two of your own ideas to the list.

_____ *I can look around the room.*

_____ *I can focus on a picture on the wall.*

_____ *I will feel the arms of the chair I'm sitting on.*

Thankful for the experience. Write a check mark next to the tools you will use to be thankful for the experience. Add two of your own ideas to the list.

_____ *I will appreciate everyone's help.*

_____ *I will be grateful for my friend's ability to listen.*

_____ *I will say thank you for my family's support.*

Great job! Continue using your FLOAT worksheet daily to improve your new mindfulness skills.

Conclusion

In this chapter you learned a few mindfulness skills that can help you achieve more balance in your life. Finding balance and serenity is a lifelong practice. There will be moments when you experience serenity and moments when you are sure you're back at square one. But as long as you keep practicing your skills, these moments of balance will become more and more frequent. You will find the peace of mind you were seeking all along. And you will find it without succumbing to addiction.

A Visit with the Gomez Family

Both Tony and Carmen can relate to the idea of being chased by imaginary lions. They find it helpful to understand what's happening in their brains and bodies when they get stressed; just knowing that their responses are normal makes things a little less daunting. They decide to work together through much of this chapter and to set aside time each night to practice one of the mindfulness exercises and talk a little about how each feels.

Carmen feels particularly good about the Serenity Prayer. She practices saying it each morning and night until she has it memorized. She finds herself using it to calm her nerves and keep her grounded when she feels that her life is out of control. She even buys some art supplies and lets Tina help her make a poster with the prayer written on it. They hang it in the upstairs hall, outside A. J.'s old room. Tony isn't much for praying, but even he likes seeing it there. It just makes sense.

Tony's favorite part of the chapter is the FLOAT worksheet; using the letters F-L-O-A-T helps him remember each step of the process. Slowing things down this way and knowing what to do when stress comes over him make a world of difference. Tony gains a lot of peace from knowing that he has ways to self-soothe without taking a drink. He doesn't always like taking the time to practice his mindfulness skills, but he knows they won't come easy. He is willing to make the time because he knows it will make the difference. Good things don't come easy, after all. He thinks again about the "No Feeling" contract from chapter 1 and how, at first, he used alcohol to make life seem easier. All it had done was bring more pain. Now he is making a new contract with himself; he and Carmen are both committing to a brighter future.

This is the end of part 1 of this workbook. By now, you have built a terrific foundation of skills that will help you keep your peace of mind and make good choices even when painful emotions arise. You are ready to move on to part 2, where you will truly begin to examine and cope with your loss and your addiction. You have already taken great strides on your path to healing. Keep moving forward!

Part 2

Looking at Your Losses

Chapter 5

Loss

If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.

—Jack Kornfield

Imagine that your life is a big, extraordinary mansion filled with rooms. Each room is more beautiful than the next. There are rooms for hosting parties, rooms for working, rooms for lounging. There are bedrooms with views and bathrooms with Jacuzzi tubs. Every room in your life is clean and bright, and filled with your favorite things. You can move freely into each room, enjoying the sights, smells, and colors. This is what it was like at the beginning of your life.

But slowly, quietly, something has happened inside your house. Loss has come. It has visited you many times. It has shown up in many forms, not just death, as you will see, but in the form of lost friendships, lost jobs, lost trust through betrayals. With each loss came strong emotions, emotions you believed were intolerable and you tried to dodge. Not wanting these feelings to disrupt your life, you tried to push them away. It was as if each loss got pushed away into a room in your beautiful house. You boarded up the windows, turned off the lights, and locked the door. You locked that loss away somewhere.

Over the course of your life, you may have surrendered space to dozens of these dark, hidden rooms. And little by little, entire wings and floors of your beautiful house have been shut down and boarded up. Parts of your life—of your very self—were locked away. By now you may be confined to one tiny room, with a mansion full of locked rooms all around that you dare not enter.

One of the goals of this book is to begin entering those locked rooms, one by one. This book will lead you step by step through the process of grieving your losses, leaving you finally able to move freely around your life and experience all that it has to offer without bumping into a locked door with so much pain behind it. Imagine the grieving process as your way of entering each room

and clearing out the cobwebs, dusting the furniture, and sweeping the floors. Through mindfulness and the other skills you are learning in this workbook, you will find the windows in each room of your beautiful house. You will bring fresh air and sunlight into these dark spaces.

To get to that place of freedom, you will have to do the work. You have already made it through the first part of this book; you kept your commitment to yourself, and that's something to be proud of! You have shown that you are willing to do what it takes to move forward into a new and better way of life. In this chapter, you will begin the challenging work of confronting your losses. You will identify them, put them down on paper, and explore them. You are bringing your losses into the light. So let's get started!

What Is Loss?

A little later in this chapter, you will find a list of many kinds of losses. It's likely that at first glance, the list won't make sense. That's because you probably didn't consider these experiences to be "losses" when they happened. You knew that you were in pain and that life felt upside down somehow, but the word "loss" probably didn't come to mind. That's because this is a pretty unique way of seeing things. Most of the time, when you hear the word "loss," you think of death, but the truth is that in the course of your life, there are *many* significant losses.

Here's a good way to start defining loss: think of a loss as any time when you've said good-bye to something. You could say good-bye to a relationship, the house you grew up in, a job, a school, a town. It may be that you said good-bye to a dream when you realized you would never play professional baseball or be a concert-level pianist. You may have been forced to say good-bye to your innocence at a very young age; someone or something may have stolen your childhood from you through trauma. That's a loss. That is a heavy, angry monster of a loss. You may have said good-bye to a marriage or to a child who was going off to kindergarten, or maybe you said good-bye to that same child as he went off to college. Maybe you had your heart set on a new job and had to say good-bye to that hope as the phone went day after day without ringing.

All of these experiences have hit you as losses, even if you didn't know it. They triggered a mourning response in you that probably went unacknowledged, because—hey, who has a funeral to say good-bye to their childhood home? Who gets friends together to mourn the death of a marriage? It's likely that you never truly grieved for the losses in your life. But even so, you may be thinking, *What does that matter?*

Why Look at Old Losses?

As you read in the introduction, the goal of this workbook is to guide you toward long-term, lasting recovery and wellness. This will mean not only looking at your current addictive behaviors

and any recent losses that may contribute to them, but also revisiting old losses and healing them. The thing is this: loss compounds loss. The losses build on themselves. It's as if those old wounds simply covered over with a thin layer of scarring, only to reopen as soon as another loss hit and then to begin throbbing and bleeding all over again. Lasting recovery requires healing at the *source*.

As you just read, it's possible that some of your most significant losses occurred in childhood. Early trauma and abuse can take many forms. Each form is a thief, stealing the calm, security, and happiness that every child is entitled to. If you experienced trauma in your early years, you suffered heartbreaking losses: the loss of safety, the loss of self-esteem, the loss of trust and faith in the world around you. Young and fragile at that time, you didn't have the ability to work through these losses. You couldn't heal from them the way you needed to.

One of your most important tasks now is to go back and heal those old wounds. You have the power now to help that little kid, the child inside of you who did not know how to grieve. You are going to confront and move on from all the losses of your life, and in doing so, you will take the power away from the addictive patterns that followed.

• Christina's Story

Christina's father was an alcoholic who was abusive to her mother in front of Christina and her siblings. Christina would hide under her bed when she heard her father downstairs. She did that so often that she began to sleep there every night. "I used my little stuffed dog as a pillow," she explains. "I can still remember the smell under my bed: kind of musty, like an attic. I must have been tiny when I started sleeping there. I remember thinking no one would ever find me. By the time I was eight, I couldn't fit there anymore. I guess that was one of my first losses, huh? I lost my hiding place. I never felt safe after that, even after my dad moved away."

Christina grew up to be a successful lawyer. Shortly after her divorce, a minor car accident leaves her with back problems. Within a few months, Christina is abusing the painkiller that her doctor prescribed, Vicodin. Her work is suffering, and friendships are becoming strained and distant, but somehow she can't stop. Terrified and overwhelmed, she comes to therapy, hoping to heal.

As she looks at her losses, Christina begins to make connections. Her own divorce triggered painful memories from childhood. "I thought I had put all of that behind me," she says. "But the truth is—and this is embarrassing—the night my husband moved out, I felt this urge to sleep under my bed. I actually slept in the guest bedroom for two months; it's the smallest room in the house. I guess it was the closest I could come to that old hiding place. After that, I think the pills became my hiding place."

Taking a Look at Your Losses

It's likely that strong feelings are coming up for you right now. Thinking about revisiting old, painful experiences from your life may make you feel anxious. It may be your instinct to avoid this chapter altogether. Your mind may offer up thoughts like:

This is silly.

These things don't even bother me; I never even think about them!

I can skip this part.

That's all in the past. It's pointless to think about it.

Going back over all that stuff will only make things worse.

Isn't your mind *amazing*? It's always there, doing its job. It offers up thought after thought, trying to protect you. As you learned in chapter 2, your mind may have your best interests at heart, but it can often lead you astray. When it tells you not to do this work, it's sending you down the wrong path. It is trying to help you avoid painful feelings, when really, the only way to heal is to “embrace the dog,” remember? You *can* tolerate your emotions. You *can* experience fear, sorrow, anger, shame, heartache—all of the emotions that loss brings with it—and still be okay.

As you work through the upcoming exercises, continue practicing the mindfulness exercises you learned in chapter 4. Practice self-care; do things that help you relax and unwind in a healthy way. Cut yourself some slack if you find yourself feeling grumpy, tired, or down, and give yourself credit for the challenging, important work you are doing to get better. If you find that your mind is trying to tell you to avoid looking at your old losses, this is a good time to choose the opposite reaction. Take action that will lead you farther down the road to recovery. Remember what you value. Remember why you began this journey in the first place, and focus on the healthy life you see ahead.

Exercise 5.1 Losses Checklist

Think about this list of losses. Write a check mark next to any loss that you've had in your own life, whether or not you believe it has had a big impact on you.

- ___ lost a job
- ___ unemployed long-term (loss of identity, hope, purpose, motivation, drive)
- ___ quit a job
- ___ promotion or demotion at work
- ___ parents divorced/split up
- ___ divorce
- ___ had a miscarriage
- ___ infertility
- ___ had an abortion
- ___ gave a baby up for adoption
- ___ were given up for adoption yourself
- ___ loss of reputation
- ___ unrequited love
- ___ breakup of important romantic relationship
- ___ death of a pet
- ___ having to give a pet away
- ___ pet running away
- ___ military deployment
- ___ arrest/time in jail (loss of freedom)
- ___ time in prison
- ___ mental illness or a psychotic break
- ___ psychiatric treatment as an inpatient
- ___ drug or alcohol treatment/rehab as an inpatient
- ___ severe depression/suicidal thoughts (loss of hope)
- ___ graduation from high school
- ___ graduation from college

- ___ graduation from graduate school or other higher education
- ___ spiritual crisis/loss of faith
- ___ mastectomy
- ___ loss of a limb
- ___ loss of mobility (unable to walk or move)
- ___ chronic illness (loss of health)
- ___ hearing loss
- ___ loss of sight/worsening vision
- ___ being betrayed, lied to, manipulated (loss of trust)
- ___ a friend moving away
- ___ loss of friendship through losing touch/drifting apart
- ___ loss of friendship through argument/conflict
- ___ aging (loss of youth, loss of energy, loss of health)
- ___ loss of an organ or joint
- ___ loss of driver's license
- ___ homelessness/loss of housing
- ___ moving to a new house or apartment
- ___ moving to a new town/city
- ___ moving to a new state
- ___ moving to a different country
- ___ living in a foreign country (loss of cultural identity, loss of connection to own culture)
- ___ losing your home
- ___ loss of virginity
- ___ loss of sexual interest
- ___ impotence
- ___ addiction of a parent
- ___ mental illness of a parent
- ___ absent father
- ___ absent mother

- ___ discharge from military
- ___ abuse (loss of security, loss of safety, loss of self-esteem, loss of trust, loss of identity)
- ___ physical abuse
- ___ verbal abuse/emotional abuse/psychological abuse
- ___ sexual abuse
- ___ loss of a dream (realizing you will never get to do something you always dreamed of)
- ___ large financial loss
- ___ trauma: sexual assault
- ___ trauma: physical assault or other act of violence
- ___ trauma: natural disaster
- ___ trauma: combat
- ___ trauma: other _____
- ___ death of a close friend
- ___ death of your father
- ___ death of your mother
- ___ death of your paternal grandfather
- ___ death of your paternal grandmother
- ___ death of your maternal grandfather
- ___ death of your maternal grandmother
- ___ death of another close family member
- ___ death of a sibling
- ___ a sibling leaving home
- ___ death of your spouse
- ___ death of your child
- ___ your child leaving home/leaving for college
- ___ ending counseling/therapy
- ___ other loss: _____
- ___ other loss: _____
- ___ other loss: _____

Exercise 5.2 Identifying Your Losses

Now that you have considered the list of possible losses just provided and have marked which of them you have experienced, it's time to identify which of these losses are most significant for you. Remember, it doesn't matter one bit whether a certain loss would be important in someone *else's* life; it only matters if it was important in *yours*. For example, a cat that ran away and never came home could be a very painful loss for one person, while moving to a different house may have been a more painful loss for someone else. This is your journey: your task is to reflect honestly on your losses and see which are most significant for you.

Look back to your list of possible losses and choose the five losses that were most powerful in your life. Use the following space to write down these losses along with a brief description of each.

Example A

Your loss: *Death of my mother.*

Brief description: *She had a heart attack; I was sixteen.*

Example B

Your loss: *Lost a job.*

Brief description: *Two years ago, they caught me using and I got fired—best job I've ever had.*

Your Responses

Your loss 1: _____

Brief description: _____

Your loss 2: _____

Brief description: _____

Your loss 3: _____

Brief description: _____

Your loss 4: _____

Brief description: _____

Your loss 5: _____

Brief description: _____

Exploring the Impact of Your Losses

In the following exercises, you will begin to explore the true effect your losses had on you. If you are like many people, you may have tried to push past the pain of experiencing your loss and move forward quickly; to do that, you may have begun to lock those losses away in the rooms of your house. You didn't know it then, but even locked behind closed doors, the losses had a powerful effect on your life. Now it's time to start acknowledging the impact of your losses. In completing the following worksheet, consider: was the impact of your loss immediate, long-term, or both? Were there times when the impact of the loss felt huge? What about times when you hardly noticed the impact it had on you? Looking back, can you see the influence this loss was having on your life even if you didn't know it then?

Exercise 5.3 How Resolved Is Your Loss?

Let's begin by looking at how far you have come in processing your losses. Considering each loss you listed in the previous exercise, one at a time, take this ten-question quiz to see where you are in your healing process. Circle the number next to the answer that makes sense for you right now. Scoring will be explained after you have completed all the statements. You may want to copy this quiz to use again with each loss you are targeting.

When I think about this loss, I feel...

1. ...calm, but a little bit sad at times.
2. I don't think about it.
3. ...numb.
4. ...overwhelmed or furious.

I have talked about this loss with...

1. ...anyone who would benefit from knowing about it.
2. ...a counselor, therapist, or spiritual advisor as well as loved ones.
3. ...only my very closest friends and/or family members.
4. No one knows about the loss.

When I talk about the loss...

1. ...I get emotional at times; I share how I'm feeling with the person I'm talking to.
2. ...I am very matter of fact; nothing affects me.
3. I don't talk about the loss.
4. ...I become emotionally overwhelmed and shut down.

I have dreams related to the loss...

1. ...once in a while.
2. ...never or almost never.
3. ...pretty often.
4. ...almost every night.

At the time of the loss, the people closest to me...

1. *...talked to me about the loss and about their own emotions and experiences; helped me to feel safe expressing myself.*
2. *...tried to be there for me but were too overwhelmed or couldn't handle it; I focused on their needs and taking care of them more than myself.*
3. *...shut down and avoided talking about the loss; sent me the message that my feelings about the loss should be kept to myself or maybe were wrong altogether.*
4. *There wasn't anyone close to me during the loss.*

After the loss, I took action...

1. *...right away; I felt ready to do something.*
2. *...a short time later.*
3. *...months later; I was in a fog for quite a while.*
4. *I still haven't taken any action steps.*

Even though I have experienced a significant loss, giving back to the community...

1. *...is important to me; I like helping others.*
2. *...is important, but I'd rather wait a little first.*
3. *...is not important; I'd rather just stay away from community activities.*
4. *...is not important at all; what's the point?*

Since the loss, I have been able to find meaning...

1. *...most days; I feel I'm on the right track.*
2. *...once in a while.*
3. *...not very often; I don't really know how to make sense of my loss.*
4. *...not at all; I cannot make sense of my loss.*

Since the loss, my family and I are...

1. *...close; we touch base often.*

2. ...pretty close; I feel that there is support there if I need it.
3. ...distant; we don't talk much.
4. ...estranged; I'm pretty mad.

In regard to this loss, I feel...

1. ...sometimes sad, but mostly at peace.
2. ...a deep, powerful sadness.
3. ...self-blame, a sense of responsibility, guilt, shame, or regret.
4. ...numb, closed off; everything seems dark.

Next to each answer, add together the numbers you circled to get your total score. Remember, even if you have a long way to go toward resolving a loss, that's okay; you are here to do the work! You will get there. You will experience the freedom that comes from resolving a loss. Note your total scores for the losses you listed in the previous exercise:

Loss 1 score: _____

Loss 2 score: _____

Loss 3 score: _____

Loss 4 score: _____

Loss 5 score: _____

Scoring

10–20 points: Good job! You have processed your loss very well. There's still some work to do, but you are on your way to healthy recovery from your loss.

21–30 points: You may still be struggling with some strong feelings about the loss. The loss still has a significant impact on you, and there's still work to be done.

31–40 points: This loss is still unresolved. It is causing you a lot of unnecessary pain and struggle, and it's time to take a good look at this and get moving forward. Complete the next worksheet thoroughly to see exactly how this loss has been affecting you. Part 3 of this workbook, particularly chapter 8, "Mindful Grieving," will give you more tools for working through your loss. You will experience healing if you focus your skills on this loss.

Exercise 5.4 Loss Impact Worksheet

Choose one loss from the five you just listed. It will be best to start with your least resolved loss, based on your scores from the previous quiz. In the following space, write down your ideas about how the loss may have affected your life. It would be wise to photocopy this worksheet so that you can complete one sheet for each of the five most significant losses you just listed. Using your journal is another option, and as always, your journal is a great place to expand on your thoughts and feelings as they come up.

Your loss _____

Consider the influence your loss had on the following areas of your life:

Spirituality: _____

Social life: _____

Ideas about relationships: _____

School or work functioning: _____

Eating or sleeping: _____

Family life: _____

Mood: _____

Sense of security and safety: _____

How you see yourself: _____

Connecting Your Losses

Now that you have looked back through your life and considered the losses you experienced, you will be able to see connections among these losses. Most important for the next exercise is for you to consider similarities in the ways you've dealt with the loss. What common patterns do you see in the ways you respond to loss?

Exercise 5.5 Your Responses to Loss

1. How do you react to the people around you when you are coping with a loss?

2. What ways do you take care of yourself when you have experienced a loss? Or is this an area that needs work? Reflect on ways you can practice self-care.

3. Did your responses to a loss—such as addictive behaviors or other emotion-dodging strategies—ever lead to another loss?

4. What are the most powerful feelings that come up for you when you think about the loss?

5. Can you see ways that each loss may have brought up unresolved grief from a previous loss? Reflect on how loss compounds loss.

Conclusion

You have come to the end of a difficult chapter and done some truly impressive work. Congratulations! You have identified, examined, and contemplated the most significant losses in your life. On the one hand, you may be feeling some relief as these losses have been brought into the light. On the other hand, you may find yourself feeling even more raw, vulnerable, and at risk of doing your addictive behavior. If that's the case, do *not* give up! Use the tools you have learned so far to help you now. Or visit your counselor or support group for additional guidance. You are on the right track. You will get the sense of peace and ease that comes from resolving a loss. There are more connections to be made in the following chapters, which will give you greater insight into yourself and the patterns of addiction and loss that are woven throughout your life. You are getting your feet on the ground by educating yourself and gaining a solid understanding of loss and addiction. This will give you an excellent foundation to do the transformational healing work in part 3 of this workbook. Keep it up!

A Visit with the Gomez Family

Tony and Carmen are both hesitant to begin this chapter; they even consider skipping it when they see that it's mostly about looking at old losses. Neither of them can see the point of that. What do old losses have to do with A. J.'s death? But they decide to continue trusting the process of the book and doing the hard work. It isn't long before they can feel strong emotions coming up from just below the surface as each of them considers the most important losses of their lives.

The most significant past loss for Carmen is her mastectomy. As she uses the "Loss Impact Worksheet" to process the loss, she is struck by how much it continues to affect her. Mostly, there is the quiet distance that has developed in their marriage. They haven't made love in what feels like a very long time. After the loss of her breast, Carmen felt awkward, even ashamed, when sharing her body with Tony. She never talked to him about those feelings, even though she could tell that Tony felt rejected. She told herself that her husband wasn't much for those emotional conversations; he'd probably shrug it off if she brought it up. Then how would she feel? So she began spending more time on the computer, sometimes in the hope that Tony would be asleep when she came to bed. Carmen realizes that her compulsive shopping has its roots in that time in her life. And when A. J. died, she responded to that loss in the same way. She pulled away from Tony, not wanting to trust him with her feelings, not wanting to be vulnerable to him. She has tried to use shopping to fill that void. All it has done is leave her feeling more alone and frightened, as well as in debt.

Tony, too, makes a lot of discoveries in working through this chapter. But it isn't fun! Tony is forced to think about, write about, and pick apart exactly the experiences in his life

that he wants to forget. These are the things he has never told anyone, and now he is supposed to sit down and consider them from every angle? He finds himself feeling angry, frustrated, and irritable. One night he even snaps at Tina and makes her cry, and then refuses to go on the family walk after dinner. It's all he can do to keep from driving to the store that night for a twelve-pack of beer. But Tony is smart enough to know that something big must be going on. He was doing so well, but now that he's starting to even think about old losses, he is yelling at his kid and wanting to drink. What's happening?

Tony takes a deep breath and dives into the workbook to find out. He completes the "Loss Impact Worksheet" about the very thing he wants to avoid most: the day his father hit his mother in front of him when he was six. The cops came, and Tony's father was arrested. His father moved out after that, and was known to Tony only through occasional phone calls from then on. Tony loved his father very much, despite his heavy drinking and bouts of rage. He always felt like the special one to his father: the one who got to watch sports with him or ride with him to the liquor store in the front seat of his big, blue truck. After his father left, Tony was the only boy left in a house full of women—just like now. As he looks back at this, he can see that it was the worst pain of his life—until A. J.'s death. He had tried so much to be the father A. J. deserved. Now A. J. is gone too. More than that, feeling Carmen pull farther and farther away has left Tony terrified that he will experience yet another loss. Maybe Carmen will leave him once and for all. Maybe he will fail as a husband and father. What if his worst fear comes true: losing his family?

Drinking made Tony numb to those fears for a little while. Yet it was drinking that tore his own family apart when he was a kid, and it is drinking that has taken him away from his wife and daughter! Seeing connections like these lights a fire under Tony; he reviews the skills from part 1, spends more time practicing his mindfulness exercises, and takes the time to really explore what he is learning by writing in his journal. Tony knows he can take charge of his recovery; the losses of his life don't have to dominate him anymore. Looking at all of this is painful at times, but there is hope here too. Tony is slowly clearing out the rooms in his heart that have been blocked off for so long. He is making room for something better.

Chapter 6

Addiction

To be on a quest is nothing more or less than to become an asker of questions.

—Sam Keen

Even though you have already been working on and considering your addictive behaviors while going through this book, there's a good chance you have some doubts about whether you are really "addicted." You probably have some questions. Maybe there are even times when you think you were wrong about having a problem and maybe you can control it after all. How can you know if your behavior is an addiction? What does that really mean?

The goal of this chapter is for you to spend some time figuring out what addiction actually is. You will have the chance to sort out what behaviors you do that may have taken the form of an addiction. You will also have the chance to map the course these addictions have taken, to get a closer look at how your addiction developed and how it has gotten worse. Wouldn't you like to know when and how it all started? Perhaps you have some idea about when things started to get bad. Now you are going to start from the beginning and uncover the path you took that got you using to excess.

At times you may have switched one addictive behavior for another in an attempt to help yourself. This is very common. Some behaviors that you might have switched to could even have started out as healthy. Because the underlying issue was not addressed, even healthy behaviors can turn on you. Do you remember the character Mystique from the *X-Men* comic series? As a "shape-shifter," she was incredibly dangerous. She could turn herself into anyone at all. How could her enemies ever see her coming? Just like a shape-shifter, addictive behavior can be crafty and clever. Just when you are getting close to managing an addiction, it can change shape completely! It can arrive at your door as a nice, new friend. You may welcome it in without ever knowing that this is

the same old enemy you've been waging war against. That's why it will be so helpful to write it all down and see it in black and white. The more you come to understand the patterns of your addictive behavior—its primary moves and battle tactics—the better prepared you will be to recognize it and anticipate what's coming next. Be curious. Use this opportunity to get to know yourself better. That's one of the best ways to heal. Let the journey begin!

What Is an Addiction?

You probably have a pretty good idea about what an addiction is. After all, now there are so many TV shows about addiction and addictive behavior that it's hard to get away from it. *Addiction* is a compulsive need to use a substance or do a troubling behavior despite the consequences to you or others. You may have an idea of what tolerance is. *Tolerance* means you want more and more of the substance, or want to do more and more of the troubling behavior. You may have also experienced withdrawal. *Withdrawal* means that you experience the psychological or physical impact of not having the substance or not doing the troubling behavior. Most folks with addiction problems have a tough time with relationships, family, work, and school, and they can even get in trouble with the law. To get a clearer picture, let's take a look at Brenda's story.

- Brenda's Story

The divorced mother of two young boys, Brenda works as a clothing designer. She doesn't think she has a real problem with alcohol until her boss calls her in, sits her down, and tells her that she has missed too much work over the past three months. Her boss is concerned because one of the clients smelled alcohol on Brenda's breath last week after she arrived late for a 9:00 a.m. meeting. When the boss asks her about it, Brenda feels embarrassed and angry, but says everything is fine and walks out of the office.

Brenda thinks briefly about how her life is slowly getting out of control. Her divorce is final, and her sons are living with their father. She misses them and thinks a few drinks will cover up her sadness. She is mad at everyone, it seems—mad at her ex, at her boss, at her best friend who said she had a drinking problem, and at the police officer who gave her a DUI summons two weeks ago. She has a bottle of vodka stashed in her desk drawer. She looks at her half-filled mug of warm, black coffee; glances around the office to see if anyone is looking; and then fills the mug to the top with vodka.

Like Brenda, you may feel overwhelmed by life's problems. Sometimes they keep adding up. For Brenda, the problem is alcohol. You may not have that particular problem, but you may have a problem with another kind of behavior.

The next step is to spend a little time with the “Identify Addictions Worksheets,” which are lists of the variety of substances and behaviors people have struggled with. By completing these worksheets, you will be farther along on your journey of mapping out your addictive behaviors.

Exercise 6.1 Identify Addictions Worksheet: Alcohol, Drugs, and Caffeine

Here is a list of common substances that can become addictive when used too much. Write a check mark next to the ones that ring true for you or that you have used often.

Alcohol

- ☐ beer
- ☐ wine
- ☐ hard liquor
- ☐ other alcohol products
- ☐ _____

Caffeine

- ☐ coffee or tea
- ☐ sodas
- ☐ energy drinks
- ☐ pain relievers and stimulants with caffeine
- ☐ other caffeine products
- ☐ _____

Hallucinogens

- _____ Ecstasy
- _____ LSD
- _____ mushrooms
- _____ PCP
- _____ ketamine
- _____ other hallucinogens
- _____

Inhalants

- _____ nitrites
- _____ solvents or sprays
- _____ paints or fuels
- _____ other inhalants
- _____

Marijuana

- _____ pot or hash

Nicotine

- _____ cigarettes
- _____ cigars
- _____ chewing tobacco
- _____ snuff
- _____ pipe tobacco
- _____ nicotine gum or nicotine skin patches

Opiates

- _____ opium
- _____ heroin
- _____ speedballs
- _____ other opiate products
- _____

Prescription Pain Drugs

- _____ OxyContin (oxycodone)
- _____ Percodan (aspirin and oxycodone hydrochloride)
- _____ Demerol (meperidine)
- _____ Vicodin (acetaminophen and hydrocodone)
- _____ Darvon (propoxyphene)
- _____ other prescription drugs for pain
- _____

Sedatives

- _____ barbiturates
- _____ quaaludes (methaqualone)
- _____ Nembutal (pentobarbital)
- _____ Seconal (secobarbital)
- _____ Amytal (amobarbital)
- _____ Doriden (glutethimide)
- _____ other sedatives
- _____

Prescription Drugs Used for Sleep

- _____ Dalmane (flurazepam)
- _____ Restoril (temazepam)
- _____ Halcion (triazolam)
- _____ Ambien (zolpidem)
- _____ Sonata (zaleplon)
- _____ Lunesta (eszopiclone)
- _____ Rozerem (ramelteon)
- _____ Benadryl (diphenhydramine)
- _____ other drugs used for sleep
- _____

Prescription Drugs Used for Anxiety

- _____ Valium (diazepam)
- _____ Librium (chlordiazepoxide)
- _____ Xanax (alprazolam)
- _____ Ativan (lorazepam)
- _____ other drugs used for anxiety
- _____

Steroids

Oral Steroids

- _____ Anadrol (oxymetholone)
- _____ Oxandrin (oxandrolone)
- _____ Dianabol (methandrostenolone)
- _____ Winstrol (stanozolol)

Injectable Steroids

- ☐ Deca-Durabolin (nandrolone decanoate)
- ☐ Durabolin (nandrolone phenpropionate)
- ☐ Depo-Testosterone (testosterone cypionate)
- ☐ Equipoise (boldenone undecylenate) (veterinary product)

Stimulants

- ☐ cocaine
- ☐ amphetamine
- ☐ methamphetamine
- ☐ ephedrine
- ☐ other stimulants
- ☐ _____

Prescription Drugs Used for Attention Problems

- ☐ Adderall (amphetamine and dextroamphetamine)
- ☐ Concerta (methylphenidate)
- ☐ Dexedrine (dextroamphetamine sulfate)
- ☐ Cylert (pemoline)
- ☐ Provigil (modafinil)
- ☐ other drugs used for attention problems
- ☐ _____

If you checked one or more of the drugs just listed, the next step is to see whether you have an addiction. The best way to figure this out is to complete the following “Checklist of Addiction Signs.”

Exercise 6.2 Checklist of Addiction Signs: Alcohol or Drugs

Here is a list of signs and symptoms of alcohol or drug addiction. Write a check mark next to any of the signs that you have.

1. ____ Trying to quit or cut down on the use of alcohol or drugs but can't
2. ____ An increase in the amount of alcohol or drugs needed to feel a buzz (tolerance)
3. ____ Urgency in obtaining the first drink or drug (feeling itchy, restless, and eager to get it)
4. ____ Blackouts, or memory lapses, during or after using alcohol or drugs
5. ____ Sneaking to use drugs or alcohol, and developing an increasing need to use
6. ____ Making excuses for drug or alcohol use
7. ____ Using the substance while alone, or hiding all evidence of using
8. ____ Avoiding family and friends, especially if they express concern about your drugs or alcohol use
9. ____ Drinking or using drugs more than other people do at social events
10. ____ Using alcohol or drugs to forget about your problems
11. ____ Financial, legal, medical, family, and/or work problems that have developed due to alcohol or drug use
12. ____ Unable to enjoy social gatherings or events without using drugs or alcohol
13. ____ Loss of interest in other activities and an increased desire to get "high"
14. ____ Doing things under the influence of drugs or alcohol that cause feelings of shame or regret later on
15. ____ Neglecting important responsibilities in order to use drugs or alcohol
16. ____ Being willing to do almost anything to get the drug or alcohol
17. ____ Unable to talk about the problem with others
18. ____ Denial about the seriousness of the addiction problem
19. ____ Not eating properly
20. ____ Not taking care of yourself or your hygiene
21. ____ Taking risks that may be harmful to yourself or others, such as having unsafe sex or driving while high or drunk

Scoring

Count the number of check marks you made in the previous list. Number of signs and symptoms marked: ____

If you checked ten or more signs and symptoms, then there's a good chance you are experiencing *significant* distress due to drugs and alcohol. Use the resources in this workbook to help yourself. Also, you may want to attend an Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous meeting for extra support while using this book.

If you checked nine or fewer signs and symptoms, then alcohol or drugs are still causing problems for you. Continuing to do the work will bring you closer to regaining your health and improving your coping skills.

What did it feel like to look at this list? On the one hand, it can be pretty uncomfortable to really think about the ways alcohol or drugs have taken over your life. On the other hand, maybe it feels good to step back and see what your addiction has been doing to your life, especially now that you are working so hard to change things. Maybe you feel regret or even shame when you look at this list. Maybe you fear that life will stay out of control or get out of control in the worst way again. Or maybe you feel especially grateful to be in recovery when you think about how things were when they were at their worst. It's likely that you are feeling a mixture of all of these emotions.

Along with drugs and alcohol, sometimes *behaviors* can be cause for alarm. If you find yourself unable to stop a behavior, and if the behavior causes negative consequences in your life, it's time to take a closer look. The following is the "Identify Addictions Worksheet: Other Troubling Behaviors." Take a few minutes to look at the behaviors listed there. Think about whether you are doing the behavior too often. Are you experiencing negative outcomes as a result of this behavior? Remember to be honest with yourself here.

Exercise 6.3 Identify Addictions Worksheet: Other Troubling Behaviors

There are a number of other troubling behaviors that, when done to excess, can mask underlying problems. Take a look at this list and write a check mark next to the items that ring true for you.

- _____ *Overeating.* Eating when you are not hungry or when you are already full, eating too much food that's not good for you, eating in secret.
- _____ *Sex.* May include sexual behavior with multiple partners, visiting prostitutes or sex theaters, being spied upon or looking in other peoples' windows to satisfy sexual urges (peeping).
- _____ *Pornography.* Obsessively watching pornographic material despite negative consequences for your intimate relationship. If you decrease or eliminate this behavior, you have feelings of depression, anxiety, and anger.
- _____ *Stealing/shoplifting.* Taking items from stores or other people. Getting away with the behavior may give you an immediate rush, but it's a way to avoid dealing with your emotions and other problems.
- _____ *Overexercising.* Exercising while injured or to the point of exhaustion or injury. You're obsessed with exercise at the expense of taking care of your other responsibilities. You feel depressed or anxious when you are not exercising.
- _____ *Overshopping.* Spending money that you do not have on items you do not need, on multiple similar items, or items for others. This occurs despite negative consequences in relationships and, of course, finances. Remember, this also includes online shopping.
- _____ *Gambling.* Compulsive activity that you are unable to stop, despite the fact that continuing to gamble is creating serious money and relationship problems.
- _____ *Overworking.* Working to the point of its becoming an obsession. You can't stop working and thinking about work when you are supposed to be off the job. You take on multiple jobs at the expense of your health, sleep, and relationships.
- _____ *Overuse of computers/computer games.* Using the computer at the expense of your school-work, job, relationships, sleep, hygiene, or health. You go through withdrawal symptoms of irritability, anxiety, and depression when you are not using the computer.
- _____ *Too much television.* Watching multiple hours of television, usually alone, despite negative feedback from your family or friends. Most or all of your free time is spent watching television, and you sleep and/or eat in front of the television. Decreasing television watching usually increases your feelings of depression, anxiety, and anger.

Now that you have had some time to reflect on your behaviors, the next step is to determine whether these behaviors indicate that you are struggling with an addiction. Remember to be honest with yourself. After all, that's the purpose of this workbook. You are identifying the behaviors that are getting in the way of your success in life.

Exercise 6.4 Checklist of Addiction Signs: Troubling Behaviors

Here's a list of signs and symptoms of troubling behaviors. Write a check mark next to any of the signs that you have.

1. ____ Trying to quit or cut down on the behavior but can't
2. ____ An increase in the frequency of the behavior that you need to feel good (tolerance)
3. ____ Urgency in preparing to do the behavior (feeling itchy, restless, and eager to get it)
4. ____ Sneaking the behavior and having an increasing desire to do it
5. ____ Making excuses for doing the behavior
6. ____ Doing the behavior while alone, or hiding all evidence of doing it
7. ____ Avoiding family and friends, especially if they express concern about the behavior
8. ____ Wanting to leave social events to return to doing the behavior
9. ____ Doing the behavior to forget about your problems
10. ____ Financial, legal, medical, family, and/or work problems that have developed from doing the behavior
11. ____ Loss of interest in other activities and an increased desire to do the behavior
12. ____ Shame or regret later on because of doing the behavior
13. ____ Neglecting important responsibilities in order to do the behavior
14. ____ Being willing to do almost anything to get back to doing the behavior
15. ____ Unable to talk about the problem with others
16. ____ Denial about the seriousness of continuing to do the troubling behavior
17. ____ Not eating properly
18. ____ Not taking care of yourself or your hygiene
19. ____ Taking risks that may be harmful to yourself or others, such as unprotected sex
20. ____ Lying to others about stopping the behavior

Scoring

Count the number of check marks you just made. Number of signs and symptoms marked: ____

If you checked ten or more signs and symptoms, then there's a good chance you are experiencing *significant* distress from your behavior. Use the resources in this workbook to help yourself. Also, you may want to attend a 12-step meeting to get extra support while using this book. Some examples of Anonymous meetings are Overeaters Anonymous, Sex Addicts Anonymous, and Gamblers Anonymous.

If you checked nine or fewer signs and symptoms, then your behavior is still causing problems for you. Continuing to do the work will bring you closer to gaining health and improving your coping skills.

Well, you have really uncovered some important information about yourself here. Maybe this is the first time you have really been this honest about your behaviors! Now that you can see it on paper, you have validation that these behaviors do, in fact, bother you. Maybe these behaviors have been bothering you for quite a long time. This might be a good time to practice one of your mindfulness exercises from chapter 4. Mindfulness exercises will help you stay present in the moment without judgment.

You have done a lot of work so far. Now you are ready to take a look at the time line of your addictive behavior. Take some time to read and complete the next exercise for a better understanding of when your addiction started.

Uncovering the Time Line of Your Addictive Behavior

For the next exercise, you will think back over the course of your addiction. Remember, your addictive behavior probably didn't start off as a problem; as you read earlier, it probably started off as your *solution* instead. Now is a good time to begin tracking when this behavior became a problem. This will help you to understand how the disease of addiction developed in your life. You will also be using this time line later in the book, when you begin to make solid connections between the losses you identified in chapter 5 and the path of your addiction.

Exercise 6.5 Time Line of Addictive Behavior

Don't worry if you can't remember your exact age when something occurred; just do your best to be in the right ballpark. If you've never had one of the experiences listed next (for example, if you've never engaged in the behavior daily), feel free to leave that one blank. Reflect on the following example to help you get started. In the example, Dave is 44 years old.

Example: Dave's Time Line of Addictive Behavior

Addictive behavior: smoking

Age the first time you heard about, saw, or became aware of the behavior: 3, my parents smoked

Age the first time you did the behavior: 11

Age you began doing the behavior on a regular basis: 13

Age you began doing the behavior daily: 14

What happened as a result of the behavior, and ages at the time: age 16, parents grounded me for smoking; age 17, got in trouble for trying to buy cigarettes while underage; age 21, didn't make the college basketball team (cardio health was already getting worse); age 36, doctor said high blood pressure; age 42, early signs of emphysema

Age you started using the behavior to cope with life or to escape: 18, or maybe right away?

Age the first time someone expressed concern about your behavior: 24; girlfriend worried about my cough, complained about the constant cigarette smell.

Age you began to feel dependent on the behavior (felt restless or uncomfortable when you couldn't do it): 14

Attempts to quit or cut down on the behavior and ages at the time: age 21, tried to cut back; age 24, tried to cut back; age 28, tried to cut back

Ages of switching to a different addictive behavior: age 28, tried smoking a pipe instead; age 30, tried nicotine gum

Ages of getting treatment for the behavior (rehab, therapy, medical treatment): age 35, tried hypnosis; age 42, tried medication that was supposed to make me stop

Times of abstinence from the behavior and ages at the time: age 24, quit for two months; age 42, quit for six months

Ages of relapses: ages 25, 42

Age of "bottom" (what made you sure this behavior was no longer okay for you and that you had to stop somehow; usually a severe result of the behavior, such as an arrest, a medical problem, or the loss or threatened loss of an important relationship): age 44 (now), chest pains sometimes and my cough is a lot worse; my wife doesn't want me to smoke around the kids (I don't, either).

Your Time Line of Addictive Behavior

Addictive behavior: _____

Age the first time you heard about, saw, or became aware of the behavior: _____

Age the first time you did the behavior: _____

Age you began doing the behavior on a regular basis: _____

Age you began doing the behavior daily: _____

What happened as a result of the behavior, and ages at the time: _____

Age you started using the behavior to cope with life or to escape: _____

Age the first time someone expressed concern about your behavior: _____

Age you began to feel dependent on the behavior (felt restless or uncomfortable when you couldn't do it): _____

Attempts to quit or cut down on the behavior and ages at the time: _____

Ages of switching to a different addictive behavior: _____

Ages of getting treatment for the behavior (rehab, therapy, medical treatment): _____

Times of abstinence from the behavior and ages at the time: _____

Ages of relapses: _____

Age of "bottom" (what made you sure this behavior was no longer okay for you and that you had to stop somehow; usually a severe result of the behavior, such as an arrest, a medical problem, or the loss or threatened loss of an important relationship): _____

Switching to Another Addiction

As you can see by now, there are many temptations out there for changing your mood and behavior. Switching from one addiction to another is common to avoid dealing with your painful issues. It happens to many people. Remember that shape-shifter and its crafty ways? Just when you start to feel strong in your recovery from prescription pills, you find yourself addicted to online gambling or cigarettes. You may feel that something is missing when you've given up a favorite addiction. When there is an empty space, it's only natural for you to try to fill it with something else that can soothe you. The hard work you have done so far is allowing you to fill the space made by choosing to give up your addiction.

Journey to Wellness

You learned in chapter 1 that your feelings are not going to overpower you and that you can safely feel them without turning to your addictive behaviors as an escape. You learned to embrace the dog! In chapter 2 you learned what your mind has been up to: how it tries to be helpful and keep you safe but, a lot of times, fills up with thoughts that cause distress instead. You learned to catch those repeat-offender thoughts, and you took the time to figure out where they came from. Chapter 3 took this one step further by helping you to begin thinking about your behaviors. Learning mindfulness skills in chapter 4 gave you more resources for healing and coping with stress without going back to your addictive behaviors. Now, you'll get some more ideas for filling the empty space. You will learn more positive behaviors to replace the unhealthy ones. Once you have a few new behaviors to try, there will be no need to pick up alcohol, drugs, or some other addictive behavior to fill the space.

Getting clear about your thoughts and feelings is especially important for short-circuiting your brain's search for another addictive behavior. The brain has overlapping circuits that relate to seeking pleasure and avoiding stress. That's why we have included mindfulness skills in this book: to balance the mind. Since recovery from addiction goes on for a lifetime, why not expect that you might switch addictive behaviors, and make a plan to take care of yourself?

Disease vs. Weakness

Addiction can be considered similar to a disease where you have lost the ability to control your behavior. This lack of control can lead to mental and physical harm, and the loss of your ability to act in an acceptable manner in social situations. Addiction, by its very nature, gets *worse*. You may keep doing the addictive behavior even though there are negative consequences, such as a lost job, problems in school, loss of family, problems with friends, problems with the law, and poor health.

Have you noticed some negative consequences as a result of your addictive behavior? Take a moment of honest self-reflection here. You may have experienced faulty thinking. One of the most common flaws in thinking is denial. Have you had instances of not believing that you had a problem? If so, you are not alone. It's one of the symptoms of addiction. If you don't believe you have a problem, you will most likely be unable to decide to stop the behavior. We call this a *vicious cycle*; it's why getting help to stop the addictive behavior makes so much sense.

It Didn't Start This Way

Chances are your addictive behaviors didn't start as a problem. In the beginning, your behavior was fun and comforting. Chances are you may have been in good company with others who were doing the same behaviors. You may have even felt more relaxed around others. You may have thought to yourself, *I like myself when I do this behavior*. You may have thought that the behavior helped you cope with life's little and not so little stressors. Then something happened. Your friends may have moved on with their lives, but you seem to have gotten stuck. Let's take a look at Robert's story.

- **Robert's Story**

Robert was a promising athlete in school. His two younger sisters and parents came to all his races, until his parents got divorced during his freshman year of high school. From that point on, Robert didn't see his mother or sisters that much; he stayed with his father until college.

He runs track during his first year in college and wins lots of meets. He has friends to run with on the weekends. Robert is popular but shy and anxious. He feels best when he is running. He decides that running three times a day will help his anxiety; he rarely sleeps more than four hours a night. When that doesn't work, he starts experimenting with speed. Robert also goes to the student health center at college and fakes ADHD symptoms to get a prescription for Adderall. Now he is running five to six hours a day, taking speed daily, and taking Adderall at night.

Although his friends worry about him, Robert doesn't think he has a problem. When he gets two failing grades his sophomore year, he just thinks the professors are out to get him. Secretly, Robert wishes he could go back to how it was, when his family cheered him on at a race. Now he just feels that he is running away from his problems and not getting anywhere. He drops out of college at age twenty-one and moves back in with his father. By age twenty-two, Robert is getting his Adderall on the street and using cocaine almost daily. Robert is fired from three different jobs. He is thinking about joining the army and really wants to clean up; he just doesn't know how.

Healing: When Is the Best Time?

The million-dollar question is: “When should I start my recovery?” You may have asked yourself this question many times. You may be in a cycle where there are days when you feel low, angry, or guilty, and days when you feel okay. On the days when you feel low, angry, or guilty, you may think to yourself, *I should make a change here*. Then that feeling fades, and you seem to get through the next day. What if you decided that no matter how you are feeling, you have enough information to make a change in your life? What if you decided that you want something different for yourself? Taking charge of your mental and physical health requires a commitment. You may have put family, friends, job, or school first for a long time, but now is the time to put yourself first.

In order to put yourself first in your recovery, take a look at the following “Wellness Script.” If you like this script, there are other resources you can use on a daily basis for encouragement. *The Mindful Woman: Gentle Practices for Restoring Calm, Finding Balance, and Opening Your Heart*, by Sue Patton Thoele (New Harbinger Publications, 2008) is a wonderful place to start. The “Wellness Script” is something you read to yourself. You can even read it out loud. After you read it, give yourself the gift of five minutes of silence.

Exercise 6.6 Wellness Script

Today, I will respect and nurture myself. I am of value. I give myself permission to be kind to myself. I am loved and protected. It takes courage to take care of myself first. I have that courage. I am worth it. Taking care of myself will allow me to show up for others. Taking care of myself will allow the feelings of anger, resentment, and hurt to melt away. After the feelings of anger, resentment, and hurt melt away, I am left with my true self. My true self requires attention and care. I have the ability to give myself what I need. And today, I need kindness. Being kind to myself flows into good mental and physical health. Good mental and physical health is available to me now. I am deserving of good mental and physical health. I make a commitment to be well. I feel the benefits of being well.

Another choice for inspiration is *The Dalai Lama’s Little Book of Inner Peace* (Hampton Roads Publishing 2009). Don’t forget to take a look at the resources for the Journey section at the end of this workbook.

Conclusion

The “Identify Addictions” worksheets have given you a quick and honest way to label your addictions. You may have checked more than one addictive substance and more than one troubling behavior. Now you have the chance to nurture your recovery with healthy coping. Stress and reactions to loss are common triggers for using alcohol or drugs and doing other addictive behaviors. The work you have done in this chapter on addiction has been very important on your recovery journey. You’ve now learned what an addiction really is and explored your own behavior in more detail. You’ve also explored how you can tend to switch from one addictive behavior to another. The time line of addiction was helpful in figuring out when the addictive behavior started. Armed with this information and the work you did in chapter 5, you are ready to connect your addictive behavior to past losses. In the next chapter, you will put the puzzle pieces together by connecting your losses to your addiction.

A Visit with the Gomez Family

Carmen and Tony use this chapter for an important task: accepting that their behaviors are, without a doubt, truly and absolutely addictive. In talking about this, they are able to admit to each other that each has had periods of questioning whether they are really addicted. Maybe it hasn’t been so bad. Maybe they can control themselves. But in learning more about addictive behaviors, Tony and Carmen both come to the conclusion that, yes, these behaviors—drinking for Tony and compulsive shopping for Carmen—got out of control long ago. The “Checklists of Addiction Signs” make it clear that there are real consequences to these behaviors, and despite those consequences, they continued to hide from their feelings and thoughts by drinking or excessive shopping.

It is somewhat startling to fully face this fact. These are addictions. But there is some relief in it, too. They will be lying to themselves if they try to pretend that these addictive behaviors are ever going to get them where they want to go. Tony questioned whether his addiction to alcohol is really a disease or if he is just *weak*. He knows now that his drinking to escape is not weakness. Tony is beginning to understand himself and Carmen a lot better. After fully understanding what addiction really means in their lives, Tony and Carmen can truly embrace recovery and keep themselves on track.

Chapter 7

Connecting Addiction and Loss

Life shrinks or expands according to one's courage.

—Anaïs Nin

In the last two chapters, you have explored the losses in your life and the path your addiction has taken up to this point. You have shown courage in uncovering past losses and identifying which of your behaviors are addictive. This hasn't been easy! You are walking the road to health and well-being. It's a road that, unfortunately, many choose not to travel. Deciding to recover from addiction takes courage. Following through with that decision means walking through challenges, times of struggle, confusion, and pain. It means wanting a better life more than you want to give up. It takes faith: faith in yourself and faith in the healing process. And as you certainly know by now, it takes work!

In this chapter, you will do the important work of connecting the *losses* in your life to your *addictive behaviors* (and vice versa). What makes this work so important? Well, for starters, these connections have been there all along, whether you can see them or not. And they have a lot more power over you when they stay hidden. Think of it this way: if you were battling an enemy, would you rather it be in plain sight or planning a surprise attack? When the connections between your losses and your addictions become clear, you will be more than ready to confront them. But if they continue to stay hidden, they will keep bombarding and manipulating you, and driving your decisions.

The Loss-Addiction Cycle

The enemy you are battling is the *loss-addiction cycle*. The loss-addiction cycle is what happens when loss propels your addiction, and your addiction leads to more loss. As you will learn in this chapter, it's the loss-addiction cycle that has been holding you captive. You picked up this book and have worked so hard through the first six chapters because you don't like the way that cycle is running your life. It may seem like a clever, even unbeatable, opponent. But once you know what it's up to, once you know its moves, you can easily defeat it. It may always be with you, but it will no longer be in charge. *You* will be making the decisions in your life.

How Does Loss Lead to Addiction?

Loss stirs up powerful emotions in a person's life. After a loss, or the reminder of a loss, you may feel angry, sad, helpless, depressed, frightened, irritable, lonely, or overwhelmed. As you learned in part 1 of this workbook, your addictive behaviors are an attempt at emotion dodging. Somewhere along the line, you learned that emotions like sadness, grief, heartbreak, anger, fear, and stress were intolerable or unnatural. You thought that you weren't supposed to feel those feelings or that if you did feel them, you should never show them or "dwell on" them. Maybe you came to believe that having feelings meant you were weak or that if you let yourself feel your feelings, they would overwhelm you and keep you from living your life. So you set out to avoid feeling those feelings.

Not feeling your feelings can become a full-time job. It's exhausting, draining, and doomed to fail. But at some point, you found something that seemed to work: your addictive behavior. It made you feel better. Or maybe it let you feel nothing at all.

Remember the "No Feeling" contract you read about in chapter 1? It's as if you made an agreement with your addictive behaviors. You agreed to let those behaviors take over your life if it meant you could avoid the powerful emotions you did not want to feel. Back then, you couldn't really know all that you would be losing. You just wanted to feel *good*. But by now, you have experienced the "fine print" of that "No Feeling" contract. Your addictive behaviors have been stealing your life from you, piece by piece. That leads us to the next stage of the loss-addiction cycle.

How Does Addiction Lead to Loss?

As you may already know very well from your own experience, addictions cause all kinds of loss. When you are doing your addictive behaviors, you are living in a way that *promotes* loss. Your spouse or partner might leave you because of your addiction. You may lose contact with parents, siblings, children, and friends. It might be your own choice to shut them out, or they may walk away because they don't want to watch you suffer in your addiction anymore.

You may lose your license due to DUI. You may even lose your freedom by ending up in jail. If you are addicted to substances, sex, gambling, or shopping, you may spend enough money to lose your car or your house. It's likely that at some point, you have lost a job. If you have surrounded yourself with people who abuse substances, you may have had many friends die in the disease of addiction. And, when you are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, you are more vulnerable to harm. You could be physically or sexually assaulted, or raped. As you learned in chapter 5, those traumas are very serious losses too.

When addiction has a hold on you, it's often all you can think about. Nothing else matters as much. So you let things slide out of your life as if they don't matter: people, possessions, your hopes for the future. Your health and safety get put on the back burner. Your own values often get left by the wayside in your quest to relieve an addictive urge.

So what do all these losses add up to? Stronger and stronger urges to use. As you learned in chapter 5, loss compounds loss. It builds on itself. Each loss triggers the pain of an old loss, and as the emotions pile up, emotion dodging becomes even more likely.

Of course, there's another side to this story. It is often the case that loss itself triggers a desire to recover, rather than triggering more addictive behaviors. It may have been a loss, or the threat of a loss, that led you to pick up this book and start changing your life. Loss may be your greatest motivator for facing your addiction. If this is the case, it will still be incredibly important to address the loss itself. You may have been motivated this way before and still found yourself engaging in your addictive behaviors. Motivation is a key component of your journey, but that alone is not enough. If it were, you would have stopped your addictive behaviors a long time ago. To experience true healing and long-term recovery, you must address what's underneath your addiction: loss and the emotions it brings with it. Seeing how the emotions triggered by loss have led to your addictive behaviors will be the real key to taking control of your life away from the loss-addiction cycle.

• Keith's Story

Keith has struggled with meth addiction on and off for twenty years. He first tried it in his early twenties, while he was still in the army; now he has been out of the service for eight years and is using more than ever. He loves how the meth makes him feel: as if nothing can touch him, as if he can never be hurt. But he hates what meth is doing to his life: how he lies all the time and loses jobs, how his kids stay away from him, how his wife is always depressed. Keith finds himself angry at everyone and spends time only with the neighbor he uses with.

It isn't the life he really wants, and Keith has managed to stop using meth and get sober many times in the course of twenty years. At one point, he even got three years of clean time. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, he would find himself at his neighbor's house, using again. Life was so much better without the meth, and he had been sober for so long! What could possibly make him go back?

Feeling hopeless and confused, Keith comes to therapy as a last resort. In therapy, he constructs a time line that maps his addictive behavior. He looks especially at times when his addiction grew stronger and at the relapses that left him feeling so powerless. Keith also does the difficult work of identifying and beginning to heal the losses in his life. Finally, he makes connections between his losses and his addiction. He realizes for the first time that most of his relapses happened in early spring, the same time of year that his grandmother, the one person he could count on as a child, had died unexpectedly. It is also around this time of year that he finds himself arguing more with his wife, accusing her of wanting to leave him.

Keith begins to see how the loss-addiction cycle is dominating his life. He can see how the loss of his grandmother brought up strong emotions that he has never learned to cope with and how his fears of losing his wife in the same way propel him further into his addiction and make it more likely that he will lose his wife after all.

Working hard in therapy, Keith begins to clearly see the ways the loss-addiction cycle has been trying to take over his life. He learns new, positive coping skills and begins to practice mindfulness. It's a slow journey, but Keith devotes himself to his new way of life and maintains long-term sobriety. More than that, he finds the peace and serenity that will keep him clean and sober for years to come.

The Addiction and Loss Time Line

Like Keith, you can take control of your life by doing the work. To truly understand the loss-addiction cycle and the ways it has been influencing you, you need to look back and see how your losses and your addictions have been connected throughout your life. You can do this by creating a detailed addiction and loss time line.

Exercise 7.1 Creating Your Addiction and Loss Time Line

On the left side of a page, write down your losses and the approximate age at which each happened, starting with the earliest at the top. Write down the age the loss occurred, as well as the date and season if you know them. If you can only guess, that's okay too! Just note as much information as you can. It may be helpful to refer back to exercise 5.1, "Losses Checklist." It's up to you how many losses you include on your time line, but it will be best to include at least the five main losses you noted in exercise 5.2, "Identifying Your Losses."

On the right side of the page, write down the important events in your addiction. Start with your first exposure at the top. Write down the age that each event occurred and the date, if you know it. Just as you did for your losses, do your best. Getting stressed about doing things perfectly won't be any help. It's important to take a deep breath, trust the process, and move forward with the exercise. For this activity, it will be helpful to look back at exercise 6.5, "Time Line of Addictive Behavior." Most of all, you are looking for times when you saw your addiction intensify or when a relapse happened.

Losses	Events in Your Addiction

Exercise 7.2 Reflecting on Your Addiction and Loss Time Line

In the space provided or in your journal, reflect on the addiction and loss time line you just created. Use the following questions as a guide. Then add any other thoughts or ideas that you have.

1. What loss experiences are connected to your first use, or the first time you engaged in your addictive behavior?

2. What emotions were you trying to dodge when you initially began your addictive behavior?

3. What losses happened as a *result* of your addictive behaviors?

4. Have you ever used a loss as motivation to stop or cut back on your addictive behaviors? If so, how well did this work?

5. What patterns do you see in the times when your addictive behaviors got worse or you had a relapse?

6. Other thoughts or ideas about your addiction and loss time line:

Loss Anniversaries

Now that you have done your addiction and loss time line and answered reflection questions, you should have a good idea of how your losses and addictive behaviors are connected. The next step is to find your *loss anniversaries*. Loss anniversaries are times of the year when you are most likely to be reminded of a loss.

One of the patterns you have found by doing your addiction and loss time line may be that you are more likely to do your addictive behaviors at certain times. That's because a loss anniversary has brought up strong emotions and grief that you have not yet dealt with. Rather than sit with those feelings, you were drawn toward your most common emotion-dodging method: your addiction. One of the most powerful things you can do to take control of your addictive behaviors is to note your loss anniversaries. The rest of this chapter is about loss anniversaries and how to deal with them.

- Casey's Story

Casey did three tours in Iraq with the marines before getting out of the military. In combat, he lost his best friend, Tommy. They had known each other since boot camp and had been like brothers to each other, maybe closer than brothers, with all they'd been

through. Losing Tommy was hard, but Casey pushed forward, trying to put it behind him and do the job he'd been sent to do.

A few months after getting back from his last tour, Casey finds himself having problems with his wife. She says he is angrier than before, that he has a short fuse all of a sudden, and that most nights he tosses and turns, and shouts in his sleep. Casey's wife complains that he never wants to go anywhere, but as much as Casey wants to make her happy, crowds and loud noises are just too disturbing to him. Casey feels uneasy most of the time, constantly checking on the baby and relocking all the doors. Not knowing what to do with these feelings, he starts smoking weed. He smokes most of the day, every day.

After a few months, Casey's wife insists that he get some kind of treatment for his anger and other symptoms. Casey begins receiving counseling at the VA and is diagnosed with PTSD. He begins to understand the connections between his PTSD and the changes his wife has seen in him. This helps, but it's still so hard for him to stop smoking pot. Casey feels that he has found in weed a solution to his stress and anger, and he isn't sure he wants to give it up. What if every day were nothing but stress and misery? Eventually, with the courage and strength of a marine, Casey gives sobriety a chance. He is willing to practice mindfulness skills to find balance and a sense of well-being. He learns about the power of loss and begins a deeper healing process of looking at not only Tommy's death but also the early losses in his life.

One day, Casey comes in for treatment and shares that he's had a particularly tough week, with feelings of anger and irritability coming out of nowhere. "I'm telling you, Doc," Casey says, "I was mad at *everyone*: my wife, my neighbors, strangers on the street. Even the baby seemed to be crying louder than usual, and it was driving me nuts! I was a wreck. It didn't take long before I got the idea in my head of smoking a bowl—you know, just a little weed to take some of the edge off. I felt like all this anger and frustration had come out of nowhere; I started thinking maybe I'm just a guy who *needs* weed, that without it, I'm just an angry jerk and I'd be better off using again. I hate telling you this, but I actually took out my old calendar to look for my dealer's number. But thank God I did, 'cause you know what? If I hadn't looked in there, I might never have made the connection. I saw the date. Doc, it was Tommy's birthday! I hadn't even remembered it! At least I didn't think so. But it all made sense when I realized it. Something in me was thinking about Tommy, missing him. Hell, if he was still here, I would have talked to him that day, maybe even flown him out here for his birthday and to meet my kid. It was weird to think about that: he'll never meet my kid. It's even weirder to think Tommy doesn't really have birthdays anymore."

It would not have been surprising if Casey had given in to his urge to hide from his emotions that day and had a relapse. Lucky for him, Casey had learned about loss anniversaries in treatment. He was already aware of how they might creep up and try to ruin his recovery. Casey won the battle that week because of this understanding.

Here are some examples of loss anniversaries:

- Day of the loss event (accident, move, breakup, divorce, trauma, death of a loved one, and so on)
- Birthdays
- Holidays (religious holidays, Thanksgiving, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Memorial Day, Veteran's Day)
- Wedding or relationship anniversaries
- Notable dates in a relationship with someone you lost (the day you met, other special times or memorable events in the relationship)

Preparing for Loss Anniversaries

In the case you just read about, Casey hadn't prepared himself for the loss anniversary because he didn't realize it was coming. The result was a series of strong, troubling emotions that seemed to come out of nowhere. Those emotions, and the thoughts that went with them, nearly led Casey back to using. But once Casey made the connection and realized he was dealing with a loss anniversary, he was able to step back and work through the true source of those painful feelings: missing Tommy. This allowed Casey to grieve in a healthy way. Casey moved through the emotions, instead of letting them overwhelm or control him by turning back to emotion dodging and using drugs.

Exercise 7.3 The Loss Anniversary Calendar

The first step in getting ready for your loss anniversaries is figuring out when they are coming. Using this calendar, write down any possible loss anniversaries that you may associate with a particular month. Include specific dates when you can.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

Next, mark down any loss anniversaries that you can connect to certain seasons, even if you aren't sure of the exact month.

Winter	Spring
Summer	Fall

Specific Triggers

Along with loss anniversaries, there are likely to be specific triggers that are unique to your experience. Specific triggers are things that remind you of a loss from your life. Consider the following examples.

- **Samuel's Story**

Samuel was molested by a teacher who smelled very strongly of aftershave. The scent of aftershave sometimes brings up powerful emotions in Samuel even as an adult. After something like that happens, Samuel finds himself watching pornography on the computer for hours and hours.

- **Patricia's Story**

Patricia was in a bad car accident at nighttime. Sometimes, when she is driving on the highway after dark, the headlights of the other cars trigger fear or even panic in her. Patricia finds herself smoking marijuana or taking extra Valium when she gets home after driving at night—or worse, before she goes out.

- **Enrique's Story**

When he was only seven, Enrique saw his uncle die of a heart attack. When his kids are playing in the living room one day and his son pretends to fall suddenly to the ground, Enrique becomes enraged. He yells at the kids to go to their rooms, and he spends the rest of the night drinking beer in the backyard.

- **Betty's Story**

When Betty was five, her mother left her and her siblings with their grandparents and did not come back for eight months. Betty finds herself anxious and irritable whenever a friend or family member leaves for a vacation. She often turns off her phone at these times and spends hours gambling online.

Exercise 7.4 Specific Triggers Worksheet

What are some specific triggers that might propel you toward your addictive behavior? They can be sights, smells, sensations, sounds, or events. Being aware of your specific triggers will give you even more strength in the battle against the loss-addiction cycle that has been keeping you stuck. Use this worksheet to list any specific triggers you can think of.

Specific trigger: _____

Loss it relates to: _____

Specific trigger: _____

Loss it relates to: _____

Specific trigger: _____

Loss it relates to: _____

Specific trigger: _____

Loss it relates to: _____

Specific trigger: _____

Loss it relates to: _____

Specific trigger: _____

Loss it relates to: _____

It might seem a little nerve-racking to have to keep track of your loss anniversaries. Maybe you don't want a calendar full of reminders of that pain. You may be thinking, *Is that really the answer? Am I going to have to think about this stuff every second? Do I have to obsess about my losses to recover from my addiction?*

No, you won't have to focus on your losses all the time in order to be prepared for a loss anniversary or a specific trigger. As your healing continues, you will learn how to be aware of when they are coming up without feeling as if you have to constantly stand watch.

- **Elizabeth's Story**

Elizabeth comes to therapy after getting out of rehab. She abused Xanax, a prescription antianxiety medication, and alcohol for many years.

"You know how, in the scary movies," Elizabeth says, "they know the killer is somewhere and is coming for them, and there's all this tension in the air? Oh, I can't stand it! I get so edgy! That's what it was like for me before: knowing something was wrong but not knowing when it would come for me. I would have all these feelings attack me out of nowhere. I can't tell you how much it has helped me to understand my loss anniversaries and specific triggers. The first time I was molested by my grandfather was right around Christmas; sometimes even the smell of a gingerbread cookie can bring me right back to that place. When I start to get really stressed or moody, or feel really down, I can take a deep breath—or a hundred if I need them!—and observe what's going on for me. Better yet, I can *prepare* for my anniversaries and triggers, and do some extra self-care. I am so grateful not to feel like a boat knocked around by a storm anymore. Understanding all of this has gotten me back on solid ground."

Conclusion

Let's take a moment to review what you've done so far. In chapter 1 you began getting to know your emotions. In chapter 2, you became an expert on your thoughts. In chapter 3, you focused in on your behaviors and got a clear picture of what you value in your life. Chapter 4 introduced you to mindfulness, and you learned to observe your mind without judgment. In chapters 5 and 6, you did the important work of identifying your losses and your addictive behaviors. And in this chapter you pinpointed your loss anniversaries and specific triggers and found the connections between them and your addiction.

Essentially, you have been coming to a greater and greater understanding of yourself. You have been learning the way your mind works, the way you have been responding to emotions, and what your triggers are. So, why all this work? Why all the exercises? What's so important about bringing these things to your awareness?

Awareness gives you strength! *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Big Book* (AA World Services 2002) calls alcohol "cunning, baffling, powerful" (58–59) and "a subtle foe" (85). It's certainly true that addiction can be a strong and clever enemy. Maybe you have been trying to fight that enemy alone for a very long time. Maybe it has seemed pretty hopeless. Fighting an enemy you cannot see is pretty terrifying, and it doesn't go very well. Every exercise you have done so far, every sentence in this book you have pondered, has been bringing that enemy into sight. Now it is visible to you, and you can even see its battle plans! Those repeat-offender thoughts can't manipulate you the way they used to; you know their game. Your emotions can't overwhelm you anymore; you know where they are coming from and that you can tolerate them. Your losses can't run your life anymore; you have brought them into the light, and you are healing. And finally, your addiction doesn't own you anymore. Even if you continue to struggle with that enemy at this point, you are not helplessly caught in its grasp the way you used to be. You know what addiction is doing to you, and you know there's a way out. Your awareness is giving you the strength you need to fight this battle and win!

Now that you have the strong foundation of knowing when your loss anniversaries occur and what specific triggers may urge you toward your addictive behaviors, the next chapter is devoted to enhancing your mindfulness skills. You will continue learning new, effective coping skills to accept and tolerate your emotions and experiences.

A Visit with the Gomez Family

Tony and Carmen each experience the work in this chapter in their own way.

Carmen finds even greater peace as she continues to make connections between her mastectomy and A.J.'s death—her two most significant losses—and her addictive behavior. Getting a clear view of her own loss-addiction cycle helps her to feel a stronger sense of control. She knows it will continue to be a struggle at times, but at least she isn't fighting an unknown, unseen enemy anymore. Carmen starts to think more and more about ways she might begin to rebuild her relationship with Tony. Not reaching for him when she is in pain or feeling vulnerable, and emotion dodging instead, has created a distance in the marriage that Carmen wants desperately to fix. Reading about how addiction is a way of living that promotes loss really gets Carmen to thinking. Her addictive behavior has pushed her husband even farther away. If things don't change, addiction could cause her to lose the marriage she values so much. But Carmen feels ready to do battle with the loss-addiction cycle, and she will not let it win. She is already making important changes in her life. Soon she will be ready to make real changes in her marriage too.

What Tony finds most helpful in this chapter is identifying his loss anniversaries and specific triggers. Taking the time to fill out the calendar in the workbook gives Tony a clear picture of times during the year when he will be most vulnerable to a relapse. It makes a big difference to him to be able to see difficult moments coming before they hit. Tony can see that the anniversary of A.J.'s death will be an emotional time for the entire family. He begins thinking of ways he can support himself and his family during that time. Tony considers self-care strategies and ways the family can honor A.J.'s memory to help them grieve. Looking at things proactively in this way makes Tony feel empowered. His desires to drink are steadily fading.

Part 3

Moving Forward

Chapter 8

Mindful Grieving

We have to get quiet. We have to be still, and that's harder and harder in this century.

—Jane Kenyon

In the last chapter, you learned about the connection between loss and addiction. You had a chance to reflect on your losses throughout your life—not always easy, but extremely helpful in uncovering the connection between those losses and your addictive behaviors. You might even have uncovered some surprising patterns. You may have uncovered that an anniversary date of a particular loss triggered your addictive behavior. The connections you are making are important in your journey to healing from your addiction. Congratulations for getting this far!

In this chapter you will delve a little more into mindfulness and acceptance. You will keep your eye on letting go of your losses. You will start building a new foundation of a calm and nonreactive self. Is this beginning to sound interesting to you? There will be a few exercises for you to try. Of course, no chapter on mindfulness is complete without talking about resistance. Feeling that you don't want to change or don't want to change *right now* is normal. You will read about other people who start out resisting change, even the smallest change. Can you spot the resistance in others? If you can spot the resistance in others, you're well on your way to being aware of it in yourself. The antidote to resistance is *resilience*. Your resilience is that part of you that has made it through the rough times in life so far. We've all had rough times, and we all have the ability to get through them. This chapter will help you spot and build on your personal resilience. Of course, you will check in with the Gomez family. By now, you have likely gotten to know and care about them. Let's get started.

- Caroline's Story

Caroline, a fifty-four-year-old account manager, sits on a leather couch across the room from her therapist. "I *doubt* this will help. I don't really believe in therapy," she says, challenging the therapist. It's their very first session. Caroline has *never* been in therapy before. She was referred because she was in a serious car accident five weeks ago. A truck ran into the back of her car, and her car's air bags deployed in her face. She was rushed by ambulance to the emergency room. The air bags had saved her but left her face with cuts. Those cuts are now scars. She is also recovering from a sprained shoulder, neck pain, and two broken ribs.

She has not returned to work yet. She's afraid to drive in traffic. When Caroline drove to her doctor's appointment last week, she had what she thought was a panic attack in the car. She pulled over to a parking lot and waited for her anxious feelings to go away.

Little things seem to bother her. Although her husband tries to be supportive, she finds herself extremely irritated with him. This is odd, because they have been happily married for twenty-five years.

Caroline tends to stay alone in her house during the day. She doesn't return phone calls from friends or her adult children. She feels angry and confused. Before the crash, she was lively and outgoing. She drank socially with friends. Now she finds herself looking forward to opening the wine bottle each day, usually at one o'clock in the afternoon. She likes the sound the cork makes as it pops. She single-handedly drinks a whole bottle of wine every day, and she hides the empty bottles from her husband. She doesn't really care what he thinks anyway but is tired of arguing with him. After their arguments, she takes a painkiller. Her neck seems to ache more during these arguments. She renewed her prescription for pain pills yesterday and wondered, *How long will my doctor let me keep renewing this prescription?*

Caroline feels that the life she knew slipped away after the crash. She doesn't know who she is now or how to get back to her old self. She feels ashamed to talk about the accident and how she quietly struggles every day. She leaves the therapy session more agitated than when she walked in. Although she makes another appointment for the next week, she is pretty sure she won't show up for it. As Caroline sits in her car in the parking lot, she thinks, *Nothing works.*

The next week, Caroline decides to return for her therapy appointment after all. Even though she was upset after the last session, she decides to give counseling a chance. Caroline knows that it took her months to get this out of touch with herself, so it will take time for her to heal.

Coping after a Loss

Like Caroline, you may have experienced a significant loss in your life. For her, it was a serious car accident that left her hurt, angry, and withdrawn. She felt that she had lost her old self and was left with someone she didn't recognize. And like Caroline, you may have used alcohol or drugs to cope with confusing and unpleasant feelings. In chapter 4, you learned the basics of mindfulness and were also given some mindfulness skills to practice. Feel free to go back and review these skills, allowing yourself time to practice them. After all, we will be adding to what you've already learned. This chapter will focus specifically on mindfulness skills to help with an event in which you have lost something or someone.

Caroline, as we have just learned, experienced a traumatic car accident and felt different afterward. Now is your chance to be an observer. Take a few minutes to answer the following questions about Caroline. Remember, the more you can notice about how others cope with loss, the better able you will be to reflect on your own ways of coping.

Exercise 8.1 Being an Observer

List some of the things Caroline lost after the car accident:

List some of the things Caroline does to cope:

List some things you think might help Caroline cope better:

List some things you have done to cope with your own losses:

Very good. Now that you can see how Caroline experiences loss and struggles to cope, you'll be better able to see this in yourself.

Nothing Works?

Renowned Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung was famous for saying, "What you resist persists." *Resistance* is when you refuse to accept something or you act as if it's not there. Carl Jung made an interesting discovery. He found that people who resisted parts of themselves continued to be bothered by them. In fact, he found that what people resisted got bigger and stronger (Jung 2006)! Here's how the pattern normally goes. A person resists a problem, and the problem stays put. The person resists the problem even more, and the problem gets bigger and bolder. Refusing to accept the problem brings more pain. Do you see the cycle here? Have you ever had this happen to you? Sometimes it feels as if nothing works. Next is an exercise to help you figure out what happens for you when you ignore a problem. You'll also explore what happens when you meet your problem head on. Take a few moments to do the following exercise. Give yourself time to focus on one problem that has been bugging you.

Exercise 8.2 Ignore vs. Accept

Take a few minutes to write down a problem that you had decided to ignore:

Now write down what happened when you ignored the problem. What were the consequences of ignoring your problem?

Now write down what would happen if you accepted your problem. What would be the consequences of accepting your problem?

We've all resisted things we did not want to feel. One of the main feelings that leads to resistance is *shame*. Caroline felt ashamed that she was no longer in control of herself. She was trying very hard not to experience her shame, but the cracks were beginning to show. In a strange way, it's more draining to hide from your real feelings than to accept them. If Caroline returns to therapy, one of the first things that might be helpful for her to do is to just sit quietly in the room with the therapist. Sitting quietly is easier said than done. For Caroline, sitting quietly might bring up a flood of emotions. The best way to find out what might happen for you is to try this yourself. Would you be willing to try this next exercise?

Exercise 8.3 Leaves Down a Stream

Find a place in your home that is free of distractions. You can sit on a chair with both of your feet on the floor and put your hands on your thighs. Or you can sit on the floor with your legs crossed under you and put your hands in your lap. How you sit is not as important as just sitting. We will start with five minutes at a time. Feel free to place a watch or clock nearby so that you can time yourself for five minutes.

Close your eyes. If thoughts start pouring into your mind, that's okay. It is the job of your mind to have thoughts.

One at a time, let each thought float by, like a leaf floating down a stream. Visualize the leaf floating down the stream. Can you see the leaf? What color is it? How big is it? You very likely may have critical thoughts and unpleasant feelings at first: *This is stupid*. Let the thought float like a leaf down the stream. *I've got a load of things to do; why am I just sitting here?* The leaf is floating down the stream. *This is the longest five minutes of my life*. The leaf is floating down the stream. Each thought gets its own leaf. Each feeling gets its own leaf. There are enough leaves for all of your thoughts and feelings. One at a time, let each thought and feeling float on its own leaf. There is a simple joy in having the thought float down the stream. Each thought moves freely. There are no obstacles to block the movement of the leaf. The river is running smoothly: next thought, next leaf, next feeling, next leaf—leaf floating down the stream.

Practice the act of sitting once or twice each day. Start with five minutes at a time. Remember to use your leaf-down-a-stream skills. Choose a time that works for you. Is the morning the best time, before your day begins? Could you do this at your workplace for five minutes each day? Is the evening a good time to practice? After one month of sitting for five minutes each day, you will be ready to move up to ten minutes. Don't rush it. You will notice changes with even a few minutes of sitting each day. Remember, there are enough leaves for all of your thoughts and feelings.

Radical Acceptance Revisited

As you may have experienced during your “Leaves Down a Stream” exercise, your mind begins to calm down. In chapter 4, you learned about radical acceptance as a way to be in the world without judgment. Now we will review the idea of accepting things as they are. This may be a strange idea for you. You may be thinking, *How can I accept something that I’m mad about? How can I accept something that I’m ashamed about?* Yes, at first this idea may seem odd.

Let’s go back to Caroline’s story. Caroline is confused, hurt, and angry about the car accident. If she were to accept the experience and her feelings, she would probably feel weird at first. Let’s take this a step further. What if you could not only accept but also *embrace* those parts of yourself that you do not like? What if those parts could be wrapped up as a gift and given back to you?

Here is the gift of confusion. What can I learn about myself from this gift of confusion.

Here is the gift of feeling hurt. What can I learn about myself from this gift of feeling hurt?

Here is the gift of anger. What can I learn about myself from this gift of anger?

You are no longer resisting the feelings, but embracing them. What do you notice? Are the feelings getting bigger or smaller? Are the feelings easier or harder to manage? How does it feel to not struggle against your own feelings? You may notice a little compassion for yourself. A little kindness goes a long way. Ever notice that you’re nice to everyone except yourself? Well, this next exercise turns the tables by getting you closer to deep acceptance through the practice of giving yourself the gift of your emotional world. Are you ready to give this a try?

Exercise 8.4 The Gift to Yourself

Take a few minutes to reflect on a problem or situation that has been bothering you. Perhaps this problem or situation has led you to destructive or addictive behaviors in the past.

1. Write down the problem or situation:

2. Now jot down your feelings about the problem or situation:

3. Next, complete the following sentences using your list of feelings from step 2:

I give myself the gift of _____.

I give myself the gift of _____.

I give myself the gift of _____.

4. Gift visualization: Now that you have your feelings listed, it's time to use visualization to bring home the message. Close your eyes.

Visualize a wonderfully wrapped gift. Someone must really know you. The gift is wrapped in paper that brings a smile to your face. Go ahead and smile if you'd like. Take the gift with both hands and put it in front of you. Quietly say thank you for the gift. With your eyes still closed, begin to open the gift, slowly removing the wrapping paper. Open the lid. Look inside. What do you see? It's your feelings: anger, confusion, withdrawal, sadness, grief. Now, instead of throwing your feelings away or reacting to them, just have them. That's it. They are yours. Accept them. With your eyes closed, say thank you, thank you.

The purpose of this exercise is to move from emotional conflict to accepting your emotions to embracing your emotions. It's the process of moving from struggle to peace to strength. Strength is an important characteristic in your personal journey to feeling and coping better. Next we will take a look at strength in the form of your personal resiliency.

Personal Resiliency

By purchasing this book, you have already made a commitment to your well-being. You are clearly motivated to enhance your life. This section is designed to remind you of what you know about your resiliency and how to apply this knowledge to yourself.

It might be hard to choose yes or no when the answer might be “sometimes.” Just do your best and choose the answer that seems to fit the most right now.

Exercise 8.5 The Personal Resiliency Quiz

These ten questions have been adapted with permission from the American Holistic Health Association (2003) (ahha.org). Take time to answer these questions honestly. Circle yes or no. At the end of the quiz, jot down your three personal resiliency goals.

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----|-------|----|
| 1. Do you wake up with enthusiasm for the day ahead? | _____ | Yes | _____ | No |
| 2. Do you have the high energy you need to do what you want to do? | _____ | Yes | _____ | No |
| 3. Do you laugh easily and often? | _____ | Yes | _____ | No |
| 4. Do you confidently find solutions for the challenges in your life? | _____ | Yes | _____ | No |
| 5. Do you feel valued and appreciated? | _____ | Yes | _____ | No |
| 6. Do you appreciate others and let them know it? | _____ | Yes | _____ | No |
| 7. Do you have a circle of warm, caring friends or family? | _____ | Yes | _____ | No |
| 8. Do the choices you make every day get you what you want? | _____ | Yes | _____ | No |
| 9. Do you have a positive relationship with your body? | _____ | Yes | _____ | No |
| 10. Do you enjoy periods of calmness each day? | _____ | Yes | _____ | No |

Adapted with permission from the American Holistic Health Association (ahha.org) booklet Wellness from Within: The First Step (2003).

If you answered no to any of these questions, congratulations! You have identified areas in need of change. Let's redirect your negative responses into action by taking a look at one of your no answers. Can you find a way to think about this that will be helpful to you? For example, if you answered no to question 1, would you be willing to turn that into a personal resiliency goal? If you are willing to target this as a goal, write your plan for making a change in the following space. These are both goals and specific plans for ways to reach them: a goal *and* a behavior change.

Sample Personal Resiliency Goal

I will make an effort to wake up with enthusiasm for the day ahead. I will start my morning with a five-minute meditation or a fifteen-minute walk around the neighborhood.

Your Resiliency Goals

Personal resiliency goal 1:

Personal resiliency goal 2:

Personal resiliency goal 3:

Grieving the Loss

We all have it. It's that part of you that doesn't want to change. It's that part of you that is pretty comfortable in the discomfort. At least the discomfort is familiar. Trying something different would be strange. So why bother? Better to let sleeping dogs lie, as the saying goes. But in order to feel better, challenging yourself is the next step. As Ronald Alexander (2008, 53) states in his wonderful book *Wise Mind, Open Mind: Finding Purpose and Meaning in Times of Crisis, Loss, and Change*, "All change involves loss." Even dealing with your loss involves more loss. You will be changing how you react.

Mindfulness is about increasing your personal strengths. The purpose of mindful grieving is to change your point of view about loss. It's about being calm, focused, and nonreactive.

As a kid, did you ever fight with your parents about going to bed? You wanted to stay up with your parents so you wouldn't miss anything. Even though you were tired from a long day, you still wanted to stay awake. You were what's affectionately called a "sleep fighter." You would fight going to sleep even if sleep was good for you. It's the same principle here. There is a natural calm that begins to take over if you let it. But most of us want to fight this. Don't be a "calm fighter." Make some space for a new calm to enter your life.

Exercise 8.6 Don't Be a "Calm Fighter"

Okay, so perhaps you chuckled here. Maybe you are, in fact, a "calm fighter." The secret's out. Every time things start to go well, you secretly think, *When will this good feeling end?* Your thoughts seem to automatically go negative, without much coaxing from you. Actually, since you've been using this workbook and doing the exercises, you might have started to feel better throughout the day but never have given yourself credit for your success. You're the type of person who always looks for a dark cloud on a sunny day. You have the makings of a serious "calm fighter." If this is you, would you be willing to try an exercise now?

Everything is already okay. Whenever you feel that internal struggle, repeat the phrase, "Everything is already okay." This is something that you can practice throughout the day if you are having a rough day. Repeat this phrase before an important event or meeting. Repeat this phrase if you are having an urge to drink, use drugs, or go back to old patterns of unhealthy behavior. Repeat this phrase if you are stuck in memories of painful events from your past. "Everything is already okay" is your go-to phrase to calm down. It's hard to be a calm fighter when you have this phrase at the ready.

Exercise 8.7 Walking with Words

Well, you have already mastered the "Leaves Down a Stream" meditation exercise. You have been able to practice five minutes of sitting each day. You have also built your tolerance for calm by repeating the phrase "Everything is already okay" in the last exercise. Now you have the opportunity to add to your skills. Walking with words is another skill to help you calm your mind and focus on your values.

Pick three positive words and walk with them. For example, your three words could be "peace," "harmony," and "well-being." Think each word with each step you take, and repeat again and again. Repeat the words when you go to check your mailbox, when you are at the grocery store, when you are walking up stairs to a meeting, or when you are walking with your kids. This practice achieves two things: first, it trains your mind to calm down during ordinary activities, and second, it slows down your walking so that you can be in the present moment. These words are also used in meditation and prayer. Practice walking with words and let your mind enjoy the calm.

Resiliency in Action

You are resilient throughout the day. Sometimes it's just hard to notice it with all the other busyness in your mind. Again, taking a look at Caroline's story may help you master the art of identifying resilience. Let's go back to her story. Can you pick out three instances when she was resilient over her loss?

Actually going to her first therapy appointment shows us that Caroline is trying to make sense of her feelings. Although she doubts that therapy will do any good, she does show up. Pulling over in the car when she noticed herself feeling panicky was another instance of taking care of herself. Although Caroline thought about skipping her second therapy session, she does show up for the second appointment. And she slowly, carefully starts to rebuild her life without alcohol and painkillers. These are all resilient behaviors. And the good news is that resilient behaviors build on themselves. Once you do one resilient behavior, you are more likely to do another and another. You are building your resiliency muscles. These acts of resilience that you practice will help you get stronger and have more stamina. The more stamina you develop, the better you will be able to cope with distressing thoughts and feelings. As you know by now, more resilience gives you the ability to cope with your addictive behaviors. This is all about developing new pathways to change your behaviors for your mental and physical health. You are on the path to rebuilding your strength.

Exercise 8.8 Your Resiliency in Action

Now that you are able to identify Caroline's resiliency, it's time for you to practice identifying your own resiliency. Take a moment to think about your day or week. Can you see where you were resilient? Being able to spot your moments of resiliency lays the groundwork for your recovery and long-term health. Jot down five examples of your resiliency. Remember, even small examples count.

Conclusion

In this chapter you had the opportunity to review mindfulness and to learn about mindful grieving. You've made great strides in calming your mind and accepting all parts of yourself. It hasn't always been easy. Change usually isn't. In the next chapter, you will have the opportunity to share some of your changes with those who are close to you. Before we get to sharing with others, let's check in with the Gomez family. Aren't you curious to see how they are doing?

A Visit with the Gomez Family

Tony gets a lot out of this chapter. Ever since he read chapter 4, he has been interested in mindfulness and has practiced the skills he learned there, but it feels good to him to have more exercises to work through. If he is going to do this thing, he wants to do it well, and to Tony, that means getting better and better at using mindfulness to cope with his addiction.

He finds it useful to imagine his thoughts as leaves floating down a stream, one at a time. Sometimes his mind churns out so many thoughts that he thinks he'll go crazy, but as he gets farther along in the workbook, he is finding it easier and easier to let go of the thoughts and let them pass. Now he practices closing his eyes during times of stress and letting himself have those five minutes of peace. He can really visualize that stream and the leaves floating gently with the current. He even finds time to do the exercise at work, whether during his lunch break or by just stepping into the bathroom for a few brief moments of quiet.

People see a change in him pretty soon. His boss says he seems to really be on top of things lately, and a colleague asks what he is doing differently because he looks so well rested! Tony can see the benefits of his new skills, and this gives him the drive to put even more energy into developing mindfulness.

Carmen also enjoys getting more familiar with mindfulness. In fact, the sense of peace she gets from the mindfulness exercises inspires her to finally join a friend of hers at a yoga class. Carmen commits herself to doing yoga twice a week, on Tuesday nights and Saturday mornings. On Saturdays, Carmen brings Tina to the class with her. It is becoming a special time for just the two of them to share.

Carmen thinks a lot about rebuilding her family. She wants them to be stronger and healthier than ever. Carmen knows that means staying away from addictive behaviors and choosing to use the new skills from the workbook. It isn't always easy to make the right choice, but she's working hard to do it anyway. Seeing Tina's smile and how Tony is able to relax these days without a beer in his hand are the gentle reminders Carmen needs to keep moving in this new, brighter direction.

Chapter 9

Relationships

You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.

—The Buddha

The disease of addiction ruins relationships. Secrecy, lies, mood swings, anger, and obsession over your addiction all put a strain on intimacy. As you learned in chapter 7 with the loss-addiction cycle, a life with addictive behaviors is prone to loss—most of all, the loss of relationships.

This chapter is about forming, strengthening, and rebuilding the important relationships in your life. You have been walking a path to recovery with every page of this workbook, heading toward a brighter and more beautiful life. That life does not exist in isolation! It's full of healthy, happy relationships that you can be proud of. You are ready to start this next stretch of your journey: healing your social world.

Along with all of the gifts that recovery brings—gifts like greater peace of mind, a healthier body, and a sense of control and stability in your life—there are also challenges. One of these challenges is coming to terms with the problems in your relationships. Some of these problems may have been hidden by the fog of your addicted life. Now they are taking shape and becoming visible. Seeing your relationship problems so clearly in front of you can be painful. But remember, you have the opportunity to heal. These problems do not have to remain exactly as they are at this moment. Healing is possible.

Exercise 9.1 List of Common Social Problems

Here are some of the common social problems you may be experiencing in recovery. Circle the number next to each one that you are experiencing.

1. All of your friends and acquaintances engage in the addictive behavior you are trying to heal from. Being around them is not supportive of your recovery, but staying away from them would feel lonely.
2. You don't feel comfortable in social settings without engaging in your addictive behavior. At times you wonder if you will even be able to have a social life in recovery.
3. Now that your head is clearing and you are more aware of what's going on in your life, you notice that your personal relationships aren't great. They may be unbalanced (one person relying more on the other), unhealthy, or even unsafe. You may find that what seemed like real intimacy was an illusion created by your addiction. You may find that there is no one really close to you, and you may experience the incredible loneliness that addiction has created in your life.
4. Everyone is mad at you. You may have important, close relationships in your life, but they are horribly strained. You hurt people while you were in your addiction, and now that you are recovering, there's a lot of fallout to deal with.
5. No one trusts you. Employers, friends, and family have all come to question whether you are being honest. Suddenly you are in the position of having to prove yourself to others. It feels shaming at times and frustrating to be distrusted.
6. You have become completely isolated in your addiction. Now that you are beginning to recover, you have no social support whatsoever.

Any one of these situations or several are likely to come up in the early part of your recovery. This chapter will lead you through the solutions to each of these problematic situations. Recovery from your addictive behaviors can bring you to the most satisfying relationships you have ever known. As always, it will take action!

Take a look at the problems that you just circled. For each problem, there's a section of this chapter that will teach you how to solve it. While every section is valuable, you may want to focus on the ones that apply to you the most.

No matter what problem or problems you are dealing with, we suggest that you read the first section, "Basic Communication Skills." Everyone who wants to have great relationships should learn these basic skills. Your next step is to proceed to the sections that apply most to you. Remember, the more effort you put into completing the exercises and reflecting on the ideas in these sections, the better your results.

Basic Communication Skills

No matter what may be troubling you about your social world, mastering the basics is a must. It truly does make a difference *how* you say what you say. With time and practice, these basic communication skills will help you in all of your relationships.

“I” Statements

One of the best things you can master in basic communication is using “I” statements. Phrasing your communications in this way decreases the odds that the other person will become defensive. Less defensiveness in your communication leads you to the outcomes you want. Although it will take practice to get the hang of this, the formula is very simple:

I feel/felt _____ (an *emotion* word; review table 1.1, “List of Common Emotions,” for help with this) *when you* _____
(the other person’s specific behavior), *because* _____
(explain what probably causes you to feel this way, without placing blame).

Example A: “I feel hurt when you don’t show up on time for dinner, because it’s important to me that we have that time together.”

Example B: “I felt frustrated when you forgot the directions and we got lost, because I was counting on our having an easy drive and instead we got into a fight.”

Exercise 9.2 Practicing “I” Statements

Rephrase these comments as “I” statements:

1. “You never do the dishes.” _____

2. “You make me so crazy; you’re always late!” _____

3. “You didn’t stick up for me when Joe was picking on me. You obviously don’t care.” _____

4. “You drive too fast; it’s ridiculous!” _____

5. “You always want me to come visit you. Why can’t you visit me for a change?” _____

Reflect on the new statements you just wrote. How would you feel if you were spoken to in that way, instead of with accusations or blame? _____

Speaking with Softer Emotions

In chapter 1, you began the hard work of getting to know your emotions. The exercises in that chapter helped you figure out what you were really feeling. Now you are ready to go a step further: figure out what softer emotions lie under the surface.

Sue Johnson (2008), author of *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*, founded the most successful form of couples therapy to date: *emotionally focused therapy* (EFT). EFT strengthens the bonds of relationships in many ways, but one of its key aspects is helping partners to step out from behind their “harder” emotions, such as anger, and instead to communicate with each other about their softer emotions, such as hurt. As you may have noticed in your own life, anger puts others on the defensive and drives them farther away, but expressing hurt and other soft emotions draws others closer to you. Think about your own responses to these statements:

- “I am so angry with you!”
- “I feel really sad about what’s happening with us right now.”

Which statement would be easier to hear? Which would cause you to put your guard up, and which would allow you to keep an open mind and go on listening? Chances are, the second statement is more likely to leave you open to communication and closeness.

Next is a list of hard and soft emotions. If you are honest with yourself, you will see that beneath your hard emotions are softer ones. You may think you are just plain angry, but somewhere in there, you will find fear, embarrassment, or hurt.

Hard Emotions

anger

annoyance

bitterness

defensiveness

envy

frustration

hostility

irritation

jealousy

rage

Soft Emotions

embarrassment

fear

heartache

hurt

inadequacy

insecurity

rejection

sadness

shame

vulnerability

Talking to someone you care about and sharing your feelings of inadequacy, shame, or hurt and rejection makes a world of difference in your relationships.

- *Inadequacy*: “Sometimes I’m afraid I’m not good enough for you. I get jealous because I’m scared you will leave.”
- *Shame*: “I know I raise my voice when we talk about things I did when I was using. The truth is that I just feel so ashamed sometimes and don’t know how to fix things.”
- *Hurt and rejection*: “I miss you when you go out with your friends instead of me; I start thinking that you don’t like spending time with me, and it makes me really lonely.”

There’s no doubt that this is a hard thing to do at times! You probably feel much safer storming out of the room, giving the silent treatment, avoiding the person, or even yelling at the top of your

lungs than you do speaking from the heart. It's scary to put yourself out there. You may not be sure what response you will get, and what if it hurts even more? But this is your choice.

Having true intimacy requires risk. Stepping out of your comfort zone will create the space for better, healthier, and more fulfilling relationships. Remember your values exercises in chapter 3? You figured out what you value most in the world. Isn't it worth tolerating the difficult emotions that come up while you are pursuing those things that you value so much? Take some deep breaths, practice your mindfulness exercises, and walk through the fear that tries to stop you from reaching out. There is so much to gain!

If you find that this type of communication is particularly hard for you, it would be a good idea to see an EFT-trained therapist for counseling. See the "Useful Websites" portion of the resources section in the back of this workbook for more information.

Listening Matters

You may get very skilled at expressing yourself, but that's only half the conversation! To have healthy communication in your personal relationships, you *must* learn how to listen.

Listening does not mean picking out bits and pieces of what others are saying and formulating your counterargument while they talk! Your job as a listener is to do your very best to understand where others are coming from and what they are feeling. Your job is not to interpret or jump to conclusions, but to truly hear what the person is saying. A great way to practice this is by summarizing what you heard and repeating it back to the person who has been talking to you. This lets that person know that you were listening. The next step is to be validating and supportive, and then to ask follow-up questions to let the person know that you care. It sounds like this:

The other person: I think they overcharged me for my oil change this morning. I can't believe it! I hate getting ripped off. It's so frustrating. Just when you think you can trust someone! And now I don't know if I should go back and confront them. I'll feel so awful if I'm wrong. Ugh!

You: So, you think they might have overcharged you, and you really trusted them [letting the other person know that you heard what he said by briefly summarizing]! That would upset me, too [validating]. But you're not 100 percent sure [summarizing again]; that's definitely a tough one [validating]! What do you think you'll do [follow-up question to show interest and concern]?

As you can see, your role in this conversation was that of a supportive and attentive listener. You did not switch the conversation to your own life, blow off how the other person was feeling, or jump in to offer a solution too quickly (which can feel like a blow-off, too). The person speaking to you likely felt heard, validated, and cared about. That's the basis of a happy and healthy relationship.

Exercise 9.3 Practicing Your Listening Skills

Use this worksheet to practice being a great listener. Focus on summarizing, validating, and asking a follow-up question. Use the previous example as a guide.

The other person: "My boss is such an incredible jerk! I really hate that guy. You will never believe what he did today. He called me into his office and told me they might have to cut back my hours again. I'm already hardly making ends meet! Why don't they just fire me once and for all? I am really starting to feel like things aren't going to turn around for me at this job. But what if I can't find another one?"

You: _____

The other person: "I got the nicest present for my mom today. It's a necklace with her birthstone in it—well, an imitation one, anyway. I hope she likes it. You know, she went in for some testing last week, and we still don't have the results. I guess once you've made it to eighty-three, they test you for everything under the sun, but I still would like to know. She's my last living relative, you know? I hate that we live so far apart."

You: _____

The other person: "Jeff's coming back from deployment in a month! I'm so excited. I think my sister can watch the kids for a while in August, so we can even take a trip, just the two of us. It's been forever since we did that, not since our honeymoon! I hope he will want to go. I know, at first, he will just want to be home for a while, and I get that. I just really need some time away myself. And I love the idea of its just being him and me for a few days!"

You: _____

Now that you are more skilled at listening, summarizing, validating, and following up, begin to practice this in your day-to-day life. Experiment with it. Watch what happens when you respond this way to others. Chances are you will get a reputation for being a very good listener!

How All-or-Nothing Thinking Threatens Relationships

Here are some more important ideas to help you with basic communication and relationship skills. Really reflect on the information in the next few paragraphs to guide you away from the power struggles in relationships that make healthy communication impossible.

Remember a long way back in your journey, when you learned how your mind plays tricks on you? In chapter 2, you got the chance to consider your repeat-offender thoughts. These thoughts are unrealistic and skewed, because they were formed in your childhood and then got locked into place. Recall that as a child, you saw the world very simply: you put everything into categories and labeled those categories to help you understand what would have otherwise been an overwhelmingly big and scary world. You saw things as either good or bad, with little room in between. Your ideas about relationships are a lot like those repeat-offender thoughts. They may be simplistic and inaccurate. You may think the only options you have in a relationship are to be either the victim or the one in charge, either the bully or the bullied, either the master and commander or the doormat. Your ability to relate successfully with others is severely limited if you are looking at your relationships in terms of these black-and-white categories:

- Powerful vs. powerless
- Strong vs. weak
- Good vs. bad
- Right vs. wrong

This all-or-nothing, good guy–bad guy view of relationships is not helpful to you. If you are breaking down your relationships in this way, your only choices are to be *better* or *less* than the other person. Feeling less than the other person lowers your self-esteem and leaves you open to being taken advantage of. You don't get to be your best self, to feel strong, confident, and valuable. You will either live with this feeling (likely becoming increasingly depressed and at risk of doing your addictive behaviors), or get burned out and exit the situation, feeling that the only way to get your self-esteem back is to banish the relationship from your life completely.

Meanwhile, feeling “better than” the other person gives you an inflated sense of yourself and can cause you to be arrogant, domineering, and generally not someone others want to be close to. You may become controlling and bossy, and you keep yourself from any chance to learn from others. Either way, you are not on solid ground. One person is up; one person is down. It's not an

even playing field, and quite simply, you and the person you are relating to will never be able to see eye to eye.

To have true intimacy with others, you need to find that even ground. In a healthy friendship, family, or love relationship, there is give and take. There is balance. You move away from all-or-nothing and make room for moving closer to the middle. Instead of a right person and a wrong person, there is “Okay, I don’t agree with you. But I can see where you’re coming from.” That’s the kind of communication that keeps relationships running steady!

Rising above the Outcome

Imagine the moment. You have done all the reading, all the worksheets. You have practiced time and time again. You have put all your energy into becoming a master communicator. And here it is: your moment. You hear yourself doing it *beautifully*. You are assertive, clear, and fair. Your tone is gentle but firm, you are taking responsibility for your own part in the situation without self-criticizing, and you are setting boundaries like a pro. You’re doing it—communicating!

But, strangely enough, the person you are talking to does not burst into applause. He doesn’t even thank you for being so clear and direct. In fact, he is still ranting and rambling as if you *hadn’t* come in to save the day—and the conversation—from utter devastation. He is not using “I” statements; he is playing the blame game; he is tossing out anger and criticism like arrows going toward a target. What the heck is going on?

The truth is that no matter how beautifully you master these skills, there are no guarantees that you will get the results you are looking for.

There is a whole other person in this situation: a person with wants, needs, expectations, wounds, and worries all his own. He is battling his own demons, trying to make sense of his own problems. Something is happening inside of him that is as complicated and complex as the thoughts, feelings, and experiences that unfold inside of you. You may have managed to pull through the chaos of all of that and communicate with all the calm and poise a human being could ever muster. But all the communication skills in the world cannot predict a perfect outcome, for the simple reason that people are unpredictable.

So what do you do when the outcome is a huge disappointment, when you’re doing things right and it’s turning out all wrong?

Detaching from the outcome of a situation, detaching from someone else’s emotional chaos is quite possibly the hardest thing you will ever learn. It’s nearly impossible to calmly step away from the drama of life and observe it. Drama has a real knack for sucking you right in. This is one of the most tremendous changes you can experience through a devotion to mindfulness practice! You can learn how not to get sucked in. You can learn to mindfully watch the other person’s response to you, bringing curiosity and understanding instead of judgment. You can learn that it really isn’t about you. What *is* about you is the work that you are doing and the fact that you put your new

skills into practice. No matter what the outcome, you can be proud of your own behavior. The outcome is nothing compared to that!

Identifying Unhealthy Relationships

This next section is designed to help you take a closer look at the relationships in your life and decide whether they are helping or harming you. You will then have the chance to reflect on the best course of action: whether to work on rebuilding these relationships or walk away.

Begin by considering the following list. Each category lists the qualities of a healthy, unhealthy, or unsafe relationship. In the extra space provided, add any other qualities you believe should be included in one of the three kinds of relationships.

Exercise 9.4 Qualities of Relationships

Take a look at the following qualities of relationships. Add any other qualities that you have found in healthy, unhealthy, or unsafe relationships.

Healthy

I offer support and feel supported in return.

I trust and am trusted in return.

I feel that I can be myself.

I like who I am in the relationship.

Conflict, arguments, and tension are resolved in a way that feels satisfying to me and the other person.

There is compromise.

I am free to spend time with others if I choose to.

I can make my own decisions about my life.

Each person's opinion is respected, even if we don't agree.

This person is supportive of my recovery from addiction and loss.

I feel safe, cared for, and loved.

Unhealthy

I am frequently judged or criticized.

I often find myself watching what I say or do.

Even when we are together, I feel very much alone.

I look to the other person to make all of the decisions.

I'm not sure how I feel about things anymore, because the other person has so much influence over my opinions.

I make all the decisions because I feel that the other person is incapable.

I feel burdened and exhausted from being in charge in the relationship all the time.

I feel a lot of distance in the relationship; it doesn't feel like real closeness or intimacy.

I get attacked or feel guilty for spending time with other people.

I feel that we have nothing in common besides addictive behavior.

I am constantly beating myself up for mistakes I have made in the relationship; I never quite feel good enough.

Arguments become vengeful or cruel; conflict level is high, and it's very difficult to get things resolved in a way that feels okay for me.

I don't feel that I can be myself in this relationship.

This person does not support my recovery from addiction even after I have explained how important it is to me and why.

This person doesn't support my healing from loss.

Unsafe

I no longer have control over or access to finances.

I feel belittled, powerless, or afraid.

I am called names or told that I am worthless.

I have become highly isolated; this person does not like me to have contact with others, including my family.

The other person is in control in several aspects of the relationship.

I have been pushed, slapped, grabbed, hit, kicked, punched, choked, sexually violated, or otherwise harmed by this person.

I am afraid to end this relationship and afraid to ask for help from others.

The other person has hurt someone or something close to me.

If you can relate to some or all of the qualities in the “Unsafe” part of that list, you may be in an abusive relationship. You are not alone! Whether or not there has been violence, a relationship is unsafe for you if you are being controlled, belittled, or isolated from your support system. Please do not put yourself in danger by taking action without first making sure that you are safe! There is help waiting for you. Contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or visit www.thehotline.org. Check out the relationships section of the resources list in the back of this book for more guidance.

Exercise 9.5 Identifying Your Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships

Now that you understand the “Qualities of Relationships” better, do this worksheet. Think of three important relationships in your life. For each relationship, think about the categories you read about in the list just before this, and decide if each relationship is healthy, unhealthy, or unsafe based on that information. Some relationships may have qualities from more than one category, so it’s up to you to decide which category describes this relationship the best. If it’s very hard to decide and you feel that the relationship is right on the borderline, you may list a relationship as “healthy/unhealthy.”

It would be wise to copy this worksheet before using it so you can redo the exercise with other relationships in the future.

Relationship 1 (name of person): _____

Category (healthy, unhealthy, unsafe): _____

Reasoning (list some information from the qualities list): _____

Relationship 2 (name of person): _____

Category (healthy, unhealthy, unsafe): _____

Reasoning (list some information from the qualities list): _____

Relationship 3 (name of person): _____

Category (healthy, unhealthy, unsafe): _____

Reasoning (list some information from the qualities list): _____

What Next?

If a relationship is unhealthy, do you have to get rid of it? You may not need to. Some of the qualities listed in the “unhealthy” relationship category could be a natural result of your addictive behaviors. For example, you may be feeling a lot of distance or having a lot of conflict in a relationship right now. Addiction is great at creating conflict and ruining intimacy! It’s also great at taking away your ability to make the best choices, so the important people in your life may have taken a more controlling role while you were doing your addictive behaviors. This leaves your relationship out of balance, and may leave you feeling as if the other person does not respect or value you. In many cases, this type of relationship can be healed. Read the next major section of this chapter, “Healing Broken Relationships,” and think about whether a strained relationship has the chance to become healthy with some work.

Walking Away

There may be some relationships in your life that are a threat to your recovery and well-being. Some of the people in your life may seek to undermine the work you are doing. They may not want you to stop engaging in your addictive behaviors for their own selfish reasons. If you feel that a relationship is harmful to you and your recovery, and that it’s unlikely to change, it may be time to walk away. Choose your health, wellness, and joy. You deserve good things, and no one has the right to take those good things away from you.

Ending a relationship is never easy, even if that’s the right thing to do. Walking away from certain people in your life may be a part of walking toward a better life. It’s a wonderful journey, but it still means leaving a relationship behind. This is a *loss*. You are going to experience a lot of emotions in response to this loss, and you will need to grieve. Flip back to the earlier chapters of this workbook and reflect on the exercises you have done. Practice accepting and tolerating your feelings as they arise. Embrace the dog. Be the watcher of your mind. Be mindful of any emotion dodging that you may be tempted to do. You have been learning these skills for a reason, and you will continue to practice them. Living comes with loss, remember? But you now have the skills to cope with this. You can tolerate these losses as part of the greater good.

Healing Broken Relationships

As you probably know very well from your own experience, addiction puts a lot of strain on relationships. Some relationships become so strained that they even break. There may be times when you feel as if the anger, criticism, and lack of trust that have invaded your personal relationships will never go away. Do not fear! There is hope for the healing of your relationships. Taking action

in the ways described in this section will set you on the path toward healing your wounded relationships and making them stronger than ever before.

Working through this process will require a hefty dose of *humility*. You will need to own up to the mistakes you have made. You will need to take responsibility for the things you have done wrong. If you are reading this and thinking, *But I haven't done anything wrong*, think again! You are a human being, not a robot. Human beings are flawed, and sometimes they mess up. If you have lived and breathed, you have managed to make a few mistakes. Now you have the chance to reflect honestly about your life and take responsibility for where you went wrong.

Meanwhile, humility is not the same as humiliation. Taking ownership of your bad choices and looking for ways to make things right is *not* the same as wallowing in guilt and shame. It does not mean constantly feeling like a failure or never feeling good enough. While the people in your life are entitled to their own feelings of anger and distrust as a result of your addictive behaviors, you do not need to carry those feelings for them. You can accept that they feel that way and take responsibility for the things you have done that may have led them to feel that way. But feeling that you are the worst of the worst or that you don't deserve forgiveness is just as unreasonable as thinking you've never made a mistake. True humility is fair and balanced; self-hatred is based on faulty thinking!

Exercise 9.6 Letter of Invitation

This writing exercise is a good place to begin with the important people in your life. You are inviting the people who matter to you to understand your recovery better and to give you a chance to right the wrongs you have done.

Use the following form as an outline. It would be best to copy this letter of invitation so that you have several copies to use in the future. Of course, you can use this letter for different people along your recovery journey.

Dear _____,

I am writing this letter to you today to talk about my addiction. I hope we will talk more in the future; this is just a beginning. I want to share with you some of my thoughts, feelings, and hopes. I also want to own up to the pain my addictive behaviors may have caused you. Here are the top five ways I think my addictive behaviors have affected or hurt you:

Am I right? Are there other ways you want to tell me about? I want to listen. I want to know what this has been like for you. I also want to know if there are any ways I can make things up to you. Here are five things I am already doing to change my life:

I am open to hearing more suggestions if you have them. Even if I can't accomplish the things that you suggest, I want to know how you feel.

I am going to continue working on getting better. I know I am responsible for my own recovery. I promise to take that responsibility seriously. Because you are an important part of my life, I would like to invite you to be a part of the process. If you are willing, here are three ways you could support my recovery:

My hope is that we will have a strong, happy, balanced relationship in the future. The kind of person I want to be in our relationship is:

This letter is only a beginning. I wanted to open the door for us to talk honestly and openly about my addiction. I hope you will join me in this process. I am willing to work hard to heal this relationship because you are important to me!

Sincerely,

Healing Conversations

The next step in healing will be to speak face-to-face to the important people in your life in a way that eases tension and allows for growth.

These conversations are likely to bring up some anxiety in you. But you don't have to dodge those feelings, right? That nervous feeling is perfectly normal. It's a genuine, natural response to the fact that this relationship is important to you. Here are some brief suggestions to help you move through your anxious feelings with ease:

- Stay away from caffeine. Caffeine only increases anxiety levels and can give you that restless, jittery feeling instead of a sense of calm and peace.
- Get some exercise beforehand. This will help to burn off some *cortisol* (the stress hormone in your brain) and help you reach a centered place.
- Breathe! In chapter 4 you learned how to breathe in a way that is soothing and restorative. Check your breathing: make sure it is coming from your belly, slow and low.
- Practice your mindfulness exercises. Chapters 4 and 8 are full of wonderful activities that can bring you peace. Most exercises only take about five minutes. Use the skills you have learned so far; they are perfect for helping you as you begin to heal your relationships.
- This one takes guts but yields the best results: reflect honestly about how you feel. *Tell* the other person that you are nervous and explain why. Chances are it's because you want things to go well, are afraid of saying the wrong thing somehow, or are afraid of messing up. Maybe you are afraid of hurting the person or of being judged.
- Make sure the person knows it isn't her fault that you are nervous; that has nothing to do with it. She isn't doing anything wrong. Even if this person has judged you in the past or has been nasty or aggressive, that still doesn't mean she is responsible for your feelings. Trying to suggest that she is will only backfire. Remember your "I" statements? Own the way you are feeling. Share that you are nervous for a very good reason: when it comes down to it, it's simply because this conversation means a lot to you.

Exercise 9.7 Healing Conversation Format

Now that you know how to deal with the anxiety that comes along with these discussions, the last question is: how? How do you talk to the people you care about, who may be hurt and angry about your addiction and things you have done?

This is your chance to open the space between you and the other person. You are letting him share with you how he has felt. He may express a lot of anger; that is healthy and normal, but it's also up to you to figure out if your boundaries have been crossed. No matter what you have done, you do not deserve to be verbally abused. You may need to calmly assert your boundaries and ask the person to express himself in a nicer way. You may even need to excuse yourself from the situation if it's making you too uncomfortable.

Use this guide to find key phrases you can use during your conversation.

Examples of Places to Have Your Conversation

A park

A peaceful place by water

In your home (if you can be alone)

In the other person's home (if you can be alone)

A restaurant (if it's quiet and private enough to talk)

A coffee shop (if it's quiet and private enough to talk)

Examples of Conversation Starters

"I wanted us to meet today because I know there's a lot we need to talk about."

"I want you to have a chance to share with me how you have been feeling; I am here to listen."

"Let's take all the time you need to talk to me about how my actions have made you feel. I am here and I am listening."

"I want to understand what things have been like for you. Please take all the time you need to tell me."

"I asked to meet for this conversation because I know there's a lot we have to work out between us. I am here to listen, and I want to know how you feel."

"I want to make things right. This conversation is just a first step, so that I can understand more about where you are coming from."

Examples of Supportive Feedback

"I can see that this has been hard for you."

"I can understand why you feel that way."

"Thank you for sharing that with me."

"Tell me more; I am listening."

"How else did it make you feel?"

"What was that like for you?"

"Thank you for sticking with me through that."

"I can see how much you have been struggling."

"I appreciate that you are willing to talk with me about this."

"It makes sense that you thought or felt that."

"Thank you for your honesty."

Examples of Boundary-Setting Phrases

"I want to be able to really hear what you are saying, but that gets hard when you raise your voice, call me names, or threaten me."

"If we are going to keep talking today, we should probably slow down and breathe a little."

"Things are getting intense right now; let's take a five-minute break and come back."

"I know that you are very angry with me, and you have every right to be, but we still need to talk to each other respectfully or we aren't going to get anywhere."

"I would like us to keep talking, but I want it to be productive. What can we do to calm things down a little so we can really hear each other?"

Examples of Phrases for Exiting the Situation If Necessary

"I am glad we got a chance to meet, but I think things are getting too out of control today and we need to stop."

"I respect how you feel, but the way you are talking is too hurtful and I need to leave."

"I want us to work things out, but being called names is not okay with me. I think it would be best for me to go."

"I know I have made mistakes, but I still deserve to be treated with respect. Let's try this conversation another time when we are calmer."

Examples of Healthy Endings to the Conversation

"Thanks so much for meeting with me today. It meant a lot to me."

"I know this is just a beginning, and I hope we can talk more in the future."

"I am really grateful that you were willing to tell me how you feel. It wasn't always easy to hear, but I am willing to work on the things you brought up."

"I hope you feel okay about how this went. Is there anything you would want to do differently the next time we talk?"

"Thank you for helping me to understand what things have been like for you. I will continue to listen, and I hope we can talk again."

Healing Conversation Action Plan

Now use this Healing Conversation Action Plan to make a solid plan for your conversation. It would be wise to copy this worksheet or use your journal to do this exercise with many important people in your life.

Name of friend or family member: _____

Place to have the conversation: _____

Conversation starter to use: _____

Supportive feedback to use: _____

Boundary-setting phrases to use: _____

Phrases to exit the situation if necessary: _____

Phrases to end the conversation in a healthy way: _____

Rebuilding Trust

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, losing the trust in your relationships is a common outcome of addiction and can be frustrating, shaming, and painful for you. It can seem to take forever for the important people in your life to stop questioning you at every turn. Please be patient! You *will* earn their trust back. It will take time and consistency on your part, but it will happen. (If it never does, that's not about you, and it will be a good situation in which to detach from the outcome.)

There are some things that may help you on the road to rebuilding trust. You may not want to do those things. In fact, you may really, *really* not want to do those things. But this is a part of taking responsibility for your addictive behaviors. For a long time, while you were caught in your addiction, you were probably not trustworthy. That's something you will have to come to terms with. Forgive yourself, but own it too. The people around you have their reasons for feeling afraid to trust in you. Give them the things they need to feel safe again. This might mean consenting to regular drug testing or alcohol breath tests. It might mean giving your spouse full access to your e-mail, phone records, or bank account information. It might mean committing to therapy or going to a support group on a regular basis. Of course, this is all up to you. You can make the final decisions about your boundaries and expectations in relationships. But your willingness to consider these actions in order to rebuild trust for those you may have harmed with your addiction could go a long way for you and for you family, friends, and partner.

Exercise 9.8 The Commit to Quit Agreement

Many people who are recovering from an addiction will tell you it's a good idea to say your "pleases" and "thank yous." In the morning, ask your higher power to please help you in your recovery throughout the day. At night, thank your higher power for another day of recovery. Why not say your "pleases" and "thank yous" to the people you care about?

This exercise will help you restore trust and closeness after addiction has taken its toll on a relationship. It's called the "Commit to Quit Agreement."

Ask an important person in your life, or many important people in your life, to participate in this conversation with you on a daily basis. It's a good idea to choose a specific time when you will repeat this conversation every day. While it may seem kind of hokey to repeat these scripted words to each other, it can have a powerful effect. It shows the important people in your life your continued commitment to recovery and reinforces that you have their support. You may state your specific addictive behavior, such as, "I have not used," or "I have not gambled," instead of, "I have not engaged in my addictive behavior," if you choose.

<i>You:</i>	I have not engaged in my addictive behavior for the last twenty-four hours. Thank you for your help. Would you please continue to support me for the next twenty-four hours?
<i>Important person in your life:</i>	Thank you for abstaining from your addictive behavior for the last twenty-four hours. Please keep it up and let me know how I can support your recovery for the next twenty-four hours.

Building a Healthy Social Support System

One of the greatest gifts you can give yourself in life is a healthy support system. Positive relationships with people who love and respect you are an incredible buffer against the hard times in life. Social support can make all the difference in your physical health, emotional well-being, and peace of mind. But how do you find this wonderful crew of people who will offer that kind of support?

Be a friend. You may have heard, “You have to be a friend to have a friend”; the way you treat others will come back around to you. It’s a pretty simple idea, but it often falls by the wayside when you are caught up in your own life and end up thinking mostly about yourself. If you feel that your social support is lacking, think hard about how you treat others. Are you there for people when they need you? Do you keep your commitments, or do you often flake out on them? Are you honest, caring, and respectful? Do you share openly with others as well as listen to what they have to say? Do you think about ways to help others or only what they can offer you? Do you give others the benefit of the doubt, or do you judge them? Quite simply, would you want to be friends with you? If the answer to these questions is no, don’t worry! You have time to become the kind of friend you would want to have. Keep focusing on your recovery and on living a life based on your values. Consider the previous ideas and put them into practice with others. You can do it!

Go to meetings. Whatever your addictive behavior may be, there’s a very good chance that there’s a 12-step program associated with it. This is especially true for drug and alcohol addiction, in which case there are a variety of meetings available to fit your needs. There are countless benefits to getting involved in a 12-step program, but one of the greatest is the social support. Being able to meet and interact with other people who truly understand your addiction is a liberating and uplifting experience that should not be missed! People who attend these meetings are embedded in a culture of unbelievable support. Social functions such as parties, dances, picnics, conferences, and camping trips are common and bring a lot of fun and friendship into your recovery. If you resist attending meetings for any reason, it would be wise to at least check them out. Go to at least three different meetings, and give yourself a chance to meet a few people each time. Having friends in recovery is an incredible gift. There is no need to recover in isolation!

See the resources section in the back of this book for more information about 12-step programs. There is a 12-step program designed for you.

Participate in activities. In this day and age, there are endless opportunities for social activities. It’s only a matter of deciding what you like to do. Then comes the Internet! Social networking sites such as Meetup (www.meetup.com) gather groups together to do just about anything under the sun. The social scene is all planned for you; all you have to do is show up and be willing to meet new people. (If this is especially hard for you, consider the next major section, “Managing Social Discomfort.”)

Here is a short list of activities that will help you meet new people:

- Join a hiking club.
- Start running, walking, or bicycling, and join a training program for races.
- Take an exercise class like yoga or spinning; get there early so that you have time to chat with others.
- Take a cooking class or another class that interests you; try the local colleges or community centers.
- Get involved in your spiritual community, such as a church or temple.
- Do volunteer work.
- Take your dog to a dog park; dog owners are some of the friendliest people in the world, and you already have something to talk about.
- If you are single, try online dating; use reputable websites and make wise decisions about how much personal information you give out and where you meet new people (never at your home!); give yourself a chance to go out at least once and walk through the fears that come with first dates. The fears could be magnified if you are in early recovery.

Build on existing relationships. This world is full of social relationships, from your closest family members to the barista at your favorite coffee shop. Chances are you already know quite a few people. What leaves you feeling lonely or isolated is the lack of closeness and connection in your personal relationships. To improve on this, start by building on relationships you already have. Perhaps there is an acquaintance or a coworker you have always thought seemed interesting. Create an opportunity to get to know that person better: ask her to join you for coffee or an activity you both might enjoy. Use the following space for a brainstorming session to think of people you know with whom you would like a deeper relationship.

Person: _____

Ideas for activities to do together: _____

Person: _____

Ideas for activities to do together: _____

Person: _____

Ideas for activities to do together: _____

Person: _____

Ideas for activities to do together: _____

Person: _____

Ideas for activities to do together: _____

It may be difficult to start adding these new experiences into your life at first, but the results will absolutely be worthwhile. Having a solid group of friends you can count on is a key component of the happy, healthy life you are building!

Managing Social Discomfort

It's very common for people who have been trapped in an addiction to feel discomfort in social situations in the early stages of recovery. Next are some ways to decrease social discomfort once you have gotten free from your addictive behavior.

Give yourself a break. Remember that you are getting used to a whole new way of life. You knew it wouldn't be easy, but you have been walking this path anyway. You have come so far! Feeling nervous, uncomfortable, or out of place socially right now does not reflect badly on you. It's perfectly normal, even expected! It's just another challenge for you to walk through. If you are feeling especially down or stressed about your social world, cut yourself some slack. Do some self-care behaviors. Practice your mindfulness and relaxation skills. Remember how strong you are for taking this journey toward healing. You are going to get where you want to go; it just takes time!

Bring a friend. Being in social situations can be especially challenging if your addictive behaviors are part of the scene. That might include having alcohol or drugs around you at a party, being tempted to overeat when dining out, or being around friends who smoke or gamble in front of you. There's nothing wrong with needing extra support! Bring along a friend who knows about your recovery and supports you. If that's not possible, have a list of people and their phone numbers with you at all times. Let people know you are walking into a challenging situation that tempts you or makes you uncomfortable; tell them you may need to call or text them for support and when to expect it. Set yourself up for success!

Watch your self-talk. Everyone has thoughts running through their minds all day long. Remember how busy your mind is, gathering information, categorizing and labeling it all, and trying to make sense of the world to keep you safe? Well, while your mind is up to all that, it is sending you thought after thought. Many of those thoughts are about yourself. Those thoughts, called *self-talk*, can be helpful or harmful.

Your self-talk might be encouraging, and if it is, bravo! Being your own cheerleader will take you very far in life. But there may be times, especially when addictive behaviors have been a part of your life, when your self-talk is negative, critical, and downright rude. As you learned in part 1 of this book, those thoughts influence your mood and behavior. Basically, they have a big influence over the course of your life. This comes into play in a big way when you are heading into a social environment or are already there, and thoughts that take away your confidence begin to pile up. Become a true expert at watching your thoughts and get that self-talk on the right track!

Exercise 9.9 Keep Track of Your Thoughts

Use the next form to keep track of your thoughts and build more positive self-talk. It would be wise to copy this worksheet so that you can use it again and again, but you can also work through this process step by step in your journal. You will rate the intensity of your feelings about the situation on a scale of 1 (least intense) to 10 (most intense).

Example

Situation: Going to a Halloween party, first party since I stopped drinking.

Thoughts (self-talk): This costume looks so stupid. Everyone is going to think I look ridiculous. No one will talk to me. It won't be any fun. What if I hate it?

Feelings: Anxious, nervous, afraid; uncomfortable in my skin, insecure, restless

Intensity of the feelings (1–10): 9

Self-encouraging thoughts to balance out negative self-talk: They invited me for a reason, so they must want me to come. Everyone looks kind of silly in Halloween costumes, and besides, it's not a beauty contest. If it really isn't fun, I can leave early. Steve is going. He knows I stopped drinking and has been really supportive. It won't kill me just to check it out; I might have fun!

Intensity of the feelings now (1–10): 4 (still nervous, but I feel a lot better)

Your Responses

Situation: _____

Thoughts (self-talk): _____

Feelings: _____

Intensity of the feelings (1–10): _____

Self-encouraging thoughts to balance out negative self-talk: _____

Intensity of the feelings now (1–10): _____

As well as practicing more-positive self-talk using the previous exercise, it would be a good idea to go back and do the exercises in chapter 2. The more you can understand your thoughts and what they are up to, the more control you will have over your moods and behaviors.

Conclusion

Congratulations on doing the hard work of focusing on your personal relationships! You have likely come across and coped with a broad range of feelings during the course of this chapter. Keep going; you are doing great! The next chapter is about taking your life in recovery to the next level of health, happiness, and well-being.

A Visit with the Gomez Family

Tony and Carmen have done a lot of challenging work so far in this workbook, but all of it seems almost easy compared to dealing with the challenges in their relationships!

Tony and Carmen each use the “Letter of Invitation” as a starting point. They fill it out in private and then choose a quiet night when Tina is at a friend’s house to read their letters aloud to each other. It’s awkward to speak directly to one another at first.

Tony feels especially uncomfortable; he notices himself feeling pretty choked up as he reads to Carmen about the kind of husband he wants to be for her. For a moment he considers announcing that this is a stupid thing to do and getting out of there. But he knows that’s only a cop-out, emotion dodging. That’s what he used to do. He wants a different life, a better life, so he chooses the opposite. He hangs in there, even when he has to stop and swallow hard between words. He allows himself to feel his feelings without running away, and the gifts he receives are well worth it: Carmen holds him tighter than he can remember being held before.

Carmen is less angry and guarded than she has been in years. She is determined to reach for Tony from her softer emotions as much as possible from now on. She begins to share with him here and there her feelings of hurt and fear. Carmen can tell immediately how differently Tony responds when she approaches him this way, instead of with anger or criticism. She practices her “I” statements and notices how differently her conversations go with friends and other family members too. In fact, Carmen is so struck by the differences healthy communication makes that she asks Tony if he is willing to find an emotionally focused therapist for couples counseling. Tony is somewhat resistant at first but says he will give it a

shot. They begin to work more consciously on their marriage and to experience the closeness they lost years ago.

The hardest thing of all is talking to Tina. Tony argues that Tina is too young for this stuff, and to a certain extent, Carmen agrees. To their surprise, when given a chance, Tina has plenty to say. She talks about how the house used to feel empty even when everyone was home at the same time. She tells stories of finding beer cans in strange places, of Carmen forgetting to pick her up from dance class and how when another mom drove her home, she'd found Carmen shopping online. Tina talks about A.J. and how she misses him. She talks about how A.J. was the one she would have talked to about all the scary things that had happened, but instead she is all alone.

When all of that comes out, Tony thanks God he has prepared for this conversation. He has memorized a few of the supportive feedback phrases from the book. When he feels overwhelmed, he is still able to say, "Keep going; tell us more." He tells his daughter, "We want to know how you feel. We are listening." Carmen holds his hand and squeezes it when he says that. Later on, she tells him how proud she is. As a family, they agree to do the "Commit to Quit Agreement" every morning before they leave the house. Tina seems reassured by this. She writes a copy of the script to keep on her bedside table.

Tina cries a lot during their conversation. She doesn't hide how she feels and doesn't push her parents away either. Tony and Carmen hold her, rub her back, and wipe her tears away. They congratulate their daughter on being brave, strong, and honest.

That night in bed, Carmen puts her head on Tony's chest the way she always used to. "She's really something, isn't she?" Carmen says. "If Tina can just keep being honest like that—I just hope she never tries to get rid of her feelings the way we did." Tony rubs Carmen's shoulder slowly. "If she does, we'll know what to do," he says. "We're finally figuring it out."

Chapter 10

Recovery, Relapse Prevention, and Beyond

There is no end to the opening up that is possible for a human being.

—Charlotte Joko Beck

In the last chapter, you got a chance to focus on your personal relationships. Building a strong support system around yourself is the foundation of long-term health and well-being. Now you will target other areas of your life that need your attention. Think of your recovery as something that needs your attention on a regular basis. This chapter will introduce you to your health as a way to prevent relapse into old behaviors. You will move beyond just surviving to thriving with a new sense of yourself and of your value. Of course, you'll read about other people who are slowly rebuilding their lives now that they have put down their addictions. Remember to read their stories as an observer. That's the best way to get good ideas about your own path to sustained recovery. Think about how you would handle another person's situation. You will look closely at five key areas of your continued health: nutrition, sleep, fitness, work, and fun. You will also get a chance to check in with the Gomez family to see how they are bringing healthy behaviors into their lives. Are you ready to conquer this next phase of your well-being?

- **Ryan's Story**

Ryan, a twenty-six-year-old assistant manager of a local grocery store and part-time student, is pretty proud of himself. He has managed to stay clean from marijuana for four

months. He thinks less and less about smoking pot these days. Going to meetings helps. He talks to his new friends from Narcotics Anonymous.

Next week is the anniversary of his father's death; Ryan can't believe it has been a year already. The past year was full of mistakes and numbing out with pot. Although he has been clean for four months, Ryan doesn't feel the way he wants to feel. He is still having trouble sleeping, and he gained thirty pounds from his crazy junk food diet. Ryan used to exercise regularly but stopped when he got depressed. He lost his motivation to take care of himself. But there's a part of him that really wants to get healthy again.

Ryan has been studying to be a vet tech, taking classes during the day and working the night shift at the grocery store. Six months after his father died, Ryan dropped out of school. The good news is that his school contacted him recently and asked if he was planning to return to finish his course work and internship. Being around animals reminds Ryan of his father, who loved animals and always had two dogs in the pickup truck with him. With the help of a counselor and using this workbook to understand his loss-addiction cycle, Ryan is ready to get back into his life in a new and healthy way.

Nutrition

As you might have guessed by now, you can stop your addictive behaviors and still feel lousy. When you were doing your addictive behavior, chances are you may not have been eating right. One area that needs your attention is what you eat on a regular basis. Making a plan for good nutrition puts you on the pathway of long-term recovery. It's no surprise that the better you eat, the better you will feel. The better you feel, the better chance you will have to deal with the feelings that may arise when you think about a loss from your past. Like Ryan, you may have gained weight from poor eating habits. A double cheeseburger, fries, and a large soda might have been the go-to comfort food when you were not feeling well. Ice cream, a box of cookies, and lots of candy bars may have relieved some tension in the short term. Now you can see that the short-term fixes turned into guilt and higher numbers on the scale. Maybe you have been thinking about a change in eating habits but don't know where to start. Lucky for you, with all the improvements you have been making since starting this workbook, you are in a good place to begin focusing on eating well.

As you begin to change your diet, there are three basic principles to keep in mind to get off to a good start. First, if overeating is your vice, eat in moderation. Yes, this means appropriate portions. Some people actually change the size of the plate. A smaller plate naturally limits your portion size. Second, stick to eating your meals at regular times. Eating at all different times or too late at night might have led to overeating in the past. Having your last meal four hours before you go to bed gives your body a chance to digest. Planning healthy and nutritious snacks for the day works wonders for keeping that sweet tooth at bay. Third, vary the kinds of food you eat. This means trying new foods, especially fruits and vegetables.

It's a good idea to talk to your physician or a nutritionist to help sort out your nutritional needs. This person may advise you to add vitamins or other supplements to your diet for the best nutrition. If you have never been to a nutritionist, would you be willing to make an appointment for an evaluation?

Ryan followed the advice of his doctor and went to see a nutritionist, who found that Ryan was drinking eight to ten sodas a day, starting first thing in the morning to get going. Ryan was asked to decrease sodas and increase his water intake throughout the day. Ryan didn't really know how to cook or put foods together. The nutritionist offered him healthy recipes and advised that he take a vitamin supplement to help him get back on track. After four weeks, Ryan was excited to have lost nine pounds. Even better, he felt that he had more energy, even without all the sodas!

Exercise 10.1 Food Journal

In the earlier chapters, you started keeping track of your behaviors and emotions. Now you will keep a record of your food intake for four weeks. Tracking your food intake will help give you a clear picture of what types of food and how much food you eat each week. You will be better able to notice your eating patterns. As you track your food intake, it will be interesting to see if you notice any changes in your mood, sleep, energy, or mental focus. Your food journal is also something you can bring with you to your first appointment with a nutritionist. Use the food journal below or track your weekly food intake in your own journal.

Food Journal

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Breakfast							
Snack							
Lunch							
Snack							
Dinner							

Sleep

Like Ryan at the start of the chapter, you may have struggled with sleep for some time. Having a drug or alcohol problem can seriously affect your sleep patterns. As you may have experienced, excessive worry or feelings of sadness also affect your sleep. Here you will learn a few ways to introduce healthy sleep back into your life. Remember to talk to your doctor if you notice real problems with your sleep.

The Harvard Medical School Division of Sleep Medicine (2009) (www.understandingsleep.org) outlines the following tips for improving your sleep. Review these good sleep habits to see if there are areas where you can make small changes for your overall health.

Avoid caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and other chemicals that interfere with sleep. Caffeine (found in coffee, tea, chocolate, colas, and pain relievers) is a stimulant that is designed to keep you awake. Ryan was drinking eight to ten caffeinated sodas every day, and noticed an improvement in his sleep when he decreased his soda intake and switched to drinking water. Would you be willing to avoid all caffeine products for four hours before bedtime? The same is true of nicotine (cigarettes, cigars, nicotine gum, and chewing tobacco). Don't smoke or use other nicotine products for four hours before bedtime. As for alcohol, you will likely be making changes to your alcohol use. This is good news because alcohol use decreases the quality of your sleep. Would you like to have deeper, more restful sleep?

Make your bedroom more sleep friendly. Bedrooms that are dark, quiet, and cool are better for inducing sleep. Is your bedroom as dark as it could be? If not, can you adjust your window blinds or add a layer of thick curtains to decrease outside light? Earplugs and sleep masks, sold at your local drugstore, do wonders to decrease sound and light. If your mattress or pillows are more than ten years old, it may be time to invest in new ones to help you sleep. And if your pets keep you up at night or wake you up early in the morning, you may want to put their beds outside the bedroom. Having lots of electronics in the bedroom can interfere with sleeping too. Take a look around your bedroom. Can you move TVs, or computers and other work items to another part of the house? The goal is to make your bedroom a sleep sanctuary for your long-term recovery.

Establish a calming presleep habit. If you are energized by the events of the day, you may need a routine to help you sleep. Reading a book or magazine before bed may better prepare you for sleep. Practicing one of the mindfulness exercises in this book may also help. If you are worried or anxious about a problem, use your journal to write down the problem, and then close the journal and put it away until the next day. Getting a good night's sleep may give you the edge you need to solve that pesky problem. Giving yourself permission to let go of today's worries to calm your mind is a healthy recovery step.

Go to bed when you are actually tired. If you are tossing and turning in your attempts to get to sleep, you'll probably get more annoyed than sleepy. The general rule is to get out of bed if you are not asleep after about twenty minutes. Find something relaxing to do and return to your bed when you feel sleepy again. For example, Ryan got out of bed when he encountered nights of tossing and

turning. He looked at his travel magazines; sometimes he imagined going on an African safari and taking photos of the animals. Ryan returned to bed more relaxed and better able to fall asleep.

Try rotating the face of your alarm clock away from your pillow. Have you ever found yourself staring at the clock in your bedroom? Doing this actually makes it more difficult to fall asleep. Turning your alarm clock away from you will keep you from being tempted to sneak a peek at the time. This tip was easy for Ryan; he just faced his alarm clock in the other direction. It made his bedroom feel darker and more relaxing. Ryan stopped worrying about the time every night and felt himself relaxing.

Take advantage of the natural light of each day. Make a habit of opening the blinds in your bedroom each morning. And no matter what you are scheduled to do during your day, make sure you get outside for a break and to reconnect with the natural light of the day. Ryan had a weird schedule, with classes all day and work at night. He made an attempt to get outside for ten minutes between classes to take advantage of the afternoon sunlight.

Allow yourself to have a regular sleep schedule. This will guarantee improvement in the quality of your sleep. The purpose is not to make you a boring person, but rather to set your body's "internal clock." This one was harder for Ryan since he worked the 2:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. shift at the grocery store. He decided to have an 11:30 p.m. bedtime and 7:30 a.m. wake-up time for four weeks to see how it felt. Ryan was surprised that he was able to keep that schedule and get some quality sleep. Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day sets the body's "internal clock" to expect sleep at a certain time night after night. Try to stick as closely as possible to your routine on weekends to avoid a Monday-morning sleep hangover. Waking up at the same time each day is the very best way to set your internal clock, even if you did not sleep well the night before.

Drink enough water to prevent dehydration. You want to drink enough water to avoid waking up thirsty, but make sure to have that water well before your bedtime. This way you won't be awakened by the need to go to the bathroom. Ryan was already drinking more water ever since he saw the nutritionist. He felt he had this one covered.

You'll feel better when you exercise. Did you know that exercising a number of hours before your bedtime actually helps you get restful sleep? Exercise may help you get to sleep more quickly and get you into a deeper sleep. The key is to work out earlier in your day or to end your workout at least three hours before bedtime. Ryan didn't believe that exercise would really help him get better sleep. But he tracked his progress on the "Sleep Improvement Worksheet" (next) and was able to see how exercise affected his sleep. Remember to talk to your physician before you take on a new exercise program. The next section of this chapter focuses specifically on exercise and how to jump-start your exercise program.

For these sleep tips to work for you, the most important thing is to stick with it. Give yourself four weeks to try one or more of these tips. Use the following "Sleep Improvement Worksheet" to jot down which tips you plan to commit to for four weeks. Write down your start date on the worksheet; this way you can track your improvements.

Exercise 10.2 Sleep Improvement Worksheet

In this table, adapted from information provided by the Harvard Medical School Division of Sleep Medicine (2009) (www.understandingsleep.org), write a check mark next to the sleep improvement activities you plan to use. Jot down the date you plan to begin the activity to improve your sleep. In the “Better Sleep Report” column, write down any changes to your sleep that you have noticed. Even small changes are worth noting. Remember, if you need more space, use your journal to track your sleep improvement.

✓	Sleep Improvement Activity	Start Date	Better Sleep Report
	<i>I will avoid caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and other chemicals that get in the way of my sleep.</i>		
	<i>I will turn my bedroom into a sleep-friendly environment.</i>		
	<i>I will start a calming presleep habit.</i>		
	<i>I will go to sleep when I really am tired.</i>		
	<i>I won't watch my alarm clock.</i>		
	<i>I will take advantage of the light each day.</i>		
	<i>I will get on a regular sleep schedule.</i>		
	<i>I will balance my fluid intake, and drink more water.</i>		
	<i>I will exercise earlier in the day.</i>		

Exercise 10.3 Sleep Journal

Keep track of your bedtime and wake time for four weeks. Track the total hours you sleep each night. Also keep a record of how often you wake during the night and the number of caffeine drinks you consume each day. Remember to make extra copies of this worksheet or use your journal to track your sleep each night.

Sleep Journal

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Bedtime							
Wake time							
Total hours of sleep							
Number of times I woke up during the night							
Number of caffeine drinks I had							

Fitness

Chances are that, like Ryan, you have thought about starting to exercise again or just improving your fitness routine. Well, you are in good company. People who exercise regularly report feeling better and improving their overall recovery. In fact, regular exercise is a great way to reduce the anxiety and depression that sometimes go along with addiction. In *Principles of Addiction Medicine*,

James O. Prochaska (2009) reports that “physical activity helps manage moods, stress, and distress. Also, sixty minutes per week of exercise can provide a recovering person with more than fifty health and mental health benefits.” Physical activity can help your body get rid of stress and tension by boosting your immune system, which has been worn down by worry and sadness for a long time. Exercise creates a lasting positive effect on your mood and your recovery.

When you start or improve your fitness in this next stage of your life, your body and brain actually build new connections. Your ability to deal with stress and cope will improve, and so will your self-esteem. Many recovery centers that include physical activity in their treatment plans notice that exercise is a healthy replacement for compulsive habits. Exercise might even reduce any cravings you have. There’s a good chance that your exercise program can replace the same pleasurable physical experience that your addictive behavior once gave you. Keep in mind that if you decide to join an exercise group, you may notice even more benefits. You will not only have the added benefit of having to account to the team, but also the built-in encouragement from your team members for you to show up and work out. You may be more likely to work out in a team sport, and others may readily notice your results. Keeping up with your fitness may greatly decrease the risk of relapse into old addictive behaviors. So, there are both short-term and long-term benefits to committing to your exercise program.

Some exercises, like yoga, tai chi, Pilates, and martial arts, teach you new skills while improving your health. Physical and mental skills that include balance, flexibility, and patience are exactly what recovery from addiction is all about. You may find that these exercises improve the mindfulness skills you learned in previous chapters. Or you may find that the mindfulness skills have made you ready to start the new journey of trying these different types of exercise. Be prepared to improve your own mind-body connection. These exercises not only help you in your recovery from alcohol and drug problems, but also give you support in recovery from other challenges, like food, pornography, and shopping addictions. Basically, you will be rewiring your brain and body to decrease stress and increase healthy behaviors. Would you be willing to try one of these new forms of exercise and see how you feel? Use the following exercise journal to track your progress. Remember to check with your doctor before starting any fitness program if you have been inactive for a long or even short time.

As you begin or restart your exercise program, you may soon notice that exercise unites your mind and body by turning on your internal motivation to be healthier. You may notice a renewed sense of self-reliance and self-awareness. The purpose of this tool and the other recovery tools is to help you build the ability to gather strength from your thoughts, emotions, and body. What would it be like to have more mental and physical strength and stamina? Take a moment to reflect on where you are now as to your fitness level and goals. Visualize yourself following through with your goals. How does it feel to take an exercise class, join a team sport, or start a walking routine? This is the feeling you can have on a regular basis with a little motivation. Commit to your goals, and the results will be yours!

Exercise 10.4 Exercise Journal

Keep track of your exercise routines for four weeks. Track what exercise you did and the total number of hours you spent exercising. Try different types of exercise, especially alternative exercises like yoga, tai chi, and Pilates. Draw a star (*) next to any new type of exercise you attempt each week. Also keep a record of how you feel that day using the following simple scale from 1 to 5. Feel free to make copies of this worksheet or use your journal to track your exercise.

1 = not feeling well

2 = feeling average

3 = feeling above average

4 = feeling very good

5 = feeling excellent

Exercise Journal

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Type of exercise							
Time spent exercising	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.
My mood							

Ryan was surprised when he looked back over his exercise journal. On the days when he exercised, he rated his mood as 4 or 5. He felt very good or excellent on the days when he exercised. His gym had a martial arts class that he started a few weeks ago. Ryan rated his mood as 5 on those days. Things were starting to make sense for Ryan. Knowing how exercise affects your mood is empowering. It reinforces the effort you are putting into your routine. The more good-mood days you can have, the better your chances for long-term recovery and wellness. Good work so far!

Work

Most people don't think of work as a way to stay healthy. You may have a stressful job or one where you do not feel valued. These days, you may be doing the work of more than one person due to layoffs. You may have recently become unemployed. Or, you may be underemployed, working at a job that is below your skill and education level. There's a chance that since you have been using mindfulness skills, you have renewed energy for your job. Or you may feel that now is a good time to look for other work or branch out into a new field. The purpose of this section is to help you refresh your connection to the job that you currently have. If you are looking for work, think of that as a full-time job, and use the following skills as you look for a job. It's like pressing the reset button on your computer. It's the same computer, but you have a newfound respect for how it works once the reset button is pushed.

How to Make Work Feel Less Like Work

You might find that you spend more time at work than at home. You may spend more time with coworkers than your own family. If this is true, then finding a new way to relate to your work could be just what you need as you continue your recovery. We provide eight strategies that you can use to make your work feel less like work. Once you read about these eight strategies, you can decide which ones make the most sense to you. A checklist of these strategies is provided so that you can note when you plan to start using them in your workday. This way, you can begin to create the new you that fits the work that you do. Are you ready to put some of these practices to work?

Pace yourself. Your work life most likely consists of a fast-paced environment with a big to-do list. There are deadlines and assignments that call for your attention. What would it be like to slow down, breathe, and work at your own tempo? If you need to take a break, give yourself permission to do so. Getting out of your chair and walking around may be the ticket to better, more targeted productivity. Remember, getting outside for ten minutes of natural light does wonders for your mood. Give it a try.

Suspend judgment. Chances are you are pretty hard on yourself when it comes to work. This new way of working requires you to be kinder to yourself. Less self-criticism may free you up to focus on your work in a new way. It's like feeling the warmth of the sun after days of gloomy weather. There is a lightness that takes over you and your mind. This is the perfect environment for getting back to the task at hand.

Brain food is allowed. Earlier in the chapter, you reviewed the importance of nutrition for optimal recovery. Well, good nutrition is also important to how you feel at work each day. Of course, you may have relied on coffee or sugar in the past to get you over that afternoon hump. Now, you will

be introducing the concept of eating well for your workday success. Now is the time to put into practice the new food choices you have been thinking about trying.

Change your mind. Negative beliefs about work may have been the norm in the past. You may even have coworkers who bring a cloud of negativity to the workplace each day. You won't be able to change your coworkers' negative attitudes, but you can certainly change your own attitude. Use one of the mindfulness practices from chapters 4 and 8 to calm your mind at work. It's possible to change your mind with a little practice. Add a positive message to your desk or workstation. A favorite is "Love what you do." Print this phrase and tape it to your computer or work area. Take a glance at it every day or many times a day.

Be imperfect. You have probably been taught your whole life that things have to be absolutely perfect. Well, it might be time to try a different approach. Instead of beating yourself up to make things perfect, be imperfect. The point is to do the task at hand to the best of your ability, and then take a break from it. You can always go back and take another look at it. Give yourself a chance to go back to the task with a fresh outlook and a calm mind.

Follow your intuition. When you are struggling at work to complete an assignment or make a deadline, it's easy to lose track of your intuition. Intuition is your gut feeling about something. Your intuition is an important guide in deciding what to do, especially what to do next. Listening to your intuition will naturally provide you that calm guidance to finish your tasks.

Erase distractions. Distractions are the number-one time killer. Distractions at work can really derail you and waste precious time and resources. Make an effort to notice when you are distracted, and bring yourself back to the task. Notice your feelings and thoughts about the task. Accept the thoughts and feelings as a normal part of work, and refocus on the task. You may need to do this many times a day until it becomes natural.

Return to mindfulness practice. Last but not least, use your mindfulness tools at work every day. Starting your workday with a five-minute mindfulness meditation can set the stage for a productive day. Take a break at lunch and do another short mindfulness exercise. The more you can weave mindfulness into your workday, the greater the chance your day will flow—and the less it will feel like work.

Give yourself the opportunity to practice these eight techniques and jot down how your workday changes.

Exercise 10.5 Work as a Gift

In the middle column, check which methods you are willing to try to improve your workday. In the right-hand column, note the date you plan to start using that method. Once you set your date, you are on your way to trying new tools at your workplace. Remember, these tools support your recovery and help you to build long-term emotional health. Don't forget to use your journal to jot down improvements you notice at work

Eight ways to make work seem less like work	<i>I'm willing to try this</i> ✓	<i>Date I will start this</i>
<i>I will pace myself.</i>		
<i>I will suspend judgment.</i>		
<i>I will eat foods that are good for my brain.</i>		
<i>I will change my negative beliefs.</i>		
<i>I will be imperfect.</i>		
<i>I will follow my intuition.</i>		
<i>I will erase distractions.</i>		
<i>I will return to mindful practice.</i>		

Good job at bringing a little calm to your workday world. Keep this checklist at your desk or workstation to remind you of how you can enjoy your work more. Now you will switch gears to focus a little more on fun. What a great way to balance your recovery!

Ryan decided to pace himself at work in the grocery store. Instead of trying to get everything done as soon as he arrived for his shift, he focused on his breathing and his mood. He found that he enjoyed work more. He got along better with his coworkers. Ryan's positive attitude was spreading to the other workers on the night shift. For the first time, Ryan looked forward to going to

work. He didn't need to smoke pot to numb his feelings anymore. Ryan was invested in his job and his goals, and it felt great.

Fun

Let's face it, there was probably a time when fun came naturally to you. Like many folks who have been addicted to a substance or a harmful behavior, you may have found that fun was intimately linked to drinking, doing drugs, or engaging in some other harmful behavior. Now, without those old behaviors, you have to figure out exactly how to have fun again. This is surprisingly harder than it should be. It might even feel weird to think about having fun when you have just experienced a loss or remembered a significant past loss. Are people allowed to have fun after experiencing a loss? What would it feel like to have fun and joy in your life again? The playful parts of you are still there, just waiting for permission to show themselves.

Improving your mood and recovery comes from increasing the activities that you find enjoyable. Engaging in enjoyable activities may be another way to decrease your stress levels. Since you have most likely not engaged in pleasant activities in some time, the best strategy is to actually schedule the pleasant activity. It's easy to just say, "That's a good idea. I'll do that *later*." Scheduling the event holds you accountable to creating your own joy right now.

One way to figure out what's fun for you is to take a look at the following list of pleasant activities. Most of them are simple things that you may have liked to do in the past but have forgotten about, and most are free or very low cost. Also, you can do most of them in a short time. The main message here is that the activity has to be enjoyable to *you*, not something you think you *should* do. It may take you a few tries to find the thing that you enjoy now. If you try something and find it less than enjoyable, choose something else right away. One pleasant activity a day is the best way to start this new positive habit. Don't give up on your joyful recovery.

Exercise 10.6 Pleasant Activities List

On the left side of this worksheet is a list of pleasant activities. Take a moment to look at the list. On the right side of the worksheet is a space to check off whether you *enjoy* the activity. Once you have gone through the list, go back and fill in the date you plan to start the activity. The list is not in any particular order. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list of fun activities. There may be things that you like to do that are not listed here. Space is provided for you to write in five other pleasurable activities that may be helpful in your recovery.

Pleasant activity	<i>I enjoy this activity ✓</i>	<i>Date I will start this activity</i>
<i>Go for a drive.</i>		
<i>Ride a bike.</i>		
<i>Rearrange a room.</i>		
<i>Clean my office.</i>		
<i>Take a dance class.</i>		
<i>Go to a park.</i>		
<i>Learn a musical instrument.</i>		
<i>Volunteer at a local organization.</i>		
<i>Help a neighbor.</i>		
<i>Go to the movies.</i>		
<i>Do artwork.</i>		
<i>Go to the local gardens.</i>		
<i>Go downtown.</i>		
<i>Take time to meditate or sit quietly.</i>		
<i>Go to a concert.</i>		
<i>Plan a vacation.</i>		
<i>Read an inspirational story.</i>		
<i>Wear clothes I like.</i>		
<i>Take a bath.</i>		
<i>Read a book or magazine.</i>		

<i>Go out to hear a lecture.</i>		
<i>Listen to relaxing music.</i>		
<i>Cook for a friend.</i>		
<i>Do the dishes.</i>		
<i>Work on my car.</i>		
<i>Finish an assignment.</i>		
<i>Go to church or temple.</i>		
<i>Play a board game.</i>		
<i>Start to learn another language.</i>		
<i>Complete a puzzle or crossword.</i>		
<i>Bake cookies.</i>		
<i>Go to a meeting.</i>		
<i>Do yard work.</i>		
<i>Play with my pet.</i>		
<i>Soak up the sunshine.</i>		
<i>Join a sports team.</i>		
<i>Visit someone who is sick.</i>		
<i>Visit a museum.</i>		
<i>Give someone a gift.</i>		
<i>Watch sports.</i>		
<i>Go to a comedy club.</i>		
<i>Get a massage.</i>		
<i>Go to the local zoo.</i>		
<i>Plan a celebration.</i>		
<i>Go out to take photographs.</i>		
<i>Donate blood.</i>		
<i>Talk to a friend or family member on the phone.</i>		
<i>Allow myself to daydream.</i>		

<i>Renew my financial goals.</i>		
<i>Do odd jobs around my home.</i>		
<i>Go to a new restaurant.</i>		
<i>Get up early in the morning.</i>		
<i>Volunteer at my local animal shelter.</i>		
<i>Write in my journal.</i>		
<i>Go for a swim.</i>		
<i>Read the newspaper and comics.</i>		
<i>Go for a walk around the neighborhood.</i>		
<i>Be with someone I love.</i>		
<i>Play catch with a kid.</i>		
<i>Walk barefoot.</i>		
<i>Start a new project.</i>		
<i>Sit outside and people-watch.</i>		
<i>Gaze at the fireplace.</i>		
<i>Sell my items that I no longer need, or take them to charity.</i>		
<i>Write a letter.</i>		
<i>Window-shop.</i>		
<i>Take care of my houseplants.</i>		
<i>Go outside at night to look at the stars.</i>		
<i>Say hello to three new people.</i>		
<i>Go to a garage sale.</i>		

Great job! Remember to schedule your pleasant activity into your week. You are in charge of your enjoyment!

Ryan took a look at the “Pleasant Activities List” and smiled to himself. He checked quite a few of them. He was especially excited to visit a museum. He was fascinated by African art and wanted to learn more. A friend told him about an exhibit of African art and culture at the local museum. Ryan jumped at the chance to go and asked his friend to join him. Even better, on Tuesdays admission was free at the museum. Ryan completed his pleasant activity and felt happy. He thought to himself, *I bet my dad would have been proud of me for following my passion.* He went over the “Pleasant Activities List” again and looked for the next thing he could do in the coming week. Ryan was able to use some of the tools to move forward in his recovery. Which tools will you add into your life to support your success!

Conclusion

Congratulations for choosing to improve one or more of the five key areas of life discussed in this chapter. Improving your nutrition, getting better sleep, increasing your exercise, enjoying your work, and adding more pleasant activities are the keys to continuing your successful recovery. Acknowledge yourself for the accomplishments you have made. Remember, the mindfulness skills you learned and practiced throughout this workbook have set the stage for your ongoing success. The decisions you make now will help you to further your recovery and increase your sense of well-being in the future. There’s a list of resources in the back of this workbook to choose from as you continue on your journey. Pick one topic that you have had some success with and take it to the next level. Or choose a topic that’s still a challenge for you and choose one of the books listed there to give the topic another try from a new perspective. You are well on your way to achieving your goals and dreams!

A Visit with the Gomez Family

Tony and Carmen Gomez have come a long way in their journey by the time they get to this chapter. They have each developed strong mindfulness skills, awareness of their losses, and understanding of their addictive behaviors. They can see the connections among their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. With this understanding, they each begin to be mindful of their thoughts, accepting of their feelings, and conscious of their behaviors. They focus on living according to their values. Tony and Carmen then use these skills as a foundation for the challenging work of healing and enhancing their important relationships. Their next step is to build on this foundation even further by embracing a new, healthy lifestyle that will increase their sense of well-being in recovery.

Carmen starts keeping a food journal and notices strong changes in her mood and energy level based on what she eats. A better focus on her nutrition, coupled with increased devotion to her yoga practice, leaves Carmen feeling healthier than she has felt in years. This feeling of health makes it easier for her to cope with stressors that come up. It gives Carmen even more solid footing as she walks the road of recovery from her grief and addictive behaviors.

Tony decides to focus on his fitness. He uses the exercise journal to keep track of the changes he makes, including weight training twice a week and jogging three mornings a week. He isn't too thrilled about yoga or Pilates, but takes a couple of classes to give them a try. He finds that being on the move helps to clear his mind. His stress falls away and his mood improves. Tony even notices that he is losing some weight and gaining muscle tone—a nice bonus to the psychological benefits he has been striving for.

Carmen and Tony agree to work together to create a calming presleep routine. They want to sleep and wake up as close to the same time as possible every day to set their internal clocks, so they turn their alarm clock away from the bed to keep from checking the time during the night. Tony had often used alcohol to help him sleep because he used to toss and turn a lot. Now Tony finds himself very relaxed before bedtime after using the techniques suggested in this book. While trapped in her addiction, Carmen stayed up until all hours of the morning looking for things to buy on the Internet. Now she is creating a healthy sleep routine and feeling better than ever.

Tony and Carmen finish their workbooks just in time for spring. Carmen has saved enough money to buy Tina a new dress for Easter, with matching shoes. Carmen's heart swells when she sees her bright, sweet daughter and how happy she is these days. Even Tina's school counselor calls to tell Tony and Carmen what a difference she has seen in Tina. Tony and Carmen hold each other for a while after hanging up the phone. They let themselves feel the rush of gratitude, pride, and relief, all blended with the heartache of what their family has been through.

At Easter services, the Gomez family listens to words of hope. It is a day of rebirth, a day for new beginnings. Tony puts one arm around his daughter and one around his wife. He knows they are missing A.J. today, feeling that loss. They will not run from it. They will walk through it together, with all their love for A.J. in their hearts. Later, before dinner, they will look at the old family photographs. They will remember A.J. and the wonderful moments they shared with him. Tony will not drink over this; Carmen will not shop online. They will live this day together, present and open to all the feelings that the day holds. Addiction will not steal them from their lives or from their daughter.

It has been a long journey: a journey of recovery that Tony and Carmen will keep traveling for years to come. But somehow, they know now, it is going to be all right. Tony and Carmen are coming back to life.

Resources for Your Journey

Alcohol and Drug Addiction

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Useful Websites

Al-Anon: www.al-anon.org/www.al-anon.alateen.org

Alcoholics Anonymous: www.aa.org

Domestic violence: www.thehotline.org

Families Anonymous: familiesanonymous.org

Gamblers Anonymous: www.gamblersanonymous.org

Grief Loss Recovery—Hope and Health through Creative Grieving: www.recover-from-grief.com

The International Conference of Young People in Alcoholics Anonymous: www.icypaa.org

Intervention Workshop: www.interventionworkshop.com

Marijuana Anonymous: www.marijuana-anonymous.org

Nar-Anon: www.nar-anon.org

Narcotics Anonymous: www.na.org

National Institute on Drug Abuse: www.drugabuse.gov

NIDA for Teens: The Science Behind Drug Abuse: www.teens.drugabuse.gov

Overeaters Anonymous: www.oa.org

Sex Addicts Anonymous: saa-recovery.org

Sexaholics Anonymous: www.sa.org

Shopaholics Anonymous: www.shopaholicsanonymous.org

Workaholics Anonymous: www.workaholics-anonymous.org

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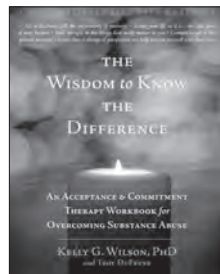
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Rebecca E. Williams, PhD, is a clinical psychologist specializing in recovery from mental illness and addictions. She received her master's degree from Harvard University and her PhD from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She is currently the director of the Veterans Affairs San Diego Healthcare System's Wellness and Vocational Enrichment Clinic. In addition, she is an associate clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego, an adjunct faculty member at the University of San Diego, and coauthor of *Couple Therapy for Alcoholism*. She has a psychotherapy practice in San Diego, CA.

Julie S. Kraft, MA, received her master's degree in marriage and family therapy from the University of San Diego's School of Leadership and Education Sciences. She has provided counseling to veterans and their family members at the Veterans Affairs San Diego Healthcare System and has provided psychotherapy to individuals, couples, families, and groups in community settings. In her current position with Sharp HealthCare, she treats clients struggling with both addiction and mental health concerns. She lives and works in San Diego, CA.

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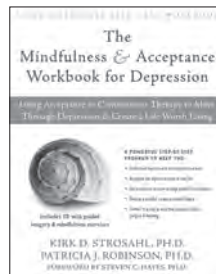


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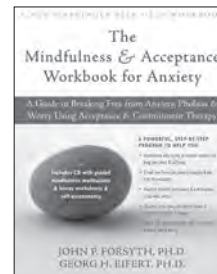


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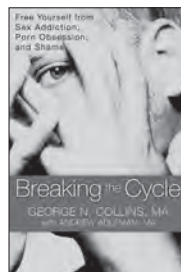


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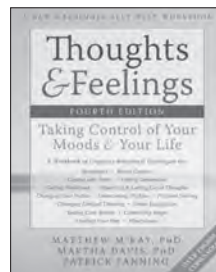


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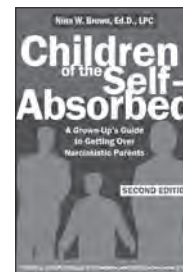


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