



RECOVERY IN FOCUS · GROUP CURRICULUM · FACILITATOR GUIDE

The Comparison Trap

Social comparison, shame, and the fair measurement. Four parts, two group classes.

Topic category (billing anchor)	Emotional Regulation / Relapse Prevention
Clinical focus	Comparison-driven shame as a relapse pathway; cognitive reframing, environmental curation, and evidence-based self-appraisal as relapse prevention
Evidence base	CBT (cognitive distortions, evidence gathering) · social-comparison research · Relapse Prevention
Format	One participant packet · two group classes of about 2 hours each · Class 1 = Parts 1–2 · Class 2 = Parts 3–4
Group rules	2 to 12 clients, same time · at least 1 active Medi-Cal beneficiary · no minors mixed with adults

This file: facilitator guide

class agendas, milestone-math guardrail, FIRP

Companion file: participant packet (print one per member)

4 parts · 8 exercises · 1 vignette · proof list · fair measurement

FACILITATOR GUIDE

How to run this session

- **WALK-IN NOTE (\$A10):** the session opens on ancient human equipment, not on social media; the feed arrives in Part 2 as the modern pool. Keep your opening phone-free.
- **LINK:** the deepest-cutting comparisons (Exercise 2) match across members constantly: the sibling, the classmates, the former self. Link them; "the former self" comparison especially deserves naming as the room's most common and most brutal.
- **WATCH THE ROOM'S OWN TRAP:** this group can start comparing recoveries mid-session about comparison. Name it live when it happens; it's the best teaching moment the topic can hand you.
- **LAND IT CLINICALLY:** the chain (comparison, shame, "what's the point," drinking and using as the hiding place) is the spine; Nina's sponsor question is the counter-move.
- **TALK PLAIN:** this packet was rewritten in plain language after field testing; use its exact wording (the fair measurement, the proof list) and do not improvise metaphors on top of it.

Mixed-functioning group adjustments

- Read everything aloud; the proof-list items can be spoken and scribed.
- Lower-functioning rooms: run the whole session on catching comparisons, the bottom-to-today measurement, and five proof items.

GUARDRAILS

Milestone math: the packet names recovery-ranking as a trap; enforce it in the room. Clean-time differences are never leverage in this group. **The former-self comparison:** members grieving who they were before (especially after losses to health, custody, or years) can drop fast; validate the grief, then route to the bottom-to-today measurement, and offer individual follow-up where it's heavy.

Shame spirals: this session borrows Hard Emotions' territory; if a member's shame sentence turns global and dark, same-day check-in, 988 on the shelf as always.

HOOK SOURCE NOTE: automatic comparison (even when instructed otherwise, even to irrelevant targets) is standard social-comparison research; present as "studies find." Social-media comparison associating with worse mood and self-evaluation is well replicated; keep it directional. Shame-to-hiding is the same research base cited in Hard Emotions.

CLASS 1 Parts 1 and 2 (about 2 hours)

Opening (10 min)

Frame: *"We all measure ourselves against other people in private. This session covers why that measuring is unfair, what it does to recovery, and the one fair way to measure."* Icebreaker: "Without naming them, how old were you when you first lost a comparison that stuck?" The ages land young; note it: the trap predates the phone.

Part 1: Everyone Compares (40 to 50 min)

Teach (5 min or less): comparison as automatic (the hook); comparing up and comparing down; path vs verdict as the live variable; recovery-ranking named as the in-room version.

PLAIN "Who do you measure yourself against most?"

DEEPER "When you compare up, what decides whether it reads as a path or a verdict?"

- **Exercise 1** (yes/no): item 3 (recovery-ranking) gets honest hands if you raise yours first where true.
- **Exercise 2** (comparing habits): go around on the deepest cut; link the matches; flag the former-self answers gently for Part 4's measurement.

Part 2: Why Modern Comparison Is Unfair (45 to 55 min)

Teach (5 min or less): a hundred known people with bad days vs thousands of strangers' filtered peaks; the app sorts for whatever keeps people scrolling; knowing it's unfair doesn't stop the comparing but changes what losing means; members choose what their feed shows them.

- **Exercise 3** (yes/no): item 2 (posted a highlight on a terrible day) is the self-incriminating laugh that proves the whole lesson; let it land.
- **Exercise 4** (choose what you look at): mutes named aloud and done in the room where members want witnesses; the motivating follow balances it.

Close Class 1 with the talk-it-out questions. Assign: catch three comparisons this week; just tally them, no fixing.

CLASS 2**Parts 3 and 4 (about 2 hours)**

Opening (10 min)

Check in: what did the tally show? Counts in the dozens are normal; the equipment runs all day.

Part 3: Comparison, Shame, and Relapse (50 to 60 min)

Teach (5 min or less): the three-step chain (comparison, shame, hiding = using); "what's the point" as the warning thought; the counter is refusing the comparison itself, not denying the gap.

- **Exercise 5** (my chain): model one on the board first; go around on the earliest break point.
- **Nina vignette + Exercise 6:** read aloud. The sponsor's question is the tool; question 3 (what would you have given at your worst) is the session's centerpiece, and the answers deserve the room's full silence. Collect several aloud; expect tears; they're the good kind.

Part 4: The Fair Measurement (45 to 55 min)

Teach (5 min or less): the three habits: measure backward (you at your worst to you today), keep written proof instead of feelings, and tell one person your real progress regularly.

- **Exercise 7** (how far you have come): five proof items written by everyone; one read aloud per member around the room. Insist on concrete; coach "I'm doing better" into "I've made rent four straight months."
- **Exercise 8** (yes/no): item 2 names each member's progress-sharing partner; connect the unpartnered before they leave.
- **Skill of the day:** catch it and correct it, daily, with one proof item attached. Promise the check-in.

Close with the group questions and the summary read aloud.

FIRP scaffold (one note per member, per class)

Class 1. Focus: member's emotional-regulation / relapse-prevention objective, plus today's topic: social comparison and its shame pathway as relapse risk. **Intervention:** *Educated group on automatic social comparison, upward/downward dynamics, and the curated-media distortion of comparison targets; facilitated identification of each member's primary comparison targets and their emotional impact; guided environmental curation of comparison inputs; addressed within-recovery comparison norms; linked members' patterns and processed responses.* **Response:** individualize. **Plan:** tally comparison events for one week; return for Class 2.

Class 2. Focus: same objective, plus today's topic: the comparison-shame-relapse chain and evidence-based self-appraisal. **Intervention:** *Reviewed self-monitoring tallies; guided each member through tracing a personal comparison-to-shame chain with identification of the earliest interruption point and the "what's the point" warning cognition; facilitated vignette analysis demonstrating perspective reframing; guided construction of a concrete progress list (baseline point plus five verifiable gains) and identification of a regular disclosure partner; assigned daily comparison-correction practice with evidence statements.* **Response:** individualize, including proof-item specificity; document any dark-shame routing. **Plan:** daily practice with report-back; monthly progress-sharing established; individual follow-up where indicated.

COMPLIANCE NOTES: 2 to 12 clients, same time; at least one active Medi-Cal beneficiary; no one 17 or under mixed with adults (outside a certified school site). Facilitator: licensed/registered clinician or certified/registered AOD counselor, in scope. Participant list each class; one note per member per class with attendance plus that member's specific response, provider-signed, finalized within 3 business days (service day counts as day 0), tied to that member's problem list or objective. Land every segment on the substance-use and relapse link.