



RECOVERY IN FOCUS · GROUP CURRICULUM · FACILITATOR GUIDE

Coping Skills That Stick

A coping-skills session built around live practice and repetition. Four parts, two group classes.

Topic category (billing anchor)	Coping Skills / Craving Management, with Relapse Prevention
Clinical focus	Replacing substance-based and maladaptive coping with rehearsed, body-based and cognitive coping skills for craving and distress, directly reducing relapse risk
Evidence base	CBT · DBT-informed distress tolerance · Relapse Prevention (Marlatt, urge management)
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, live-practice protocol, FIRP

Companion file: participant packet (print one per member)

4 parts · 11 exercises · 2 vignettes · 7 skills practiced live

FACILITATOR GUIDE

How to run this session

- **THIS IS A DOING GROUP.** At least a third of each class is live practice, done together, with before/after tension ratings collected out loud. A described skill is not a taught skill. If you only have time for discussion or practice, cut discussion.
- **LINK:** connect members over what worked and what didn't. "Cold water did nothing for Jess but dropped Mike three points" is the lesson: kits are personal.
- **NORMALIZE FLOPS:** a skill that does nothing for a member is data, not failure. Nobody leaves with a skill they secretly know they'll never use.
- **LAND IT CLINICALLY:** every segment ties to craving and relapse: the substance was the best-rehearsed coping skill they had, and these reps are how something else wins the race.

Mixed-functioning group adjustments

- Live practice is the great equalizer here; every functioning level can do the Body Four. Lean on practice more, worksheets less, for lower-functioning rooms.
- Read exercises aloud; writing optional; a peer or you can mark tables for a member.
- For the tape-forward exercise, model one on the board first using the Alex vignette.

PRACTICE GUARDRAILS

Breathing and grounding can occasionally surface panic or trauma responses in a flooded member. Keep practice invitational ("do what your body allows"), keep eyes-open options available, and if someone gets activated, ground with them one-on-one after. Temperature skill: describe in session, practice at home; don't run a cold-water line to the restroom. Burn-off: offer seated options (chair push-ups, fast arm pumps) so mobility differences don't exclude anyone.

HOOK SOURCE NOTE: "the thinking brain goes offline under stress" reflects standard findings on prefrontal impairment under acute stress. "Name it to tame it" reflects affect-labeling research (naming an emotion reduces amygdala response). "You fall to what you've practiced" is a training adage, not a study; present it as such. Conversation starters, not testimony.

CLASS 1 Parts 1 and 2 (about 2 hours)

Opening (10 min)

Frame: "Everyone here has been handed coping skills before. This session covers why they disappear right when you need them, and how to build two that won't." Icebreaker go-around: "Name a coping skill

you've been told to use and never once used." Expect laughter; that list is the problem this session solves.

Part 1: Why Skills Fail (35 to 45 min)

Teach (5 min or less): paper skills vs body skills; state-dependent learning in plain words; addiction was a body skill with years of reps, so recovery skills need reps to compete.

PLAIN "Have you ever known what to do and not been able to do it?"

DEEPER "In your worst moments, what skill actually shows up uninvited? What does that say about what's had the most reps?"

- **Exercise 1** (yes/no): quick go-around on item 1; every hand goes up, and that shared experience sets the night's purpose.
- **Exercise 2** (coping inventory): process "the one I reach for first." Both columns get named without judgment; unhealthy coping works short-term, which is why it persists. Say that out loud.
- **Exercise 3** (written): keep shares at the body level; the point is what flooding feels like, not the story details.

Part 2: The Body Four (60 to 70 min, mostly practice)

Teach (3 min): flooded brains don't hear words, so body skills come first. Then practice, one at a time, whole group, ratings collected aloud after each:

- **Long exhale:** five breaths, you count the exhales slowly.
- **Temperature:** describe the protocol; members commit to trying it at home tonight and rating it next class.
- **Burn-off:** two minutes, member's choice: fast laps of the room, wall push-ups, chair options. Expect energy and laughter; that's the skill working.
- **5-4-3-2-1:** run it around the room, each member naming one item per sense.
- **Exercise 4** (ratings table): collect the numbers out loud; link members over matches and mismatches. The mismatch lesson: kits are personal.
- **Tyler vignette + Exercise 5:** read aloud. Question 2 carries the whole session: the second letter went differently because of reps, not courage.

Close Class 1 with the talk-it-out questions, and assign: practice your best body skill daily at one anchor; try temperature once at home.

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

Opening (10 min)

Check in: who did reps this week, at what anchor, and did temperature move anyone's number? Billable skill reinforcement with follow-through modeled.

Part 3: The Mind Three (50 to 60 min)

Teach (5 min or less): once the body comes down a notch, thinking skills can reach you: name it to tame it, play the tape forward, the ten-minute delay. Cravings crest and pass; delay is how you let one.

- **Exercise 6** (yes/no): item 2 go-around ("talked myself into something in under ten minutes that cost me months") lands the delay skill better than any lecture.
- **Exercise 7** (play your tape): model Alex's tape on the board first, then members write their own. Volunteers read their "tomorrow morning" line aloud; that line is the vaccine.
- **Alex vignette + Exercise 8:** read aloud. Walk the order: name it, tape it, delay with busy hands. Question 3 maps members' pump-three locations, which doubles as trigger identification.
- **Pair practice:** in pairs, one member describes a craving moment, the other coaches them through name-tape-delay. Switch. (Facilitator-led walk-through if pairing won't fly.)

Part 4: Making Them Stick (40 to 50 min)

Teach (5 min or less): pick two not seven; habit stacking in plain words; teaching a skill doubles retention.

- **Exercise 9** (my two): each member states their two aloud, with why they fit. Challenge any choice that smells like people-pleasing ("which one will you actually do at 11 p.m.?).
- **Exercise 10** (anchors + teach-back person): all three lines read aloud. The teach-back commitment is the sleeper; follow up on it next group.
- **Exercise 11** (rep tracker): explain it comes back next session marked. What gets tracked gets done.
- **Skill of the day:** ten calm reps. Promise the check-in.

Close with the take-it-to-the-group questions and the summary, read aloud.

FIRP scaffold (one note per member, per class)

Class 1. Focus: member's coping-skills / relapse-prevention objective, plus today's topic: replacing substance-based coping with rehearsed body-based skills. **Intervention:** *Educated group on state-dependent learning and the failure of unrehearsed coping under stress; facilitated an honest coping inventory distinguishing building vs costly coping; led live group practice of paced breathing, grounding, and physical discharge with pre/post tension ratings; facilitated vignette analysis demonstrating rehearsal effects; linked members' results and processed responses.* **Response:** individualize, including pre/post ratings and skills demonstrated. **Plan:** daily practice of chosen body skill at an anchor; try temperature skill; return for Class 2.

Class 2. Focus: same objective, plus today's topic: cognitive craving-management skills and habit formation. **Intervention:** *Reviewed practice commitments; educated group on affect labeling, playing the tape forward, and urge delay; guided each member through writing a full consequence tape for a personal craving scenario; facilitated paired rehearsal of the name-tape-delay sequence; guided selection of a personal two-skill kit with daily anchors, a rep tracker, and a teach-back commitment.* **Response:** individualize, including skill demonstrated in pair practice. **Plan:** ten calm reps at anchors with tracker returned next group; teach one skill to an identified person; individual follow-up as needed.

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.