



RECOVERY IN FOCUS · GROUP CURRICULUM · FACILITATOR GUIDE

Cravings Are Waves

A craving-management session built on urge surfing. Four parts, two group classes.

Topic category (billing anchor)	Craving Management / Relapse Prevention, with Coping Skills
Clinical focus	Cue-triggered craving as the central relapse mechanism; urge-management skills and self-monitoring as relapse prevention
Evidence base	Relapse Prevention (Marlatt; urge surfing is his) · CBT · cue-reactivity research · MI stance
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, craving-activation guardrail, FIRP

Companion file: participant packet (print one per member)

4 parts · 9 exercises · 1 vignette · live practice · craving log

FACILITATOR GUIDE

How to run this session

- **NORMALIZE FIRST:** the session's first job is stripping shame off cravings. Having one means the brain learned; it says nothing about commitment. Say this early and often.
- **LINK:** connect members over signals and bargaining lines. Two members discovering their peak uses the same sentence ("I've earned it") is the night's best moment.
- **TEACH LIGHT, PRACTICE LIVE:** urge surfing gets walked through in the room on a mild real pull (coffee, phone, sugar). Never run the practice on an active substance craving unless the member volunteers it and is stable; see guardrail.
- **LAND IT CLINICALLY:** every segment ends on the mechanism: cue, wave, ride or feed, and the log as relapse prevention you can see.

Mixed-functioning group adjustments

- Read everything aloud; writing optional; you or a peer can fill tables.
- Draw the wave on the board (rise, peak, fall) and keep it up both classes; every exercise points back at the drawing.
- Lower-functioning rooms can run the whole session on: name it, clock it, call somebody. That kit is complete by itself.

CRAVING-ACTIVATION GUARDRAIL

Talking about cravings in detail stirs cravings; the packet says so and you should too. Two rules: **no war stories about using** (the high itself never gets described; redirect: "stay with the wave, not the water"), and **end both classes with grounding**, the long exhale together, so nobody leaves activated. If a member reports a live wave in group, treat it as the teaching gift it is: walk the whole room through surfing it with them, then check on that member individually before they leave.

HOOK SOURCE NOTE: cue-reactivity imaging is well established (drug-related cues activate amygdala and related circuits before conscious processing; the classic cocaine-video studies are the ancestors of this point). "Most cravings pass within minutes" reflects urge research and clinical consensus; individual waves vary, so present it as "usually minutes, learn YOUR number." Urge surfing originates with Marlatt's relapse prevention work. Conversation starters, not testimony.

CLASS 1

Parts 1 and 2 (about 2 hours)

Opening (10 min)

Frame: *"This session is about cravings: what they are, what shape they have, and how to ride one to the other side."* Icebreaker: "Raise a hand if you've ever had a craving and concluded something was wrong with you." Then: "This session retires that conclusion."

Part 1: What a Craving Is (40 to 50 min)

Teach (5 min or less): cue reactivity in plain words; the three truths (it means the brain learned; it's always cued; it can't make you use). The hook lands here: the craving starts before conscious thought, which is why willpower alone kept losing.

PLAIN "Where does a craving show up in your body first?"

DEEPER "What have you made cravings mean about you, and who taught you to read them that way?"

- **Exercise 1** (yes/no): item 3 is the reframe in one line; have the room say it together if the vibe allows: "I have survived every craving I didn't act on."
- **Exercise 2** (body signals): go around on the earliest signal; it feeds the Part 3 plan.

Part 2: The Shape of the Wave (50 to 60 min)

Teach (5 min or less): rise, peak, fall, on the board; what feeds a wave (panic, negotiation) and what passes it (naming, riding). Nobody knows their number because every wave got answered early; tonight starts the measuring.

- **Exercise 3** (map one wave): volunteers share the peak's bargaining line out loud; board the lines. Seeing "just one" and "I've earned it" written next to each other teaches the voice is generic, not personal wisdom.
- **Teresa vignette + Exercise 4:** read aloud. Question 3 is the core: a known number turns the next peak into a countdown instead of a verdict. Question 4 surfaces foreseeable cues (paydays, refunds, anniversaries); note them for Part 3 plans.

Close Class 1 with the talk-it-out questions, then the long exhale together (guardrail). Assign: notice one pull of any kind this week and just observe its shape.

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

Opening (10 min)

Check in: who observed a pull this week, and what shape did it have? Reinforce observations over outcomes; noticing IS the skill forming.

Part 3: Riding It (55 to 65 min)

Teach (5 min or less): the five surfing steps on the board next to the wave drawing; the two backups (tape forward, tell one person mid-wave). "A spoken craving is half a craving" is the line to repeat.

- **Exercise 5 (live practice):** walk the room through surfing a mild real pull: name, locate, breathe, clock, watch. Collect before/after numbers aloud. Mild pulls only (coffee, phone, sugar); see guardrail for live substance waves.
- **Exercise 6** (yes/no): item 3 matters most; a member with no mid-wave person leaves tonight with one, even if it's another group member or a hotline.
- **Exercise 7** (ride plan): all four lines written; naming lines said out loud, twice each, around the room. A rehearsed line survives the peak.

Part 4: The Craving Log (35 to 45 min)

Teach (5 min or less): surfers study waves; the log turns urges into data; the trend line (shorter, farther apart) is the proof shame can't argue with.

- **Exercise 8** (the log): walk through one sample row together using Teresa. Logs come back next group; say so, and mean it.
- **Exercise 9** (the honest look): the "cue I pretend isn't a cue" line produces the most clinically useful disclosures of the session; follow up individually where needed.
- **Skill of the day:** clock one wave. One number beats a hundred promises.

Close with the group questions, the summary read aloud, and the long exhale together.

FIRP scaffold (one note per member, per class)

Class 1. Focus: member's craving-management / relapse-prevention objective, plus today's topic: cue-triggered craving and the urge cycle. **Intervention:** *Educated group on cue reactivity and the rise-peak-fall structure of urges, normalizing craving as learned response rather than treatment failure; facilitated body-signal and craving-mapping self-inventories including identification of personal cues and peak-stage cognitions; facilitated vignette analysis of riding a timed urge; linked members' patterns and processed responses; closed with group grounding practice.* **Response:** individualize. **Plan:** observe one urge's shape without acting; return for Class 2.

Class 2. Focus: same objective, plus today's topic: urge surfing and craving self-monitoring. **Intervention:** *Reviewed observation homework; taught and led live practice of the five-step urge-surfing sequence with pre/post ratings; taught backup strategies (consequence rehearsal, in-the-moment disclosure); guided each member through a written ride plan including a rehearsed naming statement and an identified mid-wave contact; established a structured craving log for ongoing self-monitoring; closed with group grounding.* **Response:** individualize, including practice ratings and plan completion. **Plan:** time one urge and log it; log returns next group; individual follow-up where a high-risk cue was disclosed.

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.