



RECOVERY IN FOCUS · GROUP CURRICULUM · FACILITATOR GUIDE

Meaning, Purpose & Connection

Isolation as relapse risk, network building, and purpose pathways. Four parts, two group classes.

Topic category (billing anchor)	Recovery Support Systems, with Relapse Prevention
Clinical focus	Isolation and purposelessness as relapse drivers; sober-network construction; purpose and meaning as protective factors; spiritual and secular pathway work
Evidence base	Social identity / network research on recovery · 12-step facilitation mechanisms research · MI (autonomy on pathway choice)
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, neutrality guardrail, FIRP

Companion file: participant packet (print one per member) 4 parts · 8 exercises · 1 vignette · corner audit · pathway draft

FACILITATOR GUIDE

How to run this session

- **LONELINESS IS THE CONFESSION:** members will admit using faster than they'll admit being lonely. Normalize it early and from the front: "the loneliness of early recovery surprises almost everyone."
- **LINK LIVE:** this session can literally build the network it teaches. Exercise 3's "someone in this room could be on my list" and the final group question are designed to let members recruit each other; give that process room and let numbers get exchanged after group if members choose.
- **NEUTRALITY IS STRUCTURAL:** the spiritual/secular balance in Part 4 is not a vibe, it's a rule. Equal airtime, equal respect, no facilitator thumb on the scale in either direction, including a secular thumb.
- **ACTION BEFORE MOTIVATION:** the session's spine is that purpose follows action. Every part lands on a concrete, small, dated step.

Mixed-functioning group adjustments

- Read everything aloud. The corner count works verbally: "how many people could you call at 2 a.m.? Don't say names, just the number."
- Lower-functioning rooms: run the whole session on the corner count, the next person to add, and one chair of service. The pathway draft can be a single sentence.

CLINICAL GUARDRAILS

Religion in the room: members may proselytize in either direction (faith or anti-faith). Redirect with the research framing: a practiced pathway beats a "correct" one, and the group honors both. Do not let the room debate God; route the energy to "what's YOUR practice this week?" **Grief and estrangement:** the corner audit surfaces burned bridges and dead friends. Acknowledge losses as real, keep the session on what gets built next, and route heavy grief to individual work. **Isolated members:** a member whose 2 a.m. list is zero needs the exercise framed as a starting point, not a verdict; the "next person to add" is the whole assignment for them, and follow up individually. **Romantic recruiting:** network building in group can drift toward dating; name the early-recovery relationship guidance once, lightly, and move on (the Sex & Intimacy session carries that load).

HOOK SOURCE NOTE: the mechanisms finding is from John Kelly and colleagues' research on how AA works: social network change (dropping using contacts, adding sober ones) emerged as the largest mediator of AA's effect, bigger than spiritual mechanisms for most adults. The longevity study in Part 2 is the Harvard Study of Adult Development (Waldinger); "quality of relationships at midlife predicted healthy aging better than cholesterol" is the standard summary. Purpose-and-mortality findings are a replicated literature (e.g., purpose-in-life scores predicting all-cause mortality). Keep all of it approximate and directional.

CLASS 1**Parts 1 and 2 (about 2 hours)**

Opening (10 min)

Frame: *"Using was doing jobs in your life: company, structure, a reason to get up. This session looks at what those jobs were, and what fills them now."* Icebreaker: "One thing your week has too little of."

Loneliness will show up in disguise (quiet, boredom, nothing to do); note the disguises.

Part 1: The Hole (40 to 50 min)

Teach (5 min or less): the jobs framing (company, structure, identity, a daily point), then the hook: network change as AA's biggest measured ingredient.

PLAIN "Besides the high, what did using give you that you miss?"

DEEPER "People rarely relapse because they forgot it was bad. They relapse because sober life got empty. Where's your empty?"

- **Exercise 1** (yes/no): item 2 (lonelier than expected) is the destigmatizing moment; the hands do the work.
- **Exercise 2** (the jobs it was doing): go around on "the job it did best." The answers map each member's rebuild priority and set up everything that follows.

Part 2: Connection Is Treatment (50 to 60 min)

Teach (5 min or less): the Harvard study, the sober-network findings, and the key reframe: connection is a skill and a schedule, not a personality trait.

- **Exercise 3** (who is in my corner): numbers can stay private; the "next person to add" gets said out loud and boarded. If members name each other, let it happen.
- **Exercise 4** (yes/no): item 2 (turned down connection because showing up felt like work) pairs with the skill teach: showing up IS the work.

Close Class 1 with the talk-it-out questions. Assign: one show-up before next class (meeting, call, invite accepted), chosen in the room.

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

Opening (10 min)

Check in: did the show-up happen? Celebrate attempts, not just completions; a declined invite still counts as a rep.

Part 3: Purpose (50 to 60 min)

Teach (5 min or less): FOR beats FROM, the four sources (people, work, service, something larger), and the order of operations: action first, meaning after.

- **Ray vignette + Exercise 5:** read aloud. "Tuesdays need me" is the line to board. Question 3 (your version) is the pivot of the whole class; go around.
- **Exercise 6** (the four sources): members rate privately, share the emptiest source if willing; the one-action column converts ratings into assignments.

Part 4: Your Pathway (45 to 55 min)

Teach (5 min or less): the spiritual/secular handling, straight and even; "still looking" as a legitimate active address; belief + practice + company.

- **Exercise 7** (pathway draft): written by all; sharing optional and never pushed on the belief line. The practice and first-step lines are fair game for the room.
- **Exercise 8** (yes/no): item 1 (maintaining more than building) echoes Ray; take two volunteers on what building would look like.
- **Skill of the day:** one chair. Name the actual service options available at this facility and in local meetings so the assignment has real handles. Promise the check-in.

Close with the group questions and the summary read aloud. The last group question (who in this room could be on your 2 a.m. list) is the session's payoff; give it unhurried time.

FIRP scaffold (one note per member, per class)

Class 1. Focus: member's recovery-support objective, plus today's topic: isolation and loss of structure as relapse drivers; sober-network development. **Intervention:** *Educated group on the functional roles of substance use (social, structural, identity) and the elevated relapse risk associated with isolation and purposelessness, citing recovery network research; facilitated each member's identification of unmet functional needs; guided a structured support-network audit with identification of one concrete network-building action; linked members' isolation patterns and processed responses.* **Response:** individualize. **Plan:** complete one connection action before next session; return for Class 2.

Class 2. Focus: same objective, plus today's topic: purpose and meaning as protective factors. **Intervention:** *Reviewed connection assignments; educated group on purpose as a protective factor including four purpose domains (relational, occupational, service, values-based); facilitated vignette analysis of service-based purpose development; guided each member's self-assessment across purpose domains with one remediation action identified; supported each member in drafting an individualized recovery pathway (belief, renewing practice, supportive community) with explicit facilitator neutrality between spiritual and secular frameworks; assigned one small service action.* **Response:** individualize, including grief or estrangement content routed to individual sessions where surfaced. **Plan:** complete the service action and pathway first step; 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. Pathway work remains client-directed; the facilitator endorses no religious or secular framework and documents the work in functional, not doctrinal, terms.