



RECOVERY IN FOCUS · GROUP CURRICULUM · SESSION PACKET

Hooked by Design

A relapse prevention session about dopamine, phones, and anger. Four parts, two group classes.

Topic category (billing anchor)	Relapse Prevention & Trigger Management: trigger identification, craving management (Coping Skills secondary)
Clinical focus	Compulsive dopamine-seeking behavior (phone/screen use) and anger/outrage as a mood-altering reward, and their direct relationship to substance use, craving, and relapse risk
Evidence base	Relapse Prevention (Marlatt) · CBT · Motivational Interviewing
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, linking moves, guardrails, FIRP

Companion file: participant packet (print one per member)

4 parts · 14 exercises · 2 vignettes · 2 skills

FACILITATOR GUIDE

How to run this session

This session runs on hooks and linking, not lecture.

- **HOOK:** open each part with the surprising fact, then hand it straight to the group with a question. Let members react to each other before you teach anything.
- **LINK:** your main move is connecting members to each other. *"Jess said checking her phone is the first thing she does when she's anxious. Who else? Mike, that's close to what you said last week about boredom."* Linking members to each other is where the counseling happens. It is also what makes this an interactive counseling group instead of a lecture, which matters for billing.
- **TEACH LIGHT:** teaching blocks run 5 minutes or less. The packet is built so an exercise lands every page or so. If the discussion is alive, shorten the teaching, not the processing.
- **LAND IT CLINICALLY:** end every segment on the connection to substance use and relapse risk. If a segment ends and nobody has connected it to using, make the connection yourself, out loud.
- **PACE:** the packet is two classes of material. Don't rush to finish a part. An exercise that catches fire is the session working, not a delay.

Mixed-functioning group adjustments

- Read everything aloud: hooks, teaching, exercise prompts. Don't assume reading comfort, and never make anyone read aloud.
- Writing is optional. Members can talk their answers; you or a peer can fill in their packet for them.
- Each opening question has a **PLAIN** and a **DEEPER** version. Pick per room, or start plain and go deeper if the group runs with it.
- With lower-functioning groups, cut the teaching further and do more go-arounds.

KEEPING IT OUT OF POLITICS (READ BEFORE CLASS 2)

The rage material sits one step from political and cultural arguments. The rule is mechanism, not merits. Members may *name* what fires them up; the group never debates whether the anger is justified. Say the mantra out loud when you open Part 3: *"We study the slot machine, not the jackpot. I don't care what you're mad about tonight. I care what the mad does to you."*

Redirect scripts:

- *"Hold the topic. We're not voting on whether you're right. What does that anger do in your body? What does it make you want to do after?"*
- *"Notice the room just started doing exactly what the algorithm does. Let's step back out and look at the loop instead."*
- If two members square off: *"You two just gave us a live demo of the dopamine. Thank you. Everyone, what did you feel in your chest watching that?"* Use the heat itself as material.

Keep every example side-free ("the news," "a comment section," "a topic that gets you going"). Never name parties, politicians, or culture-war topics yourself.

HOOK-STAT SOURCE NOTE: the phone-check figure varies by study. Commonly cited research lands between roughly 100 and 200+ checks a day, and one touch-tracking study logged around 2,600 touches a day. The outrage claim comes from research on what spreads on social media (high-arousal emotion, especially moral outrage, drives sharing). Say "researchers have found roughly" and move on. Conversation starters, not testimony.

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

Opening (10 min)

Frame, spoken plainly: *"Tonight we're talking about dopamine, the chemical your addiction ran on, and where it's still getting fed every day without you noticing."* Icebreaker: go around the room, "describe the pull of a craving in one word." Write the words on the board; you will point back at them all night. Do not mention phones yet; the packet walks members into that on purpose (the intro even says so).

Part 1: The Wanting System (40 to 50 min)

Teach (5 min or less): dopamine fires before the reward, it's the chemical of wanting, and wanting and liking are different systems. Wanting can stay strong while enjoyment fades.

PLAIN "Toward the end, were you still enjoying it?"

DEEPER "When did the wanting and the liking split apart for you? When did you first notice you wanted it more than you liked it?"

New (v0.6, descriptive-intro pattern): teach the two kinds of hits. Slow, earned rewards raise the baseline; fast, cheap ones spike and drop. Go around: one slow-column thing each member genuinely enjoys sober. Exercise 2 now ends with a circle/underline step so members sort their own list into helps vs costs; process that sort out loud.

This is the strongest linking moment in Class 1. Nearly everyone has a version of "I wasn't even enjoying it anymore." Connect those stories to each other out loud.

- **Exercise 1** (yes/no, wanting vs liking): quick go-around on item 1.
- **Exercise 2** (check-all, where the pull shows up now): go around on "which one is strongest right now." Link members with the same answers. Normalize: the wanting system didn't retire, it relocated.
- **Exercise 3** (written reflection): 5 minutes to write, then volunteers share. Don't force shares on this one.

Part 2: The Slot Machine in Your Pocket (50 to 60 min)

Open with the reveal: read the hook stat aloud, then run **Exercise 4** (everyone writes their honest phone-check guess; collect guesses out loud, then give the number). The gap between guesses and reality starts the discussion by itself, and this is the moment the packet finally says the word phone. Expect a little pushback ("what do phones have to do with recovery"); the intro already named that reaction as fair, so welcome it and let Part 2 answer it.

Teach (5 min or less): variable reward, the slot-machine trick, designed on purpose, and a brain that has been through addiction responds to these loops more strongly. Then the second problem: the phone carries old triggers around in your pocket.

PLAIN "How do you feel right before you check your phone? How about right after?"

DEEPER "What's the feeling in the half second before you check? And does the check ever actually fix it?"

Linking moves: gather the before feelings (restless, bored, anxious) and the after feelings (brief relief, then nothing, then checking again). Then: *"Where else in your life have you felt that exact before-and-after pattern?"* Let a member say "using" before you do. Someone usually will. If nobody does, say it yourself.

- **Exercise 5** (what's on YOUR phone): process on "which would be hardest to change." Expect real resistance; treat it like ambivalence about any trigger.
- **Exercise 6** (Before/After Map): 5 min write, pair-share 2 min, then whole group. Point out overlaps between members out loud.
- **Marcus vignette + Exercise 7:** read Marcus aloud. Walk the chain: trigger, first thought, where to step out. Question 5 ("what's your version of this story") is the heart of the hour.
- **Skill + Exercise 8:** teach "surf the check" in 2 minutes, then go around; every member states their one phone change for the week. Write them down; you open Class 2 by checking on them.

Close Class 1 with the talk-it-out questions in the packet. Tell them Class 2 covers anger, "and that one gets personal."

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

Opening (10 min)

Check in on the Exercise 8 commitments from Class 1. Who did their phone change? What happened? This review is billable skill reinforcement, and it teaches the group that commitments get followed up.

Part 3: Rage Is a Drug (50 to 60 min)

Open with the mantra (guardrail box, Part A), then the hook.

PLAIN "Is there a kind of angry that kind of feels good? Where do you get it?"

DEEPER "Be honest. Is there a kind of angry you enjoy a little? Fired up, in the right, 'can you believe this' angry? Where do you get your hits of it?"

Linking moves: expect the news, sports, exes, group chats, comment sections, rage-bait videos.

Members may name their sources. Do not let the group debate any of them; use the redirect scripts. Link members who feed at the same trough. Then the turn: "*Anger is free, legal, always available, and nobody calls it a relapse. What does that remind you of?*"

Teach (5 min or less): the anger rush is adrenaline plus dopamine, righteous anger feels good, it changes your state on demand, and that used to be the substance's job. Cross-addiction: same wiring, different supply. The algorithm learns what gets a rise out of each person and serves more. Anger is a classic relapse emotion (H.A.L.T. territory). Also validate: some anger is about real harm and deserves respect. The target is the farming of it, not the having of it.

- **Exercise 9** (body signs of anger): quick go-around. Builds the body awareness the skill work needs.
- **Exercise 10** (yes/no set): process the "two or more" line gently. The point is recognition, not confession.
- **Exercise 11** (Rage Diet): go around on the middle column, "what I honestly get out of it." Those disclosures build the most cohesion in the whole session. Validate that the payoff is real; the payoff being real is why it works like a drug.
- **Dawn vignette + Exercise 12:** read Dawn aloud. Question 3 (her nights and the craving on the drive home) is the clinical core of Class 2. Make sure the group lands it: poor sleep plus a worked-up nervous system equals a body asking for relief.

Part 4: Feeding the System on Purpose (35 to 45 min)

Teach (5 min or less): you can't starve the wanting system, so pick where it gets fed. Fast hits spike and drop; slower rewards (movement, finishing something, real connection) feed the system without the drop. Late-night scrolling wrecks sleep, and bad sleep raises relapse risk on its own.

- **Exercise 13** (the menu): insist on honesty. "Check the things you'd actually do." A short real list beats a long fake one.

- **Exercise 14** (plan for the week): every member completes all four lines and says them out loud, including "one person who will know about this plan." Saying it to the group is the first telling.
- **Skill of the day: "Name the hit."** Assign it, keep it small, promise a check-in next group.

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

FIRP scaffold (one note per member, per class)

Class 1. Focus: member's relapse-prevention / coping-skills objective, plus today's topic: dopamine-seeking behavior and phone use as trigger and craving risk. **Intervention:** *Educated group on dopamine, wanting vs. liking, and variable reward, tied to craving and relapse risk; facilitated self-inventories of reward-seeking (Ex 1, 2) and phone-based triggers (Ex 5); facilitated the Before/After mapping exercise and vignette analysis of a trigger-to-craving chain; taught the "surf the check" pause skill and obtained a specific behavioral commitment; linked members' patterns and processed responses.* **Response:** individualize (insight, disclosures, whether the member connected the loop to their own use, the commitment stated, resistance). **Plan:** carry out the stated phone change; practice the pause skill; return for Class 2.

Class 2. Focus: same objective, plus today's topic: anger/outrage as a mood-altering reward and relapse risk; replacement coping. **Intervention:** *Reviewed Class 1 behavioral commitments; educated group on anger as an adrenaline-and-dopamine reward, cross-addiction, and the relapse link; facilitated the anger body-signs inventory, the Rage Diet inventory, and vignette analysis connecting arousal and sleep loss to craving; facilitated the replacement-rewards menu and a written weekly plan with an accountability person; assigned daily self-monitoring ("name the hit").* **Response:** individualize. **Plan:** carry out the weekly plan; daily self-monitoring with report-back; individual follow-up if anger content surfaced risk; next session per series.

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 hook on the substance-use and relapse link.