



Addiction and Loss

Introduction

Welcome to the Addiction and Loss session of the *Living in Balance* program. This session discusses addiction and loss as well as recovery and the process of regaining what was lost. Alcohol and other drugs take many things from people—they destroy friendships, break up families, cause people to lose their freedom, take lives, and cause the loss of jobs and material possessions.

This session looks at those losses and how they occurred, but it also looks at some of the things you may lose in recovery, such as a particular type of identity or certain rituals you associate with your alcohol and other drug use. Finally, the session presents information on the renewal process you go through in recovery and the types and sources of support that are available to help you through loss.

What is in this session?

This session has two major parts: (1) Loss in Addiction and Recovery and (2) Regaining What Was Lost.

**Alcohol and other drugs
take many things from people.**



SESSION 30 HAS TWO MAJOR PARTS:

1. Loss in Addiction and Recovery
2. Regaining What Was Lost

- ✓ After participating in part 1, you will be able to
 - Understand how and why alcohol and other drugs may have destroyed friendships, encouraged criminal and violent behavior, and caused the loss of jobs and material possessions
 - Understand how drugs also took from you intangible things, such as your ability to make decisions
 - Understand that in getting sober, you will also lose things that meant a lot to you when you were using, such as rituals involved in drug use

- ✓ After participating in part 2, you will be able to
 - Understand what kinds of support are available to help you deal with loss
 - Recognize where you can go to get that support
 - Understand how addiction and recovery affect your sense of yourself
 - Understand how in recovery you go through a process of renewal similar to what other people go through after a serious loss, which will lead to major changes in your priorities and attitudes

What will be asked of you?

You will be asked to look at how alcohol and/or other drugs took many things from you. This may be a painful process, but it is necessary so that you can start thinking about what you want to get back in recovery. In recovery, you will find your attitudes and priorities change, and this session also asks you to consider those changes. You will be asked to look at sources for help—people and groups that can provide you with support in times of loss. All of this will help you, as you go through recovery, to better understand what you need and what you need to do to get back things you've lost—or decide that other things are really more important for you.



Part 1: Loss in Addiction and Recovery

Some people describe alcohol and other drugs as seducers because no matter how bad things get, they invite and tempt people to escape for a few minutes or more. Drugs seduce people by giving them false feelings. They help them to forget how they will feel after using the drug.

People also describe drugs as a thief. When you were using alcohol and other drugs, you may have lost many things, such as friendships, money, time, jobs, and even your health.

In a way, drugs took these things from you, although you helped the process. In recovery, you no longer have to let drugs take more from you. Instead, you can regain things you lost and heal yourself. It will not be easy to look at what you lost when you were using, but you need to do it before you can begin getting those things back. You will also feel some painful feelings, but you don't need to bury them as you did before. Feelings of loss and grief are a natural part of living, and they serve an important role by helping people to grow.

In recovery, you may lose some things that you thought you needed, such as the feeling of getting high or the ability to control your feelings by taking a drug. But these are not things you need. Alcohol and other drugs, by seducing you, trick you into believing that you can't live without them.



EXERCISE 1

Please answer the following questions:

1. What are some of the things you think alcohol and other drugs took from you?

(more writing space on next page)



LEARNER OBJECTIVES FOR PART 1:

You will

- Understand how and why alcohol and other drugs may have destroyed friendships, encouraged criminal and violent behavior, and caused the loss of jobs and material possessions
- Understand how drugs also took from you intangible things, such as your ability to make decisions
- Understand that in getting sober, you will also lose things that meant a lot to you when you were using, such as rituals involved in drug use

People also describe drugs as a thief.

Did you realize that you were losing these things at the time?

Yes No

Please explain your answer.

2. Why do you think you were willing to let go of important things (like those you mentioned above) when you were using?

3. In what ways can issues related to loss become a part of your recovery program and strengthen your recovery program?

Drugs and Friendships

In general, people come together because they have shared interests. Without thinking about it, most people enjoy being a part of a group of friends because it makes them feel good and it increases their self-esteem. Everybody likes to be liked and wanted. Before they started using alcohol and other drugs, many people had a circle of friends with whom they would hang out.

But when drugs become a part of your life, you usually have less time for old friends. Drug users spend increasingly large amounts of time and energy trying to obtain, use, and recover from the effects of drugs. If they associate with people, they are usually ones who share an interest in getting and using alcohol and other drugs, because those are the activities that are important to them.



EXERCISE 2

Please answer the following questions:

1. What important relationships did alcohol and other drugs take from you?

2. Before you began using alcohol and other drugs, did you have a group of friends that you enjoyed being with?

Yes No



When drugs become a part of your life, you usually have less time for old friends.

If so, what sort of things did you enjoy doing together?

3. When you began to use alcohol and other drugs, were you less comfortable spending time with friends who did not use?

Yes No

What happened with the relationships you had with those people?

4. In what ways can issues related to relationships and friendships become a part of your recovery program and strengthen your recovery program?

Addiction, Friendships, and Trust

Some of the things alcohol and other drugs often take from people are their healthy relationships. In many cases, the addicted person will replace them with relationships that center on unhealthy behaviors, like using drugs and drinking. In other cases, the person becomes more and more isolated and has as little contact with others as possible.

Healthy relationships are based on trust. Friends trust each other in ways that are often unspoken. For example, friends trust each other to be honest and to keep promises. But when drugs become an important part of people's lives, trust becomes much more difficult.

The need to use drugs may become stronger than the desire to do the right thing. People will say and do things they don't want to do in order to get and stay high. They often lose the trust of others—and many times, they don't even trust themselves.

People who use drugs make promises that are not kept, and they say and do things that hurt other people. Other people don't have much reason to trust them. Also, because alcohol and other drugs distort people's thinking and make them act strangely, others become even less likely to trust them. They may not feel comfortable around the person who's using, and that person may no longer feel comfortable around his or her former friends.

Addicted people become more and more isolated from their former friends. Even family members may desert the addict or alcoholic as his or her behavior causes more and more problems that they can't deal with.





EXERCISE 3

Please answer the following questions:

1. When you were drinking and using drugs, what were some of the ways people showed that they no longer trusted you?

2. How did you feel when you started losing friends because of your alcohol and other drug use? What did you tell yourself so you wouldn't feel so hurt?

3. What do you miss about the friendships you had before you started using?

4. In what ways can issues related to trust become a part of your recovery program and strengthen your recovery program?

Drugs, Violence, and Loss

There is a strong connection between drugs and violence. Different drugs may act in different ways, but many of them cause violent behavior.

Alcohol and barbiturates, for example, can cause people to lose control and do things that they would not normally do. Under the influence of alcohol and similar drugs, many people say and do things that they later regret, and some of these things involve violence.

Stimulants such as amphetamines and cocaine cause people to become irritable and act impulsively. These drugs may also make someone anxious or even paranoid, which can also cause them to strike out at others. Often, violent outbursts caused by drugs are directed at friends and family.

Death is also, often, a part of one’s life in active addiction. Since most drugs are illegal, addicts may be involved in dangerous transactions on a regular basis that can lead to violent death.

Overdoses, illnesses, and accidents caused by drug use may take the lives of friends, acquaintances, and even loved ones who are also involved with drugs. People who use drugs are at high risk for contracting HIV infection through sexual contact or shared needles. Almost all drug users know people who have become HIV infected and may have even died from AIDS.

There is a strong connection between drugs and violence.



EXERCISE 4

Please answer the following questions:

1. When you were using alcohol or other drugs, did you ever act violently toward yourself, someone else, or some property?

Yes No

If so, describe an example of a time you acted impulsively and violently because of your alcohol or other drug use.

2. Describe an example of a death or injury related to drug use that you witnessed or that affected you personally.

3. In what ways can issues related to irritability, anger, and violence become a part of your recovery program and strengthen your recovery program?

Job Loss

Having a job is important for several reasons. The most obvious reason is that work gives you money to pay rent, buy groceries, and purchase clothes and other things.

While making money may be the most obvious reason to work, there are other important benefits as well. For instance, being able to support themselves and their families allows people to feel a sense of pride, accomplishment, and self-respect.

It's true that most people do *not* constantly feel pride and accomplishment because of their work, but having a job is still an important sign of success in our society. Many people dislike their jobs, or simply dislike working in general. But when people who dislike their jobs lose them, they still feel shame, embarrassment, and frustration.

Even jobs that are not enjoyable can provide a sense of financial security and perhaps other benefits, such as health insurance.

In active addiction, the compulsion to use drugs is often stronger than the need to work. Getting high, going through withdrawal, having a hangover, or waiting to get drugs can all make it more likely for a person to miss work or have problems on the job. As a result, alcohol and other drug use often leads to a person getting fired from a job.

Getting fired and being unemployed cause people to feel depressed, lonely, anxious, and angry, which can all lead to more drug use. Spending money on cocaine and alcohol while not having an income increases the depression and self-pity. In order to get money for drugs, people may go further into debt or turn to crime, which can cause further problems.

Alcohol and other drug use often leads to a person getting fired from a job.





EXERCISE 5

Please answer the following questions:

1. What are some of the benefits that you get from work?

2. What kind of work problems did you have as the result of your alcohol or other drug use?

3. Did you ever lose a job because of your drug use?

Yes No

If so, how did it feel to lose that job? What are you doing differently now?

4. In what ways can issues related to employment become a part of your recovery program and strengthen your recovery program?

Loss of Material Possessions

Addiction is a form of compulsive behavior. Compulsive behaviors are activities that people do because they have a strong need to do them. Compulsive behaviors make people behave in a certain way, sometimes whether they want to or not.

In order to get alcohol and other drugs, the addict and alcoholic become willing to give up many things that were important to them before. The compulsion to get high is often stronger than the need for basic things like food, shelter, and clothing. The person is willing to lose those things as long as he or she can keep getting high.

Drug use may also encourage other compulsive behaviors that cost money as well, such as gambling or sex. Money that should have been spent on rent or food can end up going for drugs or other unnecessary and unhealthy activities. The result of compulsive behaviors is often the loss of money, friends, possessions, and housing.



EXERCISE 6

Please answer the following questions:

1. What are some personal examples of how drug use became compulsive behavior for you? How did this compulsion affect you and others?

2. What kinds of possessions did you lose because of your drug use?

3. In what ways can issues related to losing material possessions become a part of your recovery program and strengthen your recovery program?

Loss of Control

Alcohol and other drugs often cause people to lose control and act impulsively. People end up doing things on the spur of the moment and without thinking about them, and they and those around them end up suffering the consequences.

While you may not have thought about it as a loss at the time, one of the most important things you lose when you're using is the ability to make decisions and act in a reasonable way. Without an awareness of the consequences of your actions as a result of using, you may have lost control over who you were and how you acted.

You may have gotten into arguments, stolen things, been physically violent toward others or to property, set fires, gambled, or did other destructive or self-destructive acts. You may have regretted your actions later or even wondered how you could do such things.

In sobriety, you take back your life. You need not control everything—in fact, you have to realize that there are some things you can't control—but you are capable of making decisions and living a more balanced life.



EXERCISE 7

Please place a check next to any of the following behaviors that apply to you:

- I have spent more money on alcohol or other drugs than I intended.
- I have spent rent money on alcohol or other drugs.
- I have spent other people's money on alcohol or other drugs.
- While using alcohol or other drugs, I agreed to have sex with someone and later regretted it.
- While using alcohol or other drugs, I have said things that I didn't mean to say.

One of the most important things you lose when you're using is the ability to make decisions and act in a reasonable way.



In sobriety, you take back your life.

- While using alcohol or other drugs, I have hit another person.
- While using alcohol or other drugs, I have broken things that were valuable to me or to someone else.
- While using alcohol or other drugs, I have stolen things from others.
- While using alcohol or other drugs, I have intentionally harmed the property of others.
- While using alcohol or other drugs, I have bought or agreed to buy something that I could not afford.
- While using alcohol or other drugs, I had problems with co-workers and employers, and have lost or nearly lost my job.

In what ways can issues related to loss of control become a part of your recovery program and strengthen your recovery program?

Addiction, Recovery, Friendships, and Loss

Over time, people make new friends and lose touch with old friends as a natural part of living. This process of developing and losing friendships is usually slow and gradual. In contrast, both addiction and recovery from addiction often cause rapid and serious changes in people's social lives. This may mean losing some friends and acquaintances.

In active addiction, users often lose long-time friends while gaining new friends who also use drugs. In a way, the same thing

happens during treatment and recovery. Although recovery leads to a healthier life, and new friends are made who are also in recovery, the recovery process does involve a loss of old drug-using friends and acquaintances who could become a trigger for relapse.

Thus, while recovery and treatment involve vital social and friendship benefits, it is important to recognize that recovery also involves losing friends. Even though the loss of drug-using friends is painful, it is a necessary part of recovery.



EXERCISE 8

Please answer the following questions:

1. How did your relationships with friends and acquaintances change when you started using drugs?

2. What are some ways you can gain new friends in sobriety?

3. How can making new, healthy friends become a part of your recovery program and strengthen your recovery program?

Rituals include the behaviors that occur before, during, and after drug use.

Paraphernalia may include things such as a shot glass, a pipe, crack vials, syringes, or rolling papers.

Loss of Rituals and Paraphernalia

Session 3 of the *Living in Balance* program discussed how all addicts and alcoholics have their own triggers that can cause a hunger for their drug of choice. These triggers can include people, places, and things that are associated with getting, using, and recovering from drugs.

Two very powerful types of triggers are the *rituals* and *paraphernalia* associated with drug use.

Rituals include the behaviors that occur before, during, and after drug use. For some, a ritual may be having a cigarette after shooting up, making a phone call to a dealer, walking or driving by areas where drugs can be obtained, wearing certain clothes, putting the baby to sleep before using, or engaging in impulsive sex.

Most people have some types of *paraphernalia* that they associate with their alcohol or other drug use—paraphernalia may include things such as a shot glass, a pipe, crack vials, syringes, or rolling papers. Although there are different rituals and paraphernalia for different types of drugs, everyone who uses alcohol or other drugs has them, and they are powerful triggers that can cause drug hunger.

Because paraphernalia are potent triggers for relapse and therefore threaten your recovery, you should throw them away.

You may also need to change or avoid behaviors that are similar to your drug-using rituals.

It is not easy to get rid of paraphernalia. These objects, as well as certain rituals, have become a part of your life. Getting rid of them may be good and healthy, but will often cause a feeling of loss.



EXERCISE 9

Please answer the following questions:

1. What paraphernalia did you get rid of? How did it feel to get rid of it?

2. What paraphernalia do you still have? Why do you still have it?

3. What do you need to do in order to get rid of any paraphernalia you still have? How do you think you will feel getting rid of it?

4. What are some of the alcohol- and drug-related rituals that you miss? What are some things that you can do in order to make this loss less severe?

5. In what ways can issues related to the loss of addiction-related rituals become a part of your recovery program and strengthen your recovery program?



Part 2: Regaining What Was Lost

Types of Personal Supports

After a major loss, many people feel overwhelmed, lonely, and helpless. During these times, people need help and support. However, people need different types of support and may need them at different times.

Affection is the support one person gives to another by expressing warmth and concern. Affection can be expressed in many different ways, such as through a glance, a hug, a pat on the back, or a letter. It is a way of telling people that they are important and that they are loved.

Counsel is support that involves listening to concerns, sharing opinions, and possibly giving advice. Counsel is often informal, coming from friends, relatives, or group members, but it may involve a professional or trained counselor such as a therapist or clergy member.

Assistance is material support or the support of providing some service. It may be informal, such as friends helping to cook meals, shopping for groceries, or baby-sitting. It can also be formal, involving a professional such as a lawyer who helps with legal problems, a social worker who helps someone get social services, or a credit counseling agency that helps with financial problems.



EXERCISE 10

Please answer the following questions:

1. How has affection been important to you during hard times?



LEARNER OBJECTIVES FOR PART 2:

You will

- Understand what kinds of support are available to help you deal with loss
- Recognize where you can go to get that support
- Understand how addiction and recovery affect your sense of yourself
- Understand how in recovery you go through a process of renewal similar to what other people go through after a serious loss, which will lead to major changes in your priorities and attitudes



DEFINITION OF AFFECTION:

The support one person gives to another by expressing warmth and concern.

2. What are some examples of counsel that might help you through a crisis such as a major loss?

3. In what ways can you give assistance to someone who has experienced an important loss?

Who Can Help?

Different types of support can be provided to people who have experienced serious losses by a wide variety of groups and institutions—some of which may provide more than one type of support.

Family. The family can be a very important source for all types of support. Family members may give affection, counsel, and a wide variety of assistance. But because some families are unstable and unreliable, the type and quality of support may vary. Ideally, a healthy family will be a reliable source of support for individuals who are experiencing great loss or other painful emotions.

Friends. Friends can also be a strong source of all types of support, but the support they provide is usually different than the type provided by family. Friends often share more intimate aspects of life than family members. Friends who have shared similar losses can also support you in ways that others may not be able to.

Professionals and service organizations. Different types of professionals and organizations exist to provide counsel and emotional support; assistance in the form of technical advice on specific issues such as finances, legal problems, and medical problems; and sometimes material assistance as well, including food, shelter, and money.

Self-help groups. Often, those recovering from important losses are tempted to stop going to self-help groups until the crisis is over. In fact, going to self-help groups such as AA is very important during these times. Not only does attendance help protect you from returning to drug use, which would make the situation worse, but also group members can be sources of affection and counsel that can help you feel better.

Religious and social organizations. Social organizations can help you by providing a chance to interact with others who may express affection and give counsel. Being with others who have nothing to do with the loss can also be an effective way to put the loss behind you. Involvement in social organizations can help you develop other interests and new habits and stop you from thinking only about the loss. Some religious groups also provide members with material assistance in times of loss and trouble.

Going to self-help groups is very important during times of loss.





EXERCISE 11

Please answer the following questions:

1. Besides the sources listed on pages 22 and 23, what are some other sources of support that you can turn to in times of loss and trouble?

2. What are some types of people or institutions from which you would not want to receive support during a crisis?

3. For each of the categories listed below, who are some specific people and groups that you could turn to after a serious loss? List a person or group for each category.

Family members:

Friends:

Self-help groups:

Social services:

Religious or other organizations:

Neighbors:

Professionals (doctors, therapists, etc.):



When people first use alcohol or other drugs, they still believe that they will not become addicted, and many of them don't.

Addiction and Identity

People who have never used drugs may say to themselves, "That could never happen to me." People who have never used drugs think of themselves as being very different from addicts or alcoholics. Another way to say this is that their *identity*, or the way they see themselves, is not as an addict or alcoholic. They may feel sorry for addicts or believe that alcoholics are bad or weak-willed, but to them addicts and alcoholics are very different types of people.

When people first use alcohol or other drugs, they still believe that they will not become addicted, and many of them don't. But even those who do become addicted take some time before they begin to realize that something is wrong. Usually, they do not fully realize that they are addicted, but see only a small part of the problem.

Many people never really recognize that they are addicted until they are forced to confront their addiction by outside forces. They may be forced to do so because of arrests, job loss, illness, serious family problems, and interventions by friends and family.

During these experiences, they may begin to think of themselves as weak, bad, or crazy. As people begin to confront the realities of their addiction, their self-image or identity may change, and they may begin to think of themselves as addicts. Finally, people who may have thought of themselves as strong begin to think of themselves as weak and feel depressed and hopeless about it. In other words, they may lose their identity.



EXERCISE 12

Please answer the following questions:

1. Before you began to use drugs, what was your identity?
How would you have described yourself?

2. When did you begin to realize that you had a serious problem with drugs? At that point, how did you see yourself?

3. In what ways did your self-image change? How did you feel about these changes?

4. How do you think of yourself now? How would you like to see yourself?

**Recovery involves
gaining a new self-image
while at the same time
losing an old one.**



A New Identity

When people go to Twelve Step meetings, they hear other people call themselves addicts and alcoholics in a matter-of-fact tone. These people have come to realize that addiction has been a major part of their lives. But they've also realized that that doesn't mean they have to keep using.

What these people are saying between the lines is, "I am a *recovering* alcoholic and addict." They are actively changing their self-image from that of a hopeless addict to that of a hopeful and grateful recovering addict. Some people may eventually stop viewing themselves as addicts altogether, but others will see it as important to keep reaffirming they will always be addicts.

It is important to realize that even though the self-image of people in recovery is becoming more positive, it is not a painless transition. When people gain a new self-image, they are at the same time losing an older one.

Imagine a man who worked at a job for five years. He quit that job for a new job that paid more and was closer to home. Even though he liked the new job better, he still missed the old job. He knew how to do the old job well, he knew all the people at work, and he was respected there. At the new job, although the work is better, he has to start many things over.

Because alcohol and other drugs have played such an important part in addicts' and alcoholics' lives, the use of them becomes an important part of their identity and something they identify with in others. Recovery means letting go of this part of your identity as well. Recovery involves gaining a new self-image while at the same time losing an old one.



EXERCISE 13

Please answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think people give their name and say, "I'm an alcoholic/addict," at Twelve Step meetings?

2. How would you like to see yourself in a year? In five years? What self-image do you want to have?

3. What steps do you think you need to take to achieve this self-image?

Loss, Recovery, and Renewal

People who undergo major losses often go through other life-changing experiences as well. Many experience spiritual awakenings and get new priorities that eventually make them emotionally and psychologically healthier. This transformation, or life-changing experience, is called *renewal*. The processes of renewal and recovery are similar in many ways.

Developing a new self-awareness. In recovery, you are forced to look within yourself to seriously assess who you are and who you want to be. As a result, both loss and recovery can lead to a new self-awareness, which will help you grow emotionally.

Focusing on your real needs. In recovery, you also need to reconsider what is really important to you. You may have previously put a priority on drugs, money, appearance, power, and material possessions, but now consider such things as friends, family, work, hobbies, reading, spirituality, religion, honesty, and sobriety more important. In active addiction, alcohol and other drugs clouded your perspective—it was hard to see what was really important and healthy for you.

Making do without some things. Living in a society that places a lot of value on material possessions can leave one feeling a need for things that aren't really important. Once you understand what you really need, it becomes possible to separate what it is you *wanted* from what it is you *needed*. As you focus on your true needs, it becomes easier to postpone or put aside things that are not truly needed, so that you can concentrate on getting the things that are most important.

Accepting responsibility. In different ways, recovery and renewal both force people to accept responsibility for their own behavior. People working through recovery and renewal usually reach a point where they stop blaming other people for their problems and learn that taking risks and making mistakes is a natural part of living. The recovery and renewal processes help people to learn from mistakes and use that knowledge to change their lives for the better.

Helping others. Both in recovery and in grieving, people get to a point where they can reach out and provide support to others who are in need, just as people supported them when they were having trouble. As grieving and recovering individuals become healthier emotionally, there is a natural tendency to want to help others. Indeed, providing support to others increases self-esteem and makes you feel better.



EXERCISE 14

Please answer the following questions:

1. If you think of recovery and renewal as examples of life-changing experiences, what are some other life-changing experiences?

2. What is the difference between needs and wants? What things do you really need today?



Session 30 Summary

In this session you have learned about addiction and loss as well as recovery and regaining some of the things that were lost when you were using. You have looked at how losses occur and how your judgment becomes so affected that you are willing to lose things like friends, families, and jobs in order to keep getting high. The session also presented some ideas about recovery and the process of renewal. You have looked at some of the things you lost in recovery and some of the things you gained that replaced them. You have also learned about the types and sources of support that are available to help you through loss. By working through this session, you have gained important tools to help your recovery. You have learned to better understand what you need and what you need to do to get back things you've lost or decide that other things are really more important for you.