

## *Fellowship Recovery Compass: October 2025*



9122 34A Avenue NW, Edmonton, T6E 5P4

Telephone: 780-220-7811

Email: [info@fellowship-centre.org](mailto:info@fellowship-centre.org)

Website: <https://fellowship-centre.org>

[facebook.com/SEFellowshipcentre](https://facebook.com/SEFellowshipcentre)

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**The Centre is closed  
October 13<sup>th</sup>  
through to  
October 17<sup>th</sup>  
for renovations.  
Sorry for the  
inconvenience  
and see you  
after October 17<sup>th</sup>.**



## Dealing with Emotions in Recovery

Emotions are the feelings you experienced throughout the day such as happiness, sadness, relief, anger, joy, and fear. It is often difficult for addicts to identify their emotions early in the recovery process, which makes it harder for them to feel comfortable, relate to others, and remain clean and sober. Unhappy emotions such as depression, anxiety, and anger are particularly problematic for addicts. Emotional distress or disconnect is one of the primary reasons we begin to drink, use or act out again.



Back in *the good old days*, you had an easy way to deal with painful, bewildering, and scary emotions such as depression, anxiety, and anger: have a drink, get high or act out. It was quick, simple, and temporarily effective. You may not have known how to handle these feelings any other way, and you may have interpreted them as cravings. Mostly, you just wanted them to go away. Using drugs, alcohol, or acting out was a quick way to ease anxiety, blot out depression, and hide the pain. Now that you're clean and sober, you must face up to and deal with these feelings when they surface during recovery and in daily living.

This can be difficult, for most addicts are out of practice dealing with emotions; they often have trouble even naming the emotions they experienced during their years of addiction. Now that they are in recovery, they are often unaware of the fact that they are experiencing normal, everyday emotions: instead, they think that what they're feeling is a craving. Added to that is the fact that alcohol and drugs can change the way your brain works and scramble emotions.

Emotions occur whether you want them to or not. They are a normal part of being human, and they are neither *good* nor *bad*. Suppose, for example, an irresponsible driver cuts you off, forcing you to slam on your brakes to avoid an accident. Many people would become angry. That's perfectly natural. But while some would scream, curse, chase the other car down, and cut them off *to teach him a lesson*, others would choose to turn to soothing music and let the negative emotions fade away. Unfortunately, people with addictions tend to have difficulty dealing with strong emotions without the *help* of their abused substance or activity. They often interpret the emotion as a signal to begin drinking, using or acting out, forgetting that they have a choice not to become angry, not use, or not act out. That's why it's vital for you to learn to recognize emotions as they arise and handle them safely. This is not easy, but it is certainly possible and necessary if you want to maintain your sobriety.

**Depression** is a mood disorder characterized by persistent sadness and loss of interest or pleasure in activities, affecting how a person feels, thinks, and behaves. It's different from temporary sadness and can lead to various emotional and physical problems.

**Anxiety** is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure.

**Anger** is often a secondary emotion, masking deeper underlying feelings like hurt, fear, or sadness. These primary emotions are often uncomfortable to express directly, so anger becomes a way to protect oneself or deflect the pain.



## Depression in Recovery

It is not unusual to feel sad, blue, or depressed from time to time. Sadness is a normal reaction to loss, life struggles, or injured self-esteem. Sometimes, however, these feelings are so intense and long lasting (usually lingering more than a month) that they interfere with your ability to think, work, sleep, eat, enjoy being with others, and care for yourself. This is referred to as major depression and should be discussed with your medical doctor who may prescribe medication.

Depression is common among addicts during the recovery process, often related to the actual depressant effects of alcohol or drugs or to the family, job, financial, and other problems caused by addiction. Depression saps your energy, reduces your motivation to change, and increases your feelings of hopelessness, all at the same time. Unfortunately, many seek solace in their addiction, and relapse. Returning to your addiction is not an effective means of coping with depression, for it only serves to make you more depressed in the long run. Depression includes feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Negative thinking that is associated with depression can make it difficult for someone to take the steps necessary for recovery.

Following are several coping skills that have helped in managing mild to moderate depression. (They can also be helpful as part of treatment for major depression.)

### Increased Awareness

When you were active in your addiction, you were unaware of important information in the world around you, as well as inside your own head. Be on the lookout for signs of impending depression so that you can take steps to ward it off.

- When you start to feel sad, gloomy, ashamed, bored, lonely, or rejected, tune into what's going on. These are important clues to how you're thinking.
- If you are having trouble recognizing your feelings, start talking about them. Tell someone just how you are feeling at any given moment.
- Notice your posture, your facial expressions, how you are walking and moving. These are important clues to how you're feeling.
- Keep a lookout for sober people, places, and activities that you once enjoyed but are now avoiding. Don't try to analyze the reason. Just be aware that you are trying to avoid them.
- Are there times and places when you lean on others for help with things you can do yourself? Lack of confidence can be a sign of depression.
- Do you have to force yourself to make or return phone calls? Do you have trouble completing tasks? Decreased interest in activities can be a sign of depression. Difficulty making decisions or second guess yourself can be signs of depression.



### **Change Your Thinking**

A characteristic of depression is the tendency to view the world and yourself through inaccurate and depressive perceptions. It's important that you examine your thoughts to discover ways they may be contributing to your feelings of sadness and depression. Become aware of your self-defeating thoughts. Ask yourself why you are having these thoughts. Replace these inaccurate and depressing thoughts with healthier, more realistic ones and act on the new thoughts.

### **Change Your Activity Level**

When you are depressed, you do less, blame yourself for doing less, and become even more depressed and apathetic. Increasing your activity level is a way to change your thinking and feelings. Activity improves mood, counteracts fatigue, increases motivation, and sharpens mental ability. And most likely, others will respond positively to your attempts to become more active, providing reinforcement for continued change. Exercise, go to a movie or a ball game with a friend, participate in social activities, and otherwise engage in life. Studies show that even very depressed people feel better when they become more active.

### **Make a Plan**

- How do you become (and remain) involved in activities? Make a plan. You can schedule three kinds of activities: 1) things you do daily such as having dinner, 2) things that give you pleasure such as music, and 3) things that bring you a sense of satisfaction such as finishing a project. Your primary goal is to follow the schedule you established for yourself. The focus is to become more active and involved in life.
- Make sure your plan allows for alternatives if the activities you plan suddenly fall through. For example, if you planned a hike in the river valley but it rains, instead of getting down in the dumps, go to a movie. Then get on with the rest of your schedule.
- Schedule activities in half-hour to one-hour increments. A six-hour hike is too much for one activity. If you make it too long or too complex, it will be tempting to skip the activity altogether. On the other hand, 15 minutes of playing games on your phone may not provide enough activity.
- Don't get too specific or too general. Instead of shopping for a certain colour of item, simply plan to go to the mall for one hour. Just getting out and walking through the mall is more important than going to a specific store looking for a specific item.
- Plan for quantity, not quality. When you are depressed, remember that *anything worth doing is worth doing poorly*. If you go bowling, getting a 75 is as good as rolling a perfect 300, if it gets you out of the house and out of your depressed mindset. If you golf, scoring 150 is as good as making par. The important thing is that you're doing something.
- Pat yourself on the back after completing a planned day of activities. Analyze what you've done. Look at what you did right and see where you can improve. If you completed most of the tasks you planned, congratulate yourself and set new goals for tomorrow.



### **Interact with others**

Being with people can be very useful because it helps to draw you out of your isolation and get you engaged in conversation and activities. Try to be with other people. Confide in someone, tell them how you're feeling (but don't burden them with lengthy recitations of your problems). Let your family and friends help you. They don't have to try to cheer you up, simply be with you.

### **Be optimistic Yet Realistic**

It's easy to conclude that you'll never be happy again, but with time and the right treatment (if necessary) there's a good chance you'll cheer up. Look forward to being happy again but expect your mood to improve gradually overtime. Feeling better takes time, and people rarely snap out of depression. You'll feel better day by day, but in the meantime postponed important decisions until your depression has lifted. Before deciding to make significant changes or transitions such as taking a new job or getting married or divorce, discuss the situation with others who know you well and have a more objective view of your situation.

## **Anxiety in Recovery**

Anxiety is fear, agitation, or unease that arises when you feel that something threatening is looming. The threat might be specific, like an upcoming speech you must give, or it could be general, perhaps the ups and downs of everyday life. Whatever the cause, anxiety triggers physical, mental, and emotional reactions such as worry, nervousness, and unwarranted fear.

Everyone feels anxious at times, but people with addictions may feel it even more intensely, especially during early recovery. So much is riding on the success of recovery: jobs, family, income, self-esteem. Your anxiety level can skyrocket as you ask yourself “Can I do this? Will I ever recover completely?” And life’s everyday stressors not only start the anxiety cycle, but they can also help to keep it going perpetually.

Anxiety can greatly increase the risk of relapse for two reasons. First, anxious feelings are unpleasant, and it's natural to want to do something to make them go away. For those who are accustomed to using drugs, alcohol, or acting out to blunt or mask their anxious feelings, the urge to use, drink or act out can become overwhelming. Second, addicts often misinterpret anxiety as craving and feel that they absolutely must use in order to make the craving (anxiety) go away. Unfortunately, many people in recovery are unaware that they are anxious or that they may even have a full-blown anxiety disorder.

Anxiety occurs as part of a cycle that, unfortunately, can become vicious and self-perpetuating. It begins with stressors. A stressor is anything that elevates adrenaline and triggers the stress response. Loud noises, heavy traffic, arguments, money problems, illness, and divorce are just a few examples of stressors. Perhaps the stressor of the moment is a financial one. You don't have enough money to pay the bills, and you're worried about it. As the stressor becomes more intense, you fall into negative thinking patterns, telling yourself “I am a failure. I don't make enough money because I have a lousy job because that's all I'm worth.” These thoughts ratchet up the emotional and physical symptoms of anxiety. Your stomach begins to grind, your headaches, and your neck muscles tighten up. Now you're not only worried but you also feel uncomfortable with negative self-defeating thoughts. Here are some ideas to help you break the anxiety cycle.

### **Increase Your Awareness**

Before you can take steps to decrease your anxiety, you must figure out what's causing it. Certain situations, people, places, times of day and thoughts can set the stage for anxiety that ranges from a little bit of nervousness to a full-blown panic attack.

- Keeping a journal is an excellent tool for discovering when and why your anxiety tends to arise. Each morning, afternoon, and evening, write down the time of day, the place, what you're doing, and your current thoughts and feelings. You may also want to rate the intensity of your feelings from zero to 10, with 10 being the most intense. Make additional entries in the journal whenever you feel anxious. Overtime, the journal should reveal certain patterns that contribute to your anxiety.
- When analyzing an anxiety-producing situation, ask yourself if it is something that you can control. You have some control, for example, over the anxiety you may feel about your bills. You could eat out less often and buy fewer clothes. But in some situations, you have no control. For example, you may become anxious when a person you're attracted to doesn't return your interest. Then you must realize that you have no control over the other person and that you must let go. Trying to change the inevitable will simply increase your anxiety and get you nowhere.

### **Challenge and Change Your Negative Thinking**

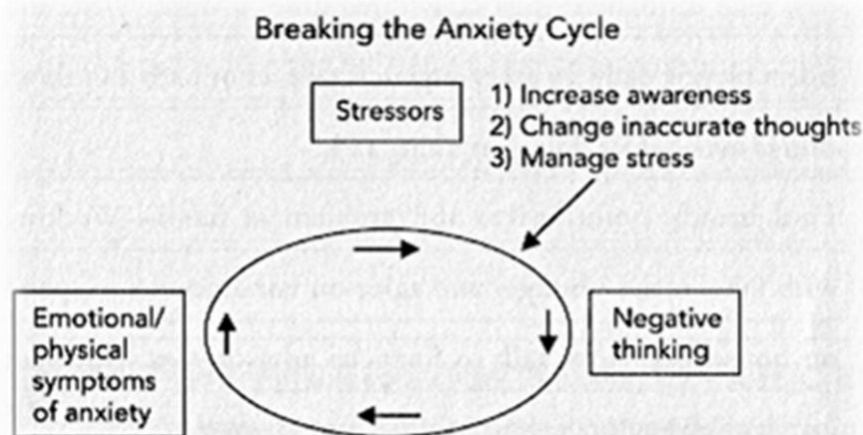
Your thoughts affect your feelings. Your feelings, in turn, influence your actions. This is especially true regarding anxiety. Your thoughts can cause your anxiety levels to skyrocket, inflaming the urge to drink, act out, or use. Or they can calm you down and help you stay on the sobriety track. Therefore, recognizing your pro-addiction thoughts and changing them to pro-recovery thoughts is an essential step in easing anxiety. Consider replacing unhealthy thoughts with the following health enhancing thoughts. Repeat often:

- using or acting compulsively to relieve my anxiety is dangerous.
- I can handle this feeling, and I can discover what is causing it.
- I don't have to tolerate this feeling; I can control my thoughts that are causing it.
- Once I've managed my feelings of anxiety, I will feel stronger.
- I can and will learn how to control my thoughts, feelings, behaviours and beliefs so I won't have to go through this prolonged anxiety anymore.

## Manage Stress

There are many strategies and techniques for releasing and reducing stress and thereby lowering anxiety levels. Some of the most helpful include:

- Aerobic exercise (the kind that gets your heart pumping and increases your respiration) is an extremely effective anxiety-buster, relieving muscle tension, burning up stress hormones, and stimulating the release of endorphins, the bodies feel good hormones.
- It is physically impossible to be stressed and relaxed at the same time. That's why practicing relaxation on a regular basis is the best way to lower your anxiety level and give your body and mind a "vacation" from stress. There are many good relaxation techniques including yoga, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing and visualization. There are some effective hands-on relaxation therapies such as massage, acupuncture, and reflexology. Find the one that works best for you.
- Many people are stressed because they have too many responsibilities and roles to fill but too little time. Try these tips.
  - figure out the most efficient and least stressful way to do what must be done.
  - Make a to-do list with the most important things at the top, the less important things beneath.
  - Plan ahead to decide how to combine activities: look for shortcuts.
  - Cross off any activities that you can skip.
  - Do one thing at a time to increase efficiency and decrease the stress of multitasking.
  - Develop realistic goals.
  - Delegate tasks: you really don't have to do it all yourself.
  - Learn to say "no." It's alright to let people know what you can and can't handle.
- An undernourished, exhausted, or under exercised body is a stressed body. Eat a healthful, balanced diet, get plenty of rest and sleep, and exercise for at least an hour every day.
- Friends, family, and recovery groups can help you get through the rough patches and validate your success. Use them.
- Don't neglect having fun! Take time to do the things you enjoy with people you enjoy. Do things that feel good to you. Distract yourself when you're stressed by having fun.



## Anger in Recovery

Anger, that unpleasant feeling of annoyance, resentment, or rage you experience when a goal is blocked, your needs are frustrated, or you are attacked, is one of the most basic human emotions. It's with you from birth to death and can be an asset or a liability, depending upon how it's used. On the positive side, anger can help you survive assaults, correct injustices, grow, become independent, and establish better conditions. But it can also destroy property, relationships and lives, if it's not handled properly. And banishing it is supposedly a major reason that many people drink, use drugs or act out. You have probably used your substance/activity of choice to get your anger under control or to calm yourself down after an angry outburst or argument. Unfortunately, it only works in the short term, if at all.

We experience anger in our own unique ways, but there are some common patterns seen with uncontrolled anger. It begins with a trigger: something unpleasant happens. Let's say you were about to pull into a parking space when someone cuts in front of you and got it first. Certain thoughts arise as you evaluate the person's behaviour and think about what happened. "Jerk! Unfair! Terrible! Awful! He shouldn't have done that!" You respond emotionally to your thoughts with feelings of being outraged, offended and, ultimately, hopeless about changing the situation. This prompts you to act out your feelings with certain behaviours. Perhaps you pound your steering wheel, roll down the window and yell at the offending driver and if you out of control, physically confront the other driver.

In most cases, there are consequences to pay: you may feel guilty, the other guy might get out of his car and attack you, or you may be arrested. And these consequences can escalate your anger and perpetuate the cycle. The offshoot of your uncontrolled anger sequence is that you feel worse and find yourself in an even more difficult situation.

### Managing Anger

Uncontrolled anger is the result of inaccurate thoughts. These thoughts may rise so naturally or so often that you don't even recognize them. To manage anger effectively, it's essential that you learn to think differently about the things that normally make you angry. Once you change your thoughts, your emotions and behaviour will follow suit. Note that the goal is not to eliminate anger, for sometimes it can be helpful. The point is to learn to identify anger, decide whether it's justified, and then either control it or use it to your advantage. This is a challenge for those in recovery because addiction causes inaccurate thinking that may trigger unnecessary anger. There are five techniques that can help you manage your anger.

1. Change you're thinking about the situation. When you are angry, you're thinking can become exaggerated and overly dramatic. Try replacing these inflammatory thoughts with more rational ones. For instance, instead of catastrophizing and saying, "Oh, this is the worst thing and everything's ruined," remain calm and say to yourself, "This is frustrating but it's not the end of the world and getting angry is not going to fix it." Logic or clear thinking is an excellent tool for defeating anger because anger, even when it's justified, can quickly become irrational. So, use cold, hard logic. Remind yourself that the world is not out to get you; you're just experiencing some rough spots. Try changing your thoughts and applying logic each time you feel anger getting the best of you and you will get a more balanced perspective.
2. Look at the situation from the other person's perspective. Suppose your friend Amanda said she was going to meet you at a mutual friend's party, but she didn't show up. Before you get too steamed up about it, try to imagine why she didn't come. Is she under a lot of stress?

Could she be sick? You might also ask yourself why Amanda's presence is so important to you. Do you have unrealistic expectations about the friendship? Are you making demands that she cannot fulfill? When you look at it from the other person's point of view, you realize that there are reasons why things may not be exactly the way you want them to be.

3. Ask yourself if your thoughts are accurate. Accurate thoughts can be supported by facts; inaccurate thoughts cannot. It's important that you examine your thought process when anger arises, to test their accuracy. To do this effectively, it is useful to write your thoughts down, so that you can more easily identify and change distortions in your thinking. Following are a few examples of inaccurate thoughts:
  - If she really cared, she wouldn't have done that.
  - She should understand what I'm going through.
  - He must not want me to succeed if he does that.

All these statements would be difficult to prove. Ask yourself if you can back up your thoughts with facts. If you can't, postpone your angry reaction until the facts are clear.

4. Think of happy or pleasant times in the past. When you find yourself in an anger provoking situation, it's helpful to visualize some pleasant scenarios that can help you diffuse the anger. Try thinking of the following when you feel yourself losing your fight against anger:
  - The first time you fell in love
  - The best present you ever received
  - The time you've spent with a beloved pet, friend, or family member
  - A dream that really came true
  - The best vacation you ever had
  - Your favorite walk in the park or forest

Visualization or imagery does not appeal to everyone, but if it works well for you, set aside 15 minutes per day, every day for a week, to practice visualizing pleasant scenarios. Some people find it helpful to list the four or five enjoyable scenarios they have practiced on an index card. When they're angry, they pull the card from their wallet or purse, select one scenario, and start imagining. Remember why this technique is helpful: if you can concentrate on a pleasant scene, you may be able to stop the negative thought patterns that trigger uncontrolled anger. Once you have calmed down, you can analyze your inaccurate thoughts and create accurate thoughts to replace them.

5. Think first, speak carefully. Angry people tend to jump to conclusions, some of which can be very inaccurate. If you find yourself in a heated discussion, slow down and think through your response. Don't say the first thing that comes into your head. Listen carefully to what the other person is saying and take your time before answering. Listen to what is underlying your anger. Suppose, for example, you like your freedom and personal space, while your significant other wants more connection and closeness. If he or she starts complaining about your solo activities, don't retaliate by painting your partner as a jailer or an albatross around your neck. Try to understand your partner's point of view and help your partner understand yours. It's natural to get defensive when you are criticized, but don't rush to fight back. Instead, listen to what's underlying the words: the message that this person might feel neglected and unloved. It may take a lot of patient questioning on your part, and it may require some breathing space, but don't let your or your partner's anger cause the discussion to spin out of control.



## Taking Responsibility

When you do something you don't feel good about, the first impulse may be to try to convince yourself and others that it wasn't your fault. For example, you don't really feel good about being violent or abusive and you know that it was wrong, but you try to deny responsibility for your behaviour. Below are some common ways that people deny responsibility for their angry behaviour:

- Blaming. She provoked me. He made me do it. She just wouldn't shut up. If he wasn't such a jerk. You know how men are.
- Justifying. I had the right. I had no other choice. I had to. It was necessary. She hit me first.
- Blaming. I had too much to drink. I had a really bad day. There's never any money. The kids... Her parents... If it wasn't for...
- Minimizing. It was only a slap, not real violence. In all the years we've been married, I only lost it a few times. It's not that big of a deal.

Denying responsibility is an attempt to shift the blame: somehow you became the victim, not the aggressor. But when you see yourself as the victim (of your partner, the system, society, or current circumstances) you give away your personal power. In truth, you are in control of yourself. You choose your emotions, actions, and reactions to both circumstances and the behaviour of others. Although you aren't responsible for everything that happens to you, you are responsible for your reactions. And when you take responsibility for your actions, you put yourself in a position of power, increasing your ability to take charge of yourself and your life. One of the best ways to stop anger before it starts is to take responsibility for yourself and your behaviour. You can accomplish this by following seven steps:

- Make a commitment to change. The first step on the journey is to define the change you want to make and decide that you're going to stick with the program and achieve the goals.
- Seek relationships and activities that are positive. When you feel good about your life, you will automatically be less negative and angry.
- Take care of yourself. Self-care lies at the heart of taking responsibility for yourself. Pay attention to your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs.
- Broaden your resources and support system. Surround yourself with supportive people who want you to be clean and sober. Go the meetings and share honestly about how you are feeling.
- Give yourself permission to say no. Draw clear boundaries and set limits to protect yourself and your physical, emotional, and financial health. Don't do things just to please others. Otherwise, you are likely to feel used, abused, resentful, and angry.
- Set realistic, reachable goals. Think about what you've easily achieved in the past, then set your next goal once step beyond. When you reach this goal, set another slightly beyond it. Don't aim for perfection if you haven't made all the stops along the way. Be sure to pat yourself on the back as you reach each goal.
- Let go. Make peace with yourself concerning situations you can't control and let them go. This is doubly important if you choose to remain in frustrating situations. Remember that you can only control yourself.

(adapted from *Healing the Addicted Brain* by H. C. Urschel, 2009)

## The Transformational Value of Step Ten

We cannot have healthy relationships without a persistent effort to keep our side of the street clean. We are going to need to face our mistakes and keep a solid alliance with ourselves as we sail into uncharted waters. There are many dangerous currents (such as false-pride) and riptides (such as self-hate) that lie ahead, and if we don't support ourselves on this journey we will end up sinking, drowning, or relapsing. Our efforts in working Steps, 8, 9 and 10 provide tangible evidence of our serenity and the depth of our commitment to this new way of life.

**Step 10:** Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

**Transformational Value:** Integrating self-examination, self-regulation, and emotional maturity into our lives.

If we were rigorous in making amends, we have forgiven ourselves for what we have done wrong and realized that we don't have to be perfect. We understand that being authentic and honest is more important than being perfect. We accept that we are a work in progress. To continue maturing emotionally and spiritually we need to integrate what we have learned about ourselves and human relations into a new way of life. We need a practice that will continue to promote honest self-appraisal, self-awareness, self-regulation, and responsibility. We need a practice that will put the best of ourselves in charge of an ongoing self-examination and a prompt admission when we are wrong. Bill W. noted that "No one can make much of his life until self-searching becomes a regular habit, until he is able to admit and accept what he finds, until he patiently and persistently tries to correct what is wrong" (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, page 88). Step 10 involves different kinds of inventories.

The **spot check inventory** is used to recover our emotional balance before we react to make things worse. This inventory is taken whenever we are emotionally tangled up or upset, at any time of the day. We use this inventory to figure out what is going on with us when we are upset or angry. As Bill W. wrote, "It is a spiritual axiom that every time we are disturbed, no matter what the cause, there is something wrong with us (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, page 90). Most typically we try to regulate others, because we don't know how to sooth our own anxieties and insecurities. We need to become emotionally self-supporting. We need to validate ourselves. This is at the heart of emotional recovery and emotional maturity.

Often taken at night, the **daily inventory** is based on a review of the day that focusses on what we have done well and where we have not done so well. We need to be balanced in our self-appraisal. We are reconstructing our self-concept, and therefore we need to recognize what we have done well while we are evaluating where we need to admit a wrong or improve. Some of the questions we might ask ourselves are:

- When did I feel good about myself today? How did I improve the situation I was in?
- When was I part of the solution rather than part of the problem?
- When did I stop, pause, and reflect on what was going on before reacting?
- Was I selfish and self-serving? Was I dishonest?
- Was I honest in all my interactions with others?
- Was I wrong but didn't admit it?
- Am I justifying or rationalizing an inappropriate behaviour or reaction?

Some people complete a **recovery progress checkup** annually or semi-annually. They may meet with their sponsor, a trusted friend in recovery or their therapist to review the progress they have made. It is valuable to occasionally reflect on how far we have come, rather than only focussing on how far we have yet to go.

Step 10 helps us maintain the emotional maturity and integrity and healthy human relationships. We have experienced a personal transformation. We are well on our way to reconstructing ourselves. We have embarked on a major transformation of ourselves and our attitudes. The path has been treacherous and challenging, but persistent and honest effort, along with a good guide and a power greater than our false-self, has helped us discover a new understanding of ourselves in a path to healthier human connections. We have started to incorporate a design for daily living in our lives that keeps us emotionally balanced and in harmony with our true-self and with others.

(Adapted from the work of Allen Berger, and expert on the science of recovery).