

Building a Solid Foundation

The recovery Journey can be a long and at the same time, extremely fulfilling experience, with wide-ranging emotional highs and lows along the way. Most of us who step into this way of living life, and intentionally choose to take it on with the same kind of passion we sought out all of our addictive, obsessive, and compulsive behaviours in the past, will experience a variety of thoughts and feelings that we've probably been avoiding for a very long time. Usually these unwanted, uncomfortable feelings are kept locked away deep in the shadows of our personality. In my experience, most people who have developed any form of lifestyle that uses harmful, destructive, and generally ineffective behaviours to cope with their emotional experiences, are probably dealing with some form of psychological, emotional, or even physical trauma. These traumas are predominantly revolving around our unmet childhood needs and it can be extremely beneficial to have a solid understanding of the symptoms associated with these issues so we can recognize their presence in our current way of being. This is why, in therapy, people often delve into certain areas of the past, which can be a daunting, and at times, an extremely triggering process.

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However, it is usually the most rewarding and empowering part of our journey too. Being able to finally put to bed all of those demons from the past and start to move forward with our life, is the essence of sustainable behaviour change, and this is the reason that the foundational work we complete at the start of our journey is vital to the long-term success of building the Life we Want to Live, whatever that life may look like for you. As I often say, again and again, in any process of behaviour change, regardless of the approach you decide to take, creating a solid foundation using the four primary fundamentals I talk about in group, and one-on-one coaching, can only go towards increasing the probability of you creating the life you want to live, not only as something in the distant future, but also something you can begin to experience right now!

The 4 fundamental areas of foundation fall into the following basic categories, which will be covered in the pages of the website as you continue to read each section:

- 1. Creating and Using a Support Network**
- 2. Creating a Structured Lifestyle**
- 3. Balancing the Physical with the Emotional**
- 4. Developing a Mindfulness Practice**

What each of these areas look like for you personally is entirely your choice, and this isn't about doing what you're told to do in order to make the changes you want to make. If that's what you're looking for, ask yourself if this has worked for you in the past, because it probably hasn't, and if it has, there's a really good chance you wouldn't be here to begin with. The problem with this is what happens when we fail because language creates behavioural rigidity. In other words, even though we are responding to our own internal narrative, we are either going to go with the flow, and do everything we are being asked to do, or we're going to push back against the requested behaviour. Our response is completely dependant on our perspective on being told what to do. If we are ok with this, then it won't be a problem. If you're like me, and there is an angry entitled child in your system, then the response might not be so great.

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If we have a poor relationship with failing, then failing to do something we've been “told to do” just activates the primary emotions we've been using our addictive, obsessive, and compulsive coping mechanisms for in the first place, so it's really important that we do our best not to go there again. This is about you building the Life that YOU Want to Live, and putting these fundamental principles of foundation in place is often a very different process for everyone. We have to understand that it's not going to be perfect, we will fail at some point, that's just a given. If changing behaviours was an easy thing to do, we wouldn't be watching YouTube videos, and trying to educate ourselves on what to do.

On the following page, there is a series of reflective questions designed to help assess the foundation that we currently have in place. Take some time to sit with each question, and contemplate how things were in the past, how they currently are, and what you would need to do in the future for the foundation to be strong enough to support this type of work.

Support Network

What was my support network like in the past?

Reflect on who has been there for you when you needed them in the past. Try to think of times when you needed support, and it was there but maybe you decided not to use it. See if there was a time in the past when you felt supported by the people around you, people that had the same goals in life as you, people who were heading in the direction you wanted to go. Describe what this time was like, how did it feel to have this support, or what was missing if you didn't have it. If there were people present during that time, list the ones that were available to you then.

Describe the support you had in the past:

Name the people who were part of that support network:

What is my support network like right now?

Reflect on who you have in your life right now that's there for you when you need them. This may be difficult at first as they may be people who challenge your current lifestyle, hold you accountable, and at the same time, have compassion for where you're at and why you struggle. It may be that these people are present in your life, or that you are pushing these people away. Maybe you're having difficulty with their conversation and their boundaries. Your support network may also contain groups that you attend on a regular basis, so reflect on what this experience is like for you too. Either way, describe the support you have right now, and list the people available to you.

Describe the support you have right now:

Name the people who are part of this support network:

What is my support network to look like in the future?

Reflect on what you need to work on to build the type of support you think you need to make the changes you want to make. Contemplate what you think is missing in your network. Do you want people who challenge your thinking, hold you accountable for what you say you want to do. Are you looking for people who can educate you, listen to you, or empathise with what you're going through. Whatever it is you think you need, look at what you currently have available, see if what you're looking for is already there, and if not, what would it take to create it.

Describe the support you want in the future:

Name the people who are currently in your life that can be a part of this support network:

Creating a Structured Lifestyle:

How has routine and structure helped you in the past?

Reflect on a time when routine and structure has helped you to achieve your goals, what was this like, how did it help you, and what were the feelings you experienced when living this type of life?

What is your current level of routine and structure?

Reflect on your current level of routine and structure, what is in place to support you in Living the Life you Want to Live, how are your days put together, and what do you currently do that's working for you in this area?

What do you want your routine and structure to look like moving forward?

Reflect on what you need to put in place to support you with making the changes you want to make, what do you want to put in place to achieve the things you want to achieve, and Live the Life you Want to Live?

Balance the Physical with the Emotional

P = Physical Wellbeing

Reflect on what your current level of physical wellbeing is like and how you are contributing to this. What medications are you taking, and are you taking them as prescribed, contemplate your level of personal hygiene and describe how this plays out in your life, or how you want it to be in the future.

L = List Barriers to Treatment

Reflect on the things you do that stop you from Living the Life you Want to Live and describe what you can do differently in this area of life. List the resources you might need to create what it is you are looking for.

E = Eat a Healthy Diet

Reflect on what your diet currently looks like and what you would like it to look like in the future, describe what you would need to do, or continue doing, to make this a part of your new way of living.

A = Avoid Mood Altering Substances

Reflect on what substances you may currently be using that can influence your physical ability to Live the Life you Want to Live. Describe anything you're using that makes it difficult to achieve the things you want to achieve. Remember to include things like caffeine and sugar as these can impair our physical ability to be who we want to be in areas of life that are important to us.

S = Sleep Hygiene

Reflect on how you practice good sleep hygiene right now, what are you doing well, and what would you like to change to make things better in this area. If you don't know how to change things, describe what you need to do so you can educate yourself on how to reach your sleep hygiene goals.

E = Exercise on a Regular Basis

Reflect on what your current level of physical activity looks like. What are you doing well, and what do you want to change in this area. Please make sure you consult with a medical professional before making any changes to your exercise routine.

It is important to sit with each area of this exercise to reflect on what you want to put in place to Live the Life you Want to Live. Remember, in order for these things to start making a difference in our physical wellbeing, we need to be consistently participating in each of these activities on a daily basis. It takes time for our body to get used to the new way of being, and it takes consistency to create new habits. If you find yourself giving up on these things after short periods of time, take a look at the videos on "The Problem with Instant Gratification" and see if it applies to you.