



## FOMO – How to Identify, Prevent and Overcome the “Fear of Missing Out”

Background: What is Fear of Missing Out? (FOMO) – FOMO is a “what if?” type of worry or anxiety focused on the possibility that life will somehow be worse if one is not present for an event.

FOMO as an official word was adopted by the Oxford Dictionary with the following definition:

- *fomo: anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere*

FOMO can at times be associated with substance use disorders especially when an individual is trying to change their lifestyle to avoid situations that can trigger relapse. An individual who is trying to live without drugs/alcohol may experience a sense of fear or worry about what may be missed out on when making a change to a more stable and safer lifestyle without substances. To put this in perspective here are some examples of FOMO types of statements associated with substance use recovery:

- “Now that I stopped getting high, how am I going to handle no longer going to the wild parties?”
- “If I don’t go out to my favorite bar on the weekends, I am going to miss all the good times with friends!”
- “If I get out of the drug game, I will miss all the excitement and action”
- “Most of my drug using friends will all start doing things without me once they find out I stopped”

### Group Question – Can anyone in this group identify with this idea of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out?)

- *If so, what specific FOMO thoughts come to mind for you personally?*

FOMO is normal for many in substance use recovery. When someone is learning to live without substances this requires significant life change which often involves changing associates and places. It is totally normal to worry about some of the “what ifs” involved with letting go of past behaviors and lifestyles. It is also not unusual to be concerned about boredom and missing out on activities that used to be considered to be “fun” or exciting. The truth is however, when addiction is involved, the “fun” part about using substances probably didn’t end up being so fun after all, due to of the consequences

FOMO and Social Media - A person can still experience FOMO without social media. However, for some people social media can enhance the feeling of FOMO, especially depending upon who is followed or friended on social media platforms. On social media, people who are still drinking or using substances may at times openly display their lifestyle in a positive light which can trigger FOMO.

The truth about social media that all of us know at this point is that social media so often is an illusion. People are usually inclined to show their lives in a much more positive perspective than the actual reality

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- **What do you think about social media and FOMO?**
- **Have you had to change your use of social media for your own good? If not, is this idea something you should possibly consider?**



## Preventing and Overcoming FOMO

Preventing FOMO – Here are two things to consider that can help prevent FOMO from setting in

- 1- If you know that you are a person who is susceptible to FOMO it may be best to avoid gossip and limit social media which may increase a false feeling that you are missing out on something. Quite often, the less you know about other people's business, the better that is for avoiding FOMO. It can take practice, but we can all learn not to care about or focus on what does not concern us.
  - **Group Question: Do you think it is a good idea for you to be careful with who you follow and associate with on social media? Also, be honest - do you need to stay away from gossip?**
- 2- Support groups can be a powerful antidote to FOMO. Hearing about other peoples' past struggles with addiction can serve as a powerful reminder telling us not to go back to an old lifestyle. When it comes to addiction, support groups can remind us that we are missing out on more pain, stress and consequences, than missing out on imagined "fun" or excitement related to substance use.
  - **Group Question – How does being part of a group help you to stay away from experiencing FOMO?**

Overcoming FOMO- Coping with FOMO involves three perspectives:

*Keep it Real About the Past* – Humans have a tendency to romanticize the past at times.

- To romanticize means to idealize or to think about or describe something as being better or more attractive or interesting than it really is
- *"The good old days weren't always good"* – Billy Joel – This saying is used in another Taking the Escalator activity, but it is worth repeating because it is so meaningful and true. Sometimes when time passes, we can forget about how difficult things really were. It can be so important not to fall into the trap of fantasizing about "the good old days" and forgetting the real consequences
- If you experience FOMO, remember, there will be other, much more beneficial events in life. You can learn to seek out and enjoy more stable and healthy forms of entertainment and socialization

**Group Question – Be honest, do you ever find yourself romanticizing the past? What can help you to keep it real with yourself and remember where your past life of substance use lead you?**

*Stay Grateful about the Present* – As a group, review and discuss each of the following sayings about keeping a grateful perspective:

"If the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, maybe you should water your own grass"


"Recovery is never easy, but it is always rewarding"

"Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough." —*Oprah Winfrey*

"He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not but rejoices for those which he has." - *Epicetus*



*Reframe and Refocus* – We can cope with FOMO by reframing FOMO-based thoughts as in this chart:

<b><u>Instead of dwelling on these thoughts about substance use...</u></b> 	<b><u>Think about these positive thoughts about positive lifestyle change and recovery...</u></b>
Living without substances is boring!	Wow it is great having money in my pocket and not having to deal with all the “lows” of that old lifestyle
I miss the excitement of the old days when I was using	It’s a great feeling not having to look over my shoulder for police or to worry about getting arrested
I was really good at hustling and doing whatever I needed to keep getting high	It’s nice to know that I don’t have anything to hide any more and I have stability in my life
I miss the feeling of escape when I was high	I appreciate having my head on straight with a clear focus
I miss the excitement of making fast money to get high	It’s nice knowing my rent and my bills are paid these days

**GROUP FOLLOW UP:** For each individual in this group personally: List five things about your present life that are better now than in the past. (For example, think life areas such as financial, relationships, family, legal, employment, etc.) - Make a list below and then when everyone is ready, discuss these lists as a group:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**FOMO FINAL REVIEW AND CHECKLIST:**

Which of the following activities and skills do you think you can work on to prevent and overcome FOMO?

<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid gossip
<input type="checkbox"/> Limit social media
<input type="checkbox"/> Use support groups
<input type="checkbox"/> Stop romanticizing about the past
<input type="checkbox"/> Stay grateful about the present
<input type="checkbox"/> Reframe negative thinking and focus on the positive things in life