



Life Skills Profile

Intro: Sometimes in substance use treatment groups and programs the focus on substance use can be overemphasized. Of course, learning skills specific to substance use recovery is important. However, there is so much more involved in the long-term positive change process. There are things about just living life in general that may need to be addressed. Areas of need must first be identified with a host of positive “life skills” to follow. Managing life without substances involves just that: **Managing life**. This exercise is focused on identifying and discussing positive life skills. Everyone’s needs are unique and different so share what you need and be open minded and honest in this discussion.

LINK TO VIDEO INTRODUCTION:

<https://youtu.be/5liLxZhaa38>

Directions: Read, review, and discuss each item on this list as a group. Try to identify which life skills apply to you the most. There are more life skills than these however this list contains some common situations for people who have a history of substance use issues.

Life Skill Areas Often Associated with Substance Use Recovery

Boredom Tolerance – Using substances is exciting and fun at first for many, which can be part of the hook. Nothing to do today? Get high! Or if you need to do something boring like clean the house: it’s a lot less boring when high, many will say. A boring job can become tolerable with the addition of mind-altering substances. The problem is that with time, it can become impossible to tolerate boredom without substances. The truth is that life for the vast majority of people has boring parts. It can’t always be exciting and new. Therefore, learning to be bored without turning to substances to cope can be an area of struggle for some. How about you?

➤ **Boredom Tolerance Skills:**

- Learn to entertain yourself in boring situations: With time you can develop ways to entertain yourself with your own thoughts.
 - Healthy fantasies about your goals are one way. Can you see yourself in a better future?
 - Learning to observe – People watching, nature watching, listening and taking things in can help make a boring situation tolerable.
 - Get involved – Strike up a conversation with a stranger. Join in with what is going on around you.
 - Exercise: Walk, get some steps in, stretch. Use down time to your advantage.
 - Read: Download a book on your smartphone and learn to love reading
 - Learn: Again, use your smartphone to learn things. Look things up, take an interest in increasing your knowledge when you are bored you can learn to love learning.
 - Create – Draw, write, etc. Use your “boredom” time as a way to create something new and interesting.



Making Friends – Some people get into drug use because it's a way to be a part of a group. This is especially true with young people. Getting together with others to get high or drunk is a way to bond, even though it can soon become an unhealthy way to do this. Older drug users may tend to isolate more often but still making new friends can be a real challenge when the substance is removed from life. How about you?

➤ **Friend making skills** –

- Take Risks – Try new things, speak to new people, join groups you may have though were weird. Go to new places.
- Widen out - Open up your mind to possibilities you may not have considered like older or younger friends or people who are very different than you.
- Find Common Interests – There are many people out there who like things you like, get out there and find them and make some friends.
- Be a friend to make a friend – Offering to help other people is a great way to meet new people and on top of that it is very rewarding.

Intimacy – Getting close to people - Alcohol and other substances can be a “social lubricant” meaning that two people using can get closer quicker and easier than “normal” When some people stop using substances, they may find it difficult to get close to certain people. It can be a challenge to “let others in” and know the real you if you are not accustomed to it. How about you?

➤ **Building Intimacy (without substances)** – There are things you can do in order to get closer to people and to allow them to get closer to you, but it can take practice. Here are a few:

- Learn to share you real feelings (other than anger)- People get so comfortable telling others what they don't like or what pisses them off but what about letting someone know your fears or insecurities? Showing a little vulnerability can build intimacy.
- “Friends First”- People can get in the pattern of making relationships all about sexual interest and conquests. Learning to make friends, without focusing on romance can be a way to work on real intimacy building.
- Share who you really are and take the time to really learn who others are – Get away from the small talk and learn to get into deeper conversations about what motivates others and what they are all about and also what you are all about. What is meaningful to you and to others?
- Learn to find people you can trust – Yes there are people out there whom you cannot trust but not everyone in the world is out to get you. You can develop the skills to steadily build trusting relationships with others who you can then build more intimate and close relationships with. You can improve your ability to find these people as you get to know people who are trustworthy. Learning to be discerning (using good judgement) without being paranoid is a process.



Decision Making for the Long Term – The substance use lifestyle can keep you in the day to day, or even the hour to hour. Sometimes when substance use gets really out of hand, life becomes a repetitive cycle of finding resources to get high, getting high, then recuperating to do it again. Long term decisions can get lost in this cycle. Has this happened to you?

- **Learning to Focus on the Long Term** – When substances are gone and life is about more important things, long term decision-making becomes a key part of everything. There are skills involved in doing this successfully. What is best for your future and the future of those you love and care for?
 - Overcome impulsivity – Learning to wait, pause and THINK becomes an essential life skill for so many in recovery. This takes practice too but is achievable.
 - Become a goal-oriented person- Learn to sacrifice the immediate pleasures of today for the lasting rewards of tomorrow. Saving money is a great example. Can you do without the latest and greatest clothes and devices to save money for more important things down the road?
 - Good things come to those who wait – Learning patience and persistence is an important skill for long term success. Grind out educational and career goals, for instance, to one day get the job you really want instead of going for the fast and easy money (for example)

Facing the Music – Substance use can become about avoidance: Avoiding responsibilities, avoiding problems, avoiding challenges, for instance. People may get high to run from past pain and trauma rather than learning to cope. You can only run for so long – Things tend to catch us eventually. Can anyone relate?

- **Learning to face the music** – Facing difficult situations is challenging but there are things that can help with this process such as:
 - Support – When you face things with a friend or loved one, it can still be scary, but less so
 - Professional help – Are you running from the past? A therapist can help you face the past and empower yourself for a better future in spite of your past. (Posttraumatic growth)
 - Successive approximations – This means gradually “molding” new behaviors by moving toward things little by little by little but getting stronger and stronger as you go. Facing things in life can be scary but if you start small and make baby steps, you can continuously build confidence and inner strength.

Closing discussion:

Which of these (if any) areas stood out to you?

What are some things you can try to focus on going forward and try or discuss with your therapist? (If you have one)