



What Happens When Things Start Going Well?

When life improves faster than the way I see myself

In early recovery, life can begin improving before self-esteem does. Simply not drinking or using for a while may reduce crises, improve sleep, restore trust, create financial breathing room, and make relationships or work more stable.

But the way I see myself may still be shaped by years of failure, shame, chaos, broken promises, or disappointment. When my circumstances start looking better than I believe I am, that mismatch can feel surprisingly uncomfortable.

Sometimes the problem is not that life is going badly. It is that life is going better than my old self-concept knows how to hold.

When Good Starts to Feel Unfamiliar

When things begin going well, I may notice myself:

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| ☐ Waiting for the other shoe to drop | ☐ Dropping routines that were helping | ☐ Taking unnecessary risks |
| ☐ Feeling suspicious of calm | ☐ Pulling away from support | ☐ Getting restless with stability |
| ☐ Minimizing progress | ☐ Creating conflict or intensity | ☐ Thinking one mistake proves nothing changed |
| ☐ Thinking I do not deserve it | ☐ Testing relationships | ☐ Other: _____ |

1. What has gotten better in my life since I stopped drinking or using?

2. Has the way I see myself improved at the same pace? Why or why not?

3. What part of me still expects things to fall apart?

4. What do I believe I deserve when things are actually going well?



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Understanding the pull back toward what feels familiar

People do not always sabotage progress because they consciously want to fail. Sometimes the old version of life feels more familiar than the new one. Chaos may fit the story I have carried about myself more easily than stability does.

If I still believe I am unreliable, broken, undeserving, or bound to fail, continued success can challenge that identity. One way to remove the tension is to change the story I tell about myself. Another is to make life match the old story again.

Which Direction Am I Moving?

Bringing My Life Back Down

- Stop doing what is working
- Create conflict or urgency
- Return to old people or patterns
- Take risks I do not need to take
- Use a mistake as proof I have not changed

Letting My Self-View Catch Up

- Notice evidence of growth
- Keep commitments to myself
- Accept positive feedback
- Let stability become familiar
- Allow progress without waiting to lose it

5. What old story about myself is being challenged by the way my life looks now?

6. What would I have to believe about myself if things continued going well?

7. What do I sometimes do that brings unnecessary chaos back into my life?

8. What expectations or responsibilities come with doing better that may scare me?

9. When I make a mistake, do I treat it as information or as proof that the old version of me was right?



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Building self-esteem through choices I can respect

Self-esteem is not something I can simply talk myself into. It becomes more believable when my behavior gives me reasons to respect myself. Honest choices, commitments kept, help accepted, responsibility taken, and following through when things are difficult all become evidence

If my life is getting better, I do not have to shrink it back down to match an old belief about myself. I can build self-esteem through esteemable acts until the way I see myself begins to reflect the way I am actually learning to live.

Self-Esteem Comes From Esteemable Acts

10. What have I done in the last 30 days that I genuinely respect myself for?

11. What decision am I facing right now where I can ask, "Will this bring me closer to or farther from the person I want to be?"

12. What esteemable act can I take today that supports the life I am building?

13. If I kept making choices like that, what might I begin to believe about myself?

Esteemable Acts Can Be Ordinary

- ☐ Tell the truth when it would be easier to avoid it.
- ☐ Keep a commitment I made to myself or someone else.
- ☐ Ask for help or take responsibility before a problem becomes a crisis.
- ☐ Set or respect a boundary.
- ☐ Choose what brings me closer to the person I want to be, even when nobody is watching.

The Principle

Self-esteem comes from esteemable acts. Each time I make a decision that brings me closer to the person I want to be, I create evidence that I can trust and respect myself. I do not have to bring my life down to match my old self-image.