



What Am I Using for Relief?

Relief asks, "How can I feel better right now?"

*Recovery asks, "What choice moves me toward the life I want to build,
and the person I want to be?"*

We all look for relief when something feels difficult. Relief itself is not the problem. The problem begins when immediate relief becomes the main way we make decisions. In recovery, a substance may have served that purpose, but food, sex, relationships, fantasy, shopping, work, screens, approval, control, anger, isolation, gambling, or constant busyness can sometimes serve a similar function. The goal of this exercise is to understand the entire relief pattern, not just the behavior.

The Relief Pattern

Common forms of relief:

substances, food, sex, relationships, fantasy or daydreaming, shopping, screens, approval, control, anger, isolation, gambling, work, exercise, sleep, reassurance seeking, or constant busyness.

1. What am I feeling or experiencing right now?

2. What do I want relief from?

3. What do I usually reach for when I feel this way?

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ☐ Alcohol or drugs | ☐ Food | ☐ Sex / pornography |
| ☐ Attention / validation | ☐ Relationships | ☐ Fantasy / daydreaming |
| ☐ Social media / screens | ☐ Shopping / spending | ☐ Work |
| ☐ Exercise | ☐ Sleep | ☐ Isolation |
| ☐ Anger | ☐ Control | ☐ Reassurance seeking |
| ☐ Gambling / gaming | ☐ Constant busyness | ☐ Other: _____ |

4. What does this give me in the short term?

5. What does it cost me afterward?

6. Does it solve the problem, or just temporarily change how I feel about the problem?



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What Does It Actually Give Me?

When I reach for relief, what am I hoping to get?

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|--|---|--|
| ☐ Escape | ☐ Calm | ☐ Confidence |
| ☐ Connection | ☐ Validation | ☐ Control |
| ☐ Numbness | ☐ Excitement | ☐ Distraction |
| ☐ Comfort | ☐ Sleep | ☐ A sense of being wanted |
| ☐ A break from myself | ☐ A different version of reality | ☐ Other: _____ |

7. What changes immediately after I do it?

8. How long does the relief usually last?

9. What returns when the relief wears off?

Relief Versus Solution

Relief

- Changes how I feel right now
- Usually works quickly
- May help me avoid discomfort
- Can create another problem

Solution

- Addresses what is actually happening
- Often requires time and effort
- Helps me face or tolerate discomfort
- Moves me toward the life I want

10. What problem is still waiting for me afterward?

Relief is not automatically unhealthy. The question is whether it helps me move through what I am feeling, or whether it becomes the way I repeatedly avoid what needs my attention.



What Am I Using for Relief?

What Fear Is Underneath It?

When I look underneath the discomfort, which basic fear may be operating?

- ☐ What will people think of me?
- ☐ What will I think of myself?
- ☐ My needs will not be met.
- ☐ My wants will not be met.
- ☐ I will have to do something I do not want to do.

11. Which fear shows up most often for me?

12. How does that fear influence the way I seek relief?

13. What am I trying to control so I do not have to experience that fear?

What Do I Actually Need?

Instead of asking only, "How do I stop doing this?" it can help to ask what need I am unsuccessfully trying to meet.

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|---|---|--|
| ☐ Connection | ☐ Rest | ☐ Safety |
| ☐ Reassurance | ☐ Belonging | ☐ Fun |
| ☐ Meaning | ☐ Structure | ☐ Space to grieve |
| ☐ A boundary | ☐ To tell the truth | ☐ To ask for help |
| ☐ To tolerate disappointment | ☐ To accept what I cannot change | ☐ Other: _____ |

14. What need am I unsuccessfully trying to meet?

15. What would addressing the actual need look like?



What Am I Using for Relief?

Building a Different Response

When I notice: _____

I am usually feeling: _____

My automatic relief behavior is: _____

What I am really hoping to get is: _____

What I may actually need is: _____

A healthier action I can take is: _____

Someone I can tell is: _____

Before I Act

- Am I trying to solve a problem, or only change how I feel for a moment?
- What feeling am I unwilling to have right now?
- Which of my values belongs in this decision?
- Can I tolerate some discomfort long enough to choose deliberately?
- What would the person I want to become do here?

The Principle

Wanting relief is human. The goal is not to eliminate every uncomfortable feeling. Some feelings need to be felt, understood, tolerated, or responded to rather than immediately escaped.

Relief is temporary. A solution changes my relationship with the problem.

Recovery does not require me to stop wanting relief. It asks me to become more honest about what I am trying to escape, what my relief is costing me, and whether the choices I make are actually helping me build the life I want.

Growth begins when discomfort stops getting the final vote.