

# Excusing the Using

## Purpose:

This exercise is designed to help you identify the common justifications or excuses that maintain substance use and to apply cognitive reframing to transform them into recovery-supportive responses. In this exercise you will learn to notice automatic excuses, to regulate your emotional triggers, and to develop healthier alternative responses aligned with your core values.

## Part 1: Understanding Excuses

Excuses are automatic thoughts designed to reduce discomfort in the short term. They usually sound reasonable in the moment. They are also usually incomplete.

When repeated, these thoughts become conditioned pathways:

Trigger → Excuse → Use → Temporary Relief → Long-Term Cost

The purpose of this exercise is not to argue with yourself. It's to learn to slow down enough to see the pattern.

## Part 2: The Top Excuses (and Reframes)

Below are common examples of “excusing the using” along with ways to reframe the excuse into a positive reason not to give in to the urge. Notice which ones feel uncomfortable to you and note them. We'll be using them later.

### 1. “I had a hard day. I deserve it.”

**Reframe:**

I deserve relief, not regret. There are healthier ways to recover from stress.

**Ecotherapy Reset:**

Take a 10-minute walk outside before making any decision. Let your nervous system settle naturally.

### 2. “It's just this once.”

**Reframe:**

Every habit was built from “just this once.” I'm building something different now.

**Ecotherapy Reset:**

Pause and feel your feet on the ground. Notice five sounds around you. Interrupt your autopilot to change the habit.

**3. “I can handle it.”**

**Reframe:**

If I truly had control, I wouldn't need to prove it to others or to myself.

**Ecotherapy Reset:**

Look at something steady in nature like a tree, a rock, or the horizon. Stability is quiet. You don't have to prove you can “handle it.” If you truly can handle it, then you can also practice abstinence instead.

**4. “No one will know.”**

**Reframe:**

I will know. My body will know. My progress will know.

**Ecotherapy Reset:**

Place your hand on your chest and take five slow breaths. Use your urge surfing skills. You can't hide from yourself. Integrity feels different than secrecy. Teach your body, your mind, and your spirit to notice the difference.

**5. “I need it to relax.”**

**Reframe:**

I need regulation, not sedation. I'm not regulating my emotions; I'm regulating my response to those emotions. There's no such thing as a “wrong” feeling. What can be “wrong” is how I choose to respond to that feeling.

**Ecotherapy Reset:**

Step outside and breathe slowly while lengthening your exhale. Let the wind, air, or light do some of the work by bringing you into the moment.

**6. “It helps my anxiety.”**

**Reframe:**

It numbs anxiety temporarily and increases it later. My anxiety will still be there when the effects of the substance are gone. I'm only postponing it.

**Ecotherapy Reset:**

Name what you see, hear, and feel in your surroundings. Grounding reduces anxiety without adding consequences. You're creating space for your anxiety and greeting it as a part of yourself, not trying to force it to go away.

**7. “Everyone else is doing it.”**

**Reframe:**

Recovery is not a popularity contest. It's a survival strategy. I don't have to follow the crowd.

**Ecotherapy Reset:**

Find something in nature that stands alone but remains whole, like a single tree, a bird on a wire. Imagine yourself becoming that. Being able to tolerate solitude is not weakness. It's the greatest strength.

### Part 3: Your Personal Excuses

Now it's your turn. Be honest. This is private. Nobody has to see it but you.

List your most common excuses for using:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### Part 4: Reframing Your Excuses

Take each excuse you listed above and write a recovery-supportive reframe. If necessary, you can use the examples listed in Part 2 above.

Excuse #1:

\_\_\_\_\_

Reframe:

\_\_\_\_\_

Excuse #2:

\_\_\_\_\_

Reframe:

\_\_\_\_\_

Excuse #3:

\_\_\_\_\_

Reframe:

\_\_\_\_\_

Excuse #4:

\_\_\_\_\_

Reframe:

\_\_\_\_\_

Excuse #5:

\_\_\_\_\_

Reframe:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Part 5: Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Pause Practice

Before acting on any excuse:

1. Step outside if possible.
2. Stand or sit in contact with the earth.
3. Take 5–10 slow breaths.
4. Ask:
  - a. What am I actually feeling right now?
  - b. Is this urge dangerous, or just uncomfortable?
  - c. What action could I take that aligns with my values?

Write what you notice, and how it could be used to reframe excuses for using:

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## Part 6: Building a New Trail

Habits are like trails in a forest. The more you walk them, the clearer they become. Excuses are trail markers indicating an opportunity to take a new path. If you stop walking the old path and consistently choose a new one, the unused trail begins to fade away while the new trail gets stronger every time you journey down it.

Small change leads to bigger changes. You don't have to change everything all at once. Instead, pick one change you can make that would eliminate one excuse for using, and work on that for today. When you've mastered that one, go on to the next.

One new behavior I will practice today instead of using:

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