

Self-Sabotaging Behaviors and Recovery

Purpose:

This exercise is to help you identify patterns of self-sabotaging behaviors that may interfere with your recovery, understand why they occur, and explore healthier, mindful alternatives. Using mindfulness-based ecotherapy, you will learn to observe thoughts, emotions, and impulses in connection with your natural environment, grounding yourself while creating positive, recovery-supportive choices.

Definition: Self-Sabotaging Behavior

Self-sabotaging behaviors are actions, habits, or thoughts that undermine your long-term goals, even when you consciously want to succeed. These behaviors often arise automatically, driven out of habit by fear, doubt, or old coping patterns, and can include:

- Using substances to cope with stress
- Procrastination on recovery tasks
- Avoiding support or therapy sessions
- Negative self-talk that erodes confidence

The first step in recovery is awareness: noticing these behaviors without judgment so you can replace them with intentional, helpful choices.

Part 1: Identifying Self-Sabotaging Behaviors

Take a moment to step outside or look at a natural scene (tree, water, sunlight). Breathe slowly and notice your thoughts and bodily sensations as you reflect on recent behaviors that might have been self-sabotaging or that might have interfered with your preferred goals and values.

Questions for reflection:

What actions or habits in the past week may have interfered with your recovery?

How did your body feel when you engaged in these behaviors?

Were there specific triggers that led to these actions?

Now look at your answers above and think about how they might reflect any self-sabotaging behaviors you might be engaging in. What thoughts, feelings, and behavior might you have acted on that may have hindered your recovery? List them below.

Your self-sabotaging behaviors identified from the previous questions:

Part 2: Mindful Awareness

Use your connection to nature to anchor your awareness. It may help to go outdoors for this part, or imagine a vivid nature scene.

Notice:

- Your breath as it moves in and out
- The sensation of your body sitting, standing, or walking
- Elements of nature around you (trees, wind, sky)

Reflection prompt:

When you think about a self-sabotaging behavior, where do you feel tension or discomfort in your body?

Can you notice this without judgment? (Yes / No)

Part 3: Questioning the Behavior

For the section that follows, examine your self-sabotaging behaviors and question the beliefs that led up to them and the actions you took.

Example of Self-Sabotaging Behavior: Using alcohol after stressful work day

Trigger/Thought Behind It: "I can't handle this without drinking"

Question/Alternative Thought: "Can I handle this without using? It might be hard, but I can take a walk, breathe, or call a support person"

Mindful Action/Recovery Step: Step outside, notice the trees, take 5 deep breaths, call a friend

Self-Sabotaging Behavior:

Trigger / Thought Behind It:

Question / Alternative Thought:

Mindful Action / Recovery Step:

Remember

Each day, take 5–10 minutes outside or by a window. Notice your automatic thoughts and any self-sabotaging impulses. Record the behavior, the trigger, and your mindful response.

Over time, notice patterns and celebrate successes. Even small moments of mindful choice support recovery! Small change leads to bigger change!