

# 1



## Dealing Effectively with High-Risk Situations

*Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world.*

**Arthur Schopenhauer, “Psychological Observations,”  
*Studies in Pessimism***

As we pointed out in the Introduction, research has shown that having reliably accessible coping and self-regulation skills is a crucial predictor for successful, sustained recovery from addiction (Cummings et al., 1980; Marlatt, 1985b; West, 2005). With more effective skills, a person in addiction recovery develops increased confidence (Marlatt et al., 1995) in their ability to handle challenging situations without the use of substances, thereby increasing their **recovery resilience**. As mentioned, your recovery resilience represents your ability to draw on your recovery capital to effectively cope with and manage stressful situations without reverting to substance use, as well as being able to self-regulate your inner world without the use of substances.<sup>1</sup> Recovery resilience is about us having the right skills and the capacity to apply those skills. This is particularly important for situations that pose a high risk for relapse.

High-risk situations can be understood as events and situations that, if not effectively managed, pose a potential risk for relapse (Brewer et al., 1998).

What is important to note is that it is chiefly the individual's subjective perception of "risk" that plays a significant role in whether a situation is high risk or not. A high-risk situation poses a threat to one's perceived ability (what psychology calls "self-efficacy") to handle the challenging situation at hand (Greenfield et al., 2000). Therefore, by developing more effective coping skills, thereby increasing perceived self-efficacy, one can learn to manage a high-risk situation without defaulting to substance use (Earley, 1994).

Most relapse prevention guides provide various skills and tools for dealing with high-risk situations which are essential for sustained recovery. We assume that you already have these assets or are in the process of gaining them. Therefore, the focus of this workbook is not to provide an exhaustive set of relapse prevention skills and tools but to help you unlock your innate resilience so that you can effectively apply them. In this chapter and throughout the workbook, we focus on helping you to develop a **Recovery Resilience Practice**, which will enable you to use these assets to optimal effect. More specifically, you will learn about a mind-body system that, when overactive and not managed properly, hinders your capacity to effectively use your skills and tools to deal with high-risk situations or any troubling situation, thereby causing you to veer off your recovery pathway.

We begin with exercises that will help you to recognize when you are experiencing this mind-body system that acts as a hindrance, and to understand how it interferes with your ability to effectively navigate high-risk situations. Recognizing when this mind-body system is overactive is the first step in increasing your recovery resilience.

## Experience the Hindrance

In Exercise 1.1 you will identify a situation that is currently causing you a great deal of trouble or distress (e.g., your current relationship or stress at work). You will use a template called a **Map** (see the example Map in Exercise 1.1). In this exercise you will perform **I-System Mapping**, or **Mapping** for short, a core Recovery Resilience Practice that helps you,

through free association, recognize the mind-body system that acts as a hindrance to your innate resilience and interferes in your daily life.

Once you have identified a troubling situation, write it inside the oval on Map 1. Then take a couple of minutes to scatter your thoughts and feelings about that situation around the outside of the oval. Don't edit or second-guess; just write down whatever thoughts come to mind.

After a couple of minutes, stop writing, and at the bottom of the Map provide a description of your body tension. Where do you experience it in your body? How do you experience it?

Next, write the same troubling situation used in the Map 1 exercise you just completed in the oval of Map 2 in Exercise 1.2. Before you write anything else on the Map, take a few moments to tune into your senses.

Begin by getting comfortable in your chair and focusing on what you are currently doing. Next, just sit and listen to the background sounds. As you listen, feel your feet on the floor, the weight of your body on your seat. Feel the fabric of your clothing, or the tabletop, or just rub the tips of your fingers together while you continue to listen to the background sounds. If a thought distracts you, return to listening to the background sounds.

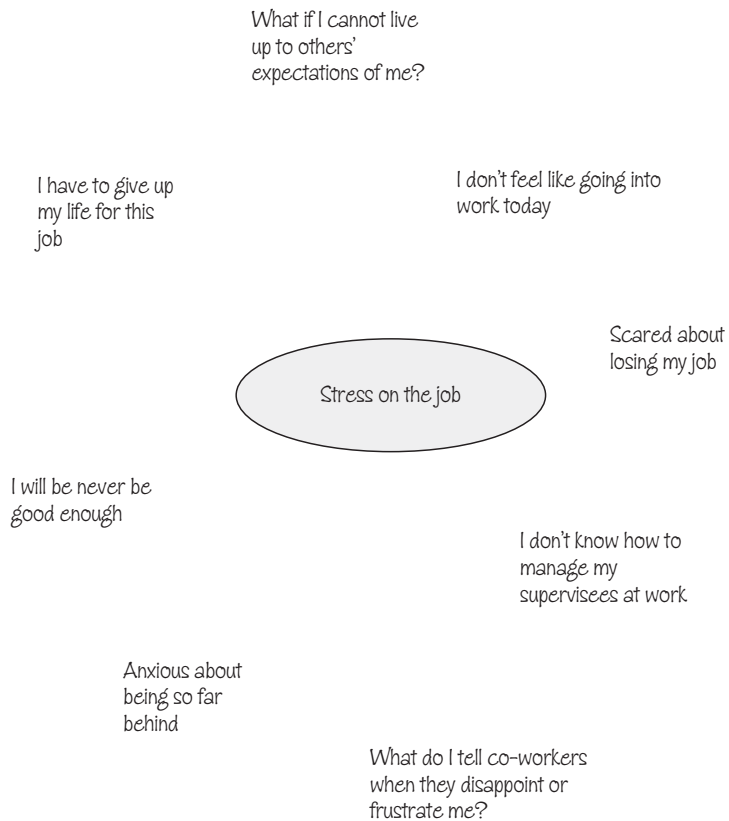
Once you begin to feel settled, write the thoughts and feelings that come to your mind now about the situation around the oval. As you write, feel the pen in your hand and watch the ink flow onto the paper while continually focusing on the background sounds. As with the previous Map, don't edit. There are no right or wrong thoughts. Just let your thoughts stream while you are tuned into your senses.

After a couple of minutes, stop writing and at the bottom of Map 2 provide a description of your body tension. Where do you experience it in your body? How do you experience it?

Now, compare Map 1 and Map 2. In the space in Exercise 1.3 write down a very brief description of your experience of doing Map 1, and then do the same for Map 2. The troubling situation in the oval is the same on both Maps, but what is different about your experience of the two Maps? What, if anything, has shifted for you? Write down your thoughts.

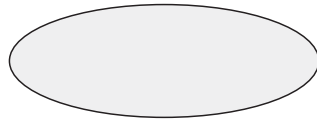
## Example

## Map 1



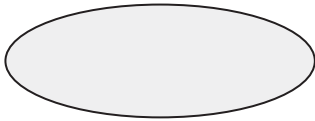
Description of body tension I feel so much tension in my neck & shoulders

Map 1



Description of body tension: \_\_\_\_\_

Map 2



Description of body tension: \_\_\_\_\_



over-analyzing) and body tension are often signs that a certain mind-body state is prevailing and that this mind-body state is caused by a mind-body system. This mind-body system is operationalized as the **I-System** – a construct for a self-referential mind-body system that when overactive interferes with optimal functioning and innate resilience (Block et al., 2016). Your I-System was likely more active when you did Map 1 than it was when you did Map 2. Why? When you did Map 2, you literally “came to your senses” by focusing on the background sounds and your body sensations. Opening your awareness to what you are sensing quiets or “rests” your I-System.

When your I-System is overactive, it contracts your awareness and restricts your optimal functioning. These are the characteristics of the mind-body state called **I-System Functioning**. What does this have to do with your recovery? The I-System distorts how one perceives, thinks, feels, and acts. If not effectively managed, your I-System hinders your ability to draw on your recovery capital (skills and tools). What’s more, it not only negatively affects your capacity to apply skills or tools, but it hinders all aspects of working a recovery program and living the good life.

As we outlined in the Introduction, the Recovery Resilience Program is based on the premise that we have an innate resilience toward growth and healing. You naturally experience and express this innate resilience when your I-System is rested and thus not hindering this access.

Excessive mental clutter and body tension are “red flags” that you are experiencing I-System Functioning. Learning to recognize when you are experiencing this mind-body state allows you to use the other Recovery Resilience Practices taught in this workbook to transform your I-System into a powerful ally.

## Befriend Your I-System

In this section, you will learn how to transform your I-System from hindrance to helper and use it to help you stay on your recovery pathway instead of allowing it to make you veer off course. When you recognize that your I-System is active by noticing that you are experiencing mental clutter and body ten-



sion, you are using a Recovery Resilience Practice called **Recognize I-System Activity**. When you recognize that your I-System is overactive, it gives you an opportunity to befriend it.

You befriend your I-System when you recognize that its overactivity is causing you to go off course from living your best life and from tapping into your innate resources. The mental clutter and body tension you experience is a signal alerting you that your I-System is overactive. From now on, this signal can alert you that you are experiencing I-System Functioning and thus are not optimally prepared to deal with the situation at hand, so you can then act to correct course.

When you “came to your senses” while completing Map 2, you experienced this course correction – the shift in a mind-body state that occurred (i.e., from mental clutter and body tension to a lightness or calmness) when your I-System released its grip.

This shift is further illustrated through Exercise 1.4.

**EXERCISE 1.4**

As you sit in your chair, lean to the left or right for about 10 seconds, then bring yourself back to an upright centered position. When you leaned to the left or right, did you feel tension in your body? Did you feel a sense of imbalance? After you returned to an upright, centered position, did the body tension release? Did you feel more balanced?

Recognizing your I-System activity is like recognizing that you are tilting off-balance. The I-System alerts you to this imbalanced state. When you rest your I-System, you come back into balance. Simply put, the I-System creates this imbalanced state and sends signals alerting you that you are off course, and your Recovery Resilience Practice brings you back into balance. This shift, is referred to as the **Mind-Body Bridging Shift (the Shift for short)**.

I-System Functioning inhibits optimal functioning by causing you to “get in your own way” as your thoughts turn inward and away from the task or moment at hand. When you are in this mind-body state, it distracts you from meeting the imperative of the moment and from drawing on your recovery capital and effectively applying your recovery skills. It is important to note that the I-System is not bad, as it plays an important function. Our aim is not to eliminate the I-System, which is not possible, but instead to make it an ally. Without awareness of its overactivity, it is counterproductive. With awareness, it acts as a compass that guides us in our activities of daily living.

Let’s consider the example of a plane that has an automatic pilot system to illustrate how this works. As the plane flies toward its destination, the automatic pilot self-corrects, moment to moment, to keep the plane on course regardless of the conditions. In the same way, each time you befriend your I-System and experience the Shift, you correct course and stay true to your recovery pathway and life goals.

## Your Optimal State

Look at Map 2 (Exercise 1.2) again. Even though the situation was the same, you likely had a different experience while doing this Map. When focused on the background sounds and your body sensations, your I-System quietened or was rested, your mental clutter and body tension reduced, and you most likely had a different perspective of the situation. The reality of the troubling situation did not change, but your orientation toward it did because you shifted toward a more expansive mind-body state.

In doing Map 2, you likely shifted to a mind-body state termed **Natural Functioning**. Natural Functioning refers to our state or mode of being when focused on the present moment or activity *without the hindrance* of the I-System. Because it is your natural mind-body state, Natural Functioning spontaneously arises when you rest your I-System. When you shifted to Natural Functioning, you were brought back into balance. Although there is often little we can do about external events, there is often a great deal we can do about our internal orientation to the event or situation. When you recognize that your I-System is overactive when dealing with any situation and you take action to rest it, you are less at the mercy of the external event or situation and naturally more confident in your ability to cope with it.

One of the central premises of the Recovery Resilience Program is that in a Natural Functioning state we are more resourceful and resilient, and we can tap into our innate capacity for flourishing. This point of view is shared by several scholars who assert that we have an innate resilience and drive toward self-actualization (sometimes referred to as the “true” or “real” self). The psychoanalyst Karen Horney (1950) proposed that the “real” self contains potential for growth, happiness, and willpower, and for achieving self-actualization. These scholars postulate that growth and flourishing spontaneously occur if one removes what hinders it from manifesting (Danielian & Gianotti, 2012, 2017; Horney, 1950). For example, plants have an innate capacity to grow when one places them in the right environment. They cannot be forced to grow. One can only create the right conditions for growth to occur. In this regard humans are not that dissimilar – when we access our natural resourcefulness we flourish.

The aim of developing a Recovery Resilience Practice is to simply remove the I-System’s interference from our innate resourcefulness, resilience, and capacity

for flourishing. We can therefore see that it is not just the “**what**” and “**how**” that comprise an effective and sustainable recovery lifestyle but also the “**who**” that is doing it. The “**who**” that is engaged in your recovery is the essence of building recovery resilience. The “**who**” is as equally important as the “**what**.” There are many books and programs on “**what**” to do for a sustainable recovery, but the Recovery Resilience Program and this workbook focus primarily on “**who**” is doing it – your Natural Functioning self or your I-System Functioning self.

Our approach is based on the premise that your Natural Functioning mind-body state is central to achieving what the Greek philosopher Aristotle called *eudaimonia*, often translated as *flourishing*.<sup>2</sup> In a Natural Functioning mind-body state, we meet the imperative of each moment without the hindrance of an overactive I-System. We automatically tap into our innate resources. This does not mean we act or behave perfectly, but we do our best, at that moment, unfettered by the I-System’s interference. In Natural Functioning we are capable of *phronesis*, an ancient Greek word for a type of wisdom or intelligence relevant to practical action. In our Natural Functioning mind-body state, we have access to our innate resilience, our various recovery skills and tools (recovery capital), and the practical wisdom (*phronesis*) to meet the demands of the moment.

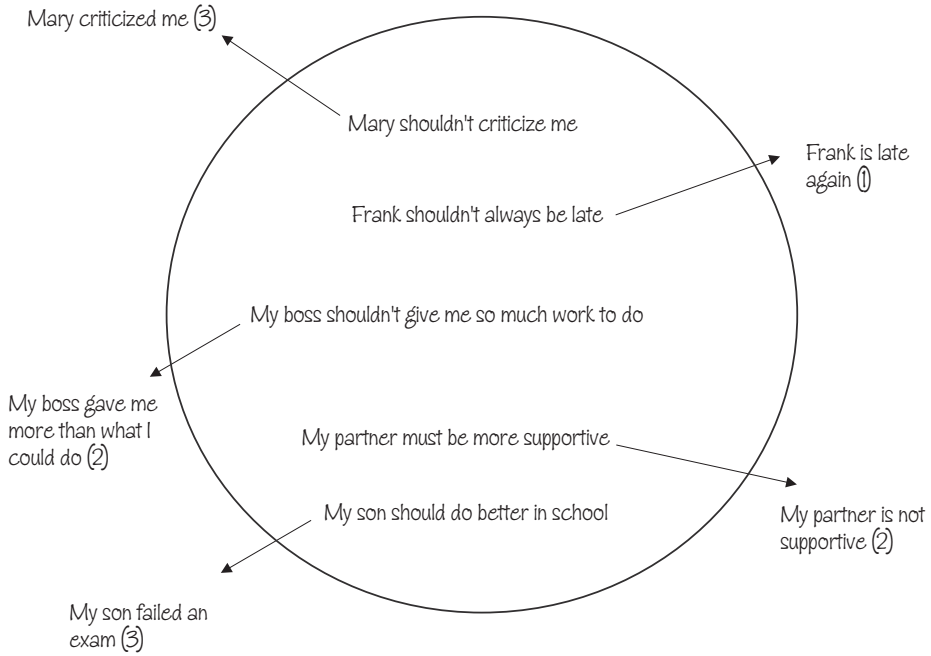
## I-System Requirements

Now you may ask, what triggers the I-System to become overactive and create this imbalanced state that causes you to get in your own way, impedes your capacity to work a recovery program, and makes you veer off your recovery pathway? This is an important question, and we are going to explore it by doing two Mapping exercises. First, you will complete a *How I Would Like Certain People to Act* Map followed by a *How I Would Like to Be* Map.

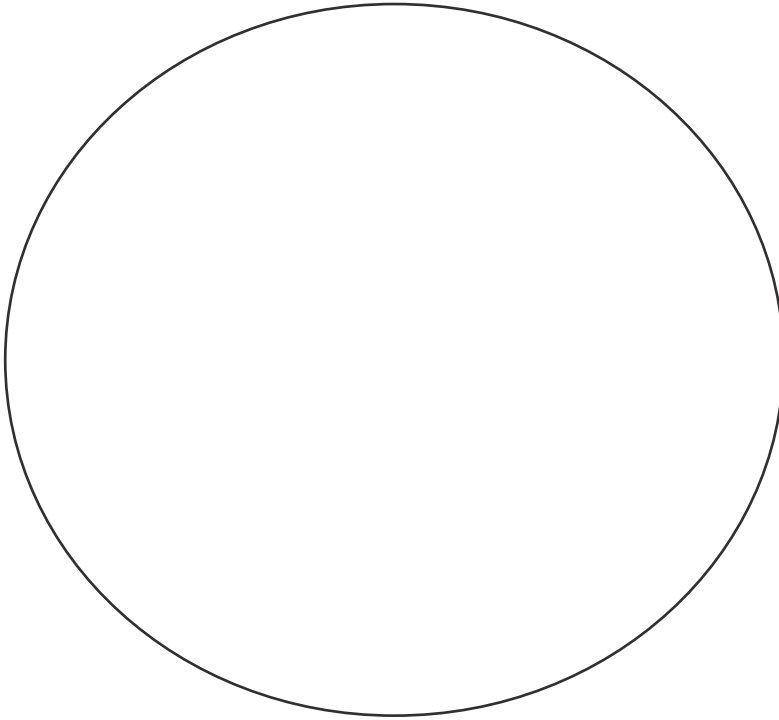
For the *How I Would Like Certain People to Act* Map, write down inside the circle in Exercise 1.5 how you would like certain important people in your life to act or behave. Then draw a line to the outside of the circle and write down each person’s behavior when they contradict how you would like them to act. Then, for each of the items outside the circle, write down the degree of your body tension and the degree of negative emotional response. Note it on a scale from 1 (low) to 3 (high). Refer to the example Map provided in Exercise 1.5.

Example

How I Would Like Certain People to Act Map



How I Would Like Certain People to Act Map



Note that on this *How I Would Like Certain People to Act* Map the items inside the circle may be natural expectations you have for that person. However, if you normally have a lot of mental clutter and body tension in response to that person's behavior outside the circle, it is your sign that your I-System becomes overactive when they behave like that.

We all have expectations. When some of these are violated, it does not bother us much, if at all. But when some expectations are not met, we experience significant mental clutter and body tension, as you may have noticed when completing the exercise. When you experience significant mental clutter and body tension when an expectation is not met, it is a sign that the unmet expectation has triggered your I-System. We refer to these type of expectations as **I-System Requirements** or **Requirements** for short. They are what cause your I-System to become overactive and interfere with your Natural Functioning.

Requirements are simply the “shoulds” or “musts” we have about a particular situation. The I-System generates Requirements each moment of how you, others, or the world absolutely should or must be. When you have a violated Requirement (i.e., reality does not conform to your Requirement), your I-System becomes overactive.

Why do Requirements over-activate the I-System? We will use an analogy to explain. All living systems strive to maintain homeostasis. When your body does not feel right, it instinctively self-regulates to restore its optimal functioning. For example, when your body temperature is too high, you sweat, and if it goes too low, you shiver. Your temperature-regulating system automatically tries to stabilize your body's optimal temperature. Analogously, your I-System, instead of working to maintain an ideal and stable temperature, works to maintain an ideal and stable view of yourself, others and the world. The reason that these “ideal pictures” or “mental rules” (I-System Requirements) of how you, others, and the world should or absolutely must be cause you distress when they are not realized is simply because they relate to your identity or self-concept. Hence the name I-System. So, when a Requirement is violated, it is not merely experienced as a minor disappointment, but rather as a direct threat to “who you think you are.” Karen Horney (1950) referred to these type of demands as a “tyranny of shoulds.”

There are many factors that influence our self-concept or “who we think we are,” including certain beliefs about others and the world. When you experience excessive body tension and mental clutter (signs of I-System Functioning), you can bet that something is not conforming to the Requirements you have for yourself, others, or the world. When you recognize that a Requirement has triggered your I-System, you are practicing a Recovery Resilience Practice called **Recognize Requirements**.

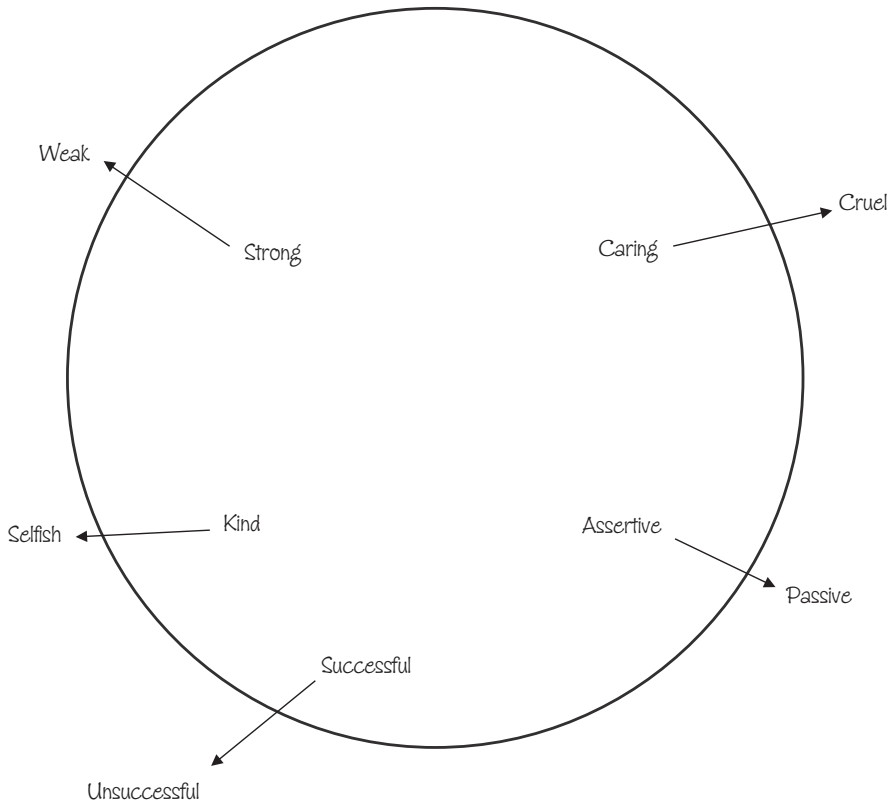
Now let’s do another exercise to further illustrate the concept of Requirements. For the next exercise, you will do a *How I Would Like to Be* Map. For this Map in Exercise 1.6 write down the qualities you wish to have. Write five of these qualities inside the circle. Then draw a line to the outside of the circle and write down the opposite of that quality. Now for each of the qualities outside the circle, consider the degree of body tension and negative emotional response you experience when you display these qualities. Refer to the example Map in Exercise 1.6.

Like the previous Map, all the qualities inside the circle may be natural expectations you have for yourself. But, if you have excessive mental clutter and body tension associated with the qualities outside the circle, it is a sign that they trigger your I-System. As mentioned, what activates your I-System are the Requirements inside the circle. For example, wanting to be successful is a natural expectation. However, when you fail (or feel as if you’re failing) and you have mental clutter and body tension, it signifies that it is a Requirement, “I should be successful.” That means that your ability to deal with the present moment is impaired because your I-System is overactive and interfering with your Natural Functioning. Simply recognizing that a Requirement has activated your I-System helps you experience the shift to Natural Functioning.

As was previously mentioned, Recovery Resilience Practice does not focus on changing any given situation (the “what”) (crucial insofar as many distressful situations or triggers may be unavoidable) but instead focuses on changing the “who” that is dealing with the situation. In *It Works How and Why: The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous* it states: “It is a spiritual axiom that whenever we are disturbed, no matter the cause, there is something wrong with us” (Narcotics Anonymous World Services, 1983, p. 92). This is exactly what the I-System leads us to believe, that it is the “what” that’s the problem. What we are attempting to point

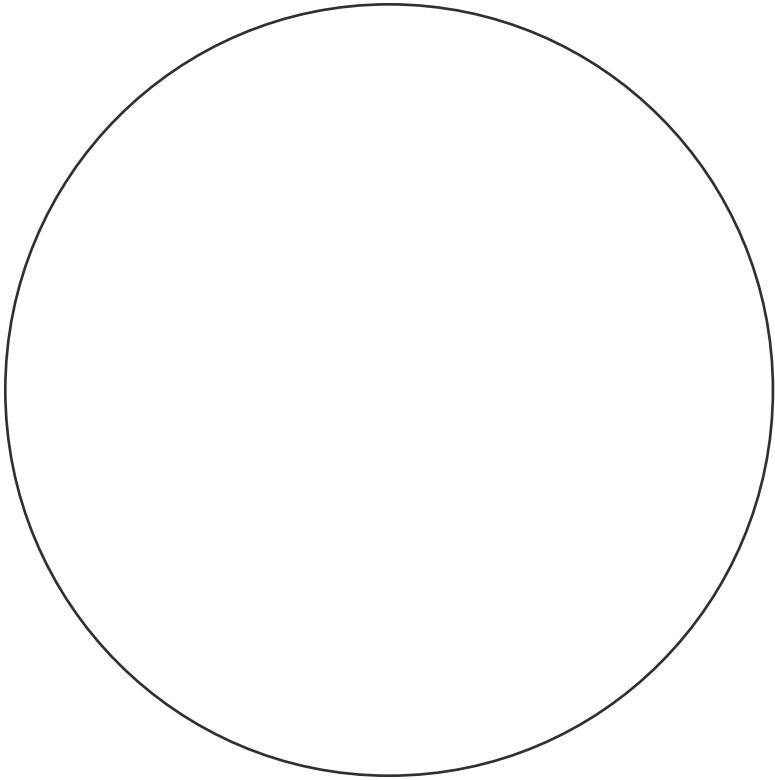
Example

How I Would Like to Be Map





How I Would Like to Be Map



out is that it is not the “what” (situation) that distresses us – which, by the way, may not be amenable to change – but rather the “who” that is dealing with the “what.” That is, when we deal with any situation or moment in I-System Functioning, we will experience body tension and mental clutter and have limited access to our recovery capital. When we deal with these “whats” in Natural Functioning, we have more access to our recovery capital and skills. Recognizing when a Requirement has activated your I-System is critical to making sure the right “who” that is best equipped to stay on the recovery path is in charge. The Stoic philosopher Epictetus highlights this point of view by stating, “It’s not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters” (Taylor, 2021, p. 220). We would modify the second part of this statement slightly to “... but the ‘who’ that reacts to it that matters.”

Choosing to use Recognize Requirements and other Recovery Resilience Practices to rest your I-System allows you to experience your innate resilience moment by moment and to live your best life. Making the same, basic point, this time from an existential perspective, psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Dr. Viktor Frankl asserted: “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way” (Frankl, 1969, p. 86). You can simply choose to befriend your I-System and use it as a guide as you travel on your recovery pathway, or you can choose to let it veer you off course – it is up to you.

Now let’s see how what you’ve learned and experienced so far relates to high-risk situations.

## High-Risk Situations

Each person has a unique set of high-risk situations related to his or her life and experience of addiction. Even so, there are nevertheless three generally agreed upon categories that most high-risk situations fit within: (1) negative or challenging internal, emotional states; (2) external social pressure; and (3) interpersonal conflict.<sup>3</sup> As an individual in recovery, it is impossible to avoid all high-risk situations and their associated internal or external triggers. It is

imperative, however, for the sake of ongoing sobriety, to learn to effectively manage these situations by managing the “who” that is dealing with them.

In the following exercise you will make a list of potential high-risk situations using the three categories:

- intrapersonal (which take place internally, within yourself, for example, your attitudes, thinking, and emotional states);
- interpersonal (refers to things taking place between people, for example, your relationship with your partner); and
- environmental (e.g., external stressors such as finances, work, and social events).

It is not important at this stage to be comprehensive in your list; rather, it's important that you start with those items which are “on the front burner” or uppermost in your mind. As with most of the exercises in this workbook, we provide some examples.

High-risk situations		
Intrapersonal (self)	Interpersonal (others)	Environmental (the world)
Self-pity	Arguing with partner	Social event

For this next exercise, you will once again use a Map template. As previously introduced, Mapping is a core Recovery Resilience Practice that helps you, through free association, recognize your I-System activity. The central aim of Mapping is to help you “see” how your I-System works and interferes in your daily life including your ability to handle high-risk situations when you encounter them.

For this exercise, you will choose one of the high-risk situations from the list you created in the previous exercise and write it inside the oval of Map 1 in Exercise 1.8. Then take a couple of minutes to scatter your thoughts and feelings about that situation around the outside of the oval. Don’t edit or second-guess; just write down whatever thoughts come to mind. An example of how to do this is provided on the next page.

After a couple of minutes, stop writing and at the bottom of Map 1 provide a description of your body tension. Where do you experience it in your body? How do you experience it?

On the next Map in Exercise 1.9, write the same high-risk situation used in Map 1 of Exercise 1.8 in the oval.

Begin by first getting comfortable in your chair and focusing on what you are currently doing. Next, just sit and listen to the background sounds. As you listen, feel your feet on the floor, the weight of your body on your seat. Feel the fabric of your clothing, or the tabletop, or just rub the tips of your fingers together while you continue to listen to the background sounds. If a thought distracts you, return to listening to the background sounds.

Once you begin to feel settled, write the thoughts and feelings that come to your mind now about the situation around the oval. As you write, feel the pen in your hand and watch the ink flow onto the paper while continually focusing on the background sounds. As with the previous Map, don’t edit. There are no right or wrong thoughts. Just let your thoughts stream while you are tuned into your senses.

After a couple of minutes, stop writing and at the bottom of Map 2 provide a description of your body tension. Where do you experience it in your body? How do you experience it?

Now, compare Map 1 and Map 2. In the space below in Exercise 1.9, write down a very brief description of your experience of doing Map 1, and then do the same for Map 2. The situation in the oval is the same on both Maps, but what is different about your experience of the two Maps? What, if anything, has shifted for you? Write down your thoughts.

Example

High-Risk Situation Map 1



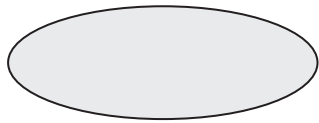
Description of body tension? Butterflies in stomach

High-Risk Situation Map 1



Description of body tension: \_\_\_\_\_

High-Risk Situation Map 2



Description of body tension: \_\_\_\_\_

Map 1	Map 2
<p><u>Difference between Maps:</u></p>	

As with the previous troubling situation Map exercise (Exercise 1.1), did you experience more tension in Map 1 than in Map 2? Did you experience less stress and more lightness when completing Map 2? Was there more mental clutter in Map 1 than in Map 2?

The high-risk situation did not change, but your orientation toward it probably did. When you did Map 1, you likely attributed all your distress to the high-risk situation itself. But your body tension and mental clutter decreased when you did Map 2, even though the troubling situation is the same. This exercise again demonstrates that there is something else (your I-System) besides the high-risk situation that is causing your distress.

Map 1 helps you see that when there is I-System activity it makes it even more difficult to manage a high-risk situation. This is because when you attempt to deal with a high-risk situation or any troubling, stressful, or painful situation in I-System Functioning it limits your awareness and ability to act optimally. When your I-System is active, it hinders your ability to draw on your recovery capital and skills and thereby limits your choices to a few habitual behaviors.



And for those struggling with addiction, relapse is often the default response when confronted with stressful, painful, high-risk, and troubling situations.

In Map 2 you likely experienced some release from I-System Functioning (i.e., the Shift). When you remove this hindrance, your capacity to effectively deal with high-risk situations dramatically increases because you have more capacity to access your recovery capital and skills.

Earlier in this chapter, you learned that I-System Functioning inhibits optimal functioning by causing you to “get in your own way” as your thoughts turn inward and away from the task or moment at hand and that when you are in this mind-body state it keeps you from meeting the imperative of the moment optimally. Remember that the I-System is not bad, as it plays an important function. You only need to learn to befriend it, which requires that you are aware of when it is active. Doing this transforms the I-System from a hindrance to a compass that tells you when you are getting off track and guides you back to Natural Functioning.

In Exercise 1.11, we are going to look for the Requirements associated with a high-risk situation that overactivate your I-System when they are violated.

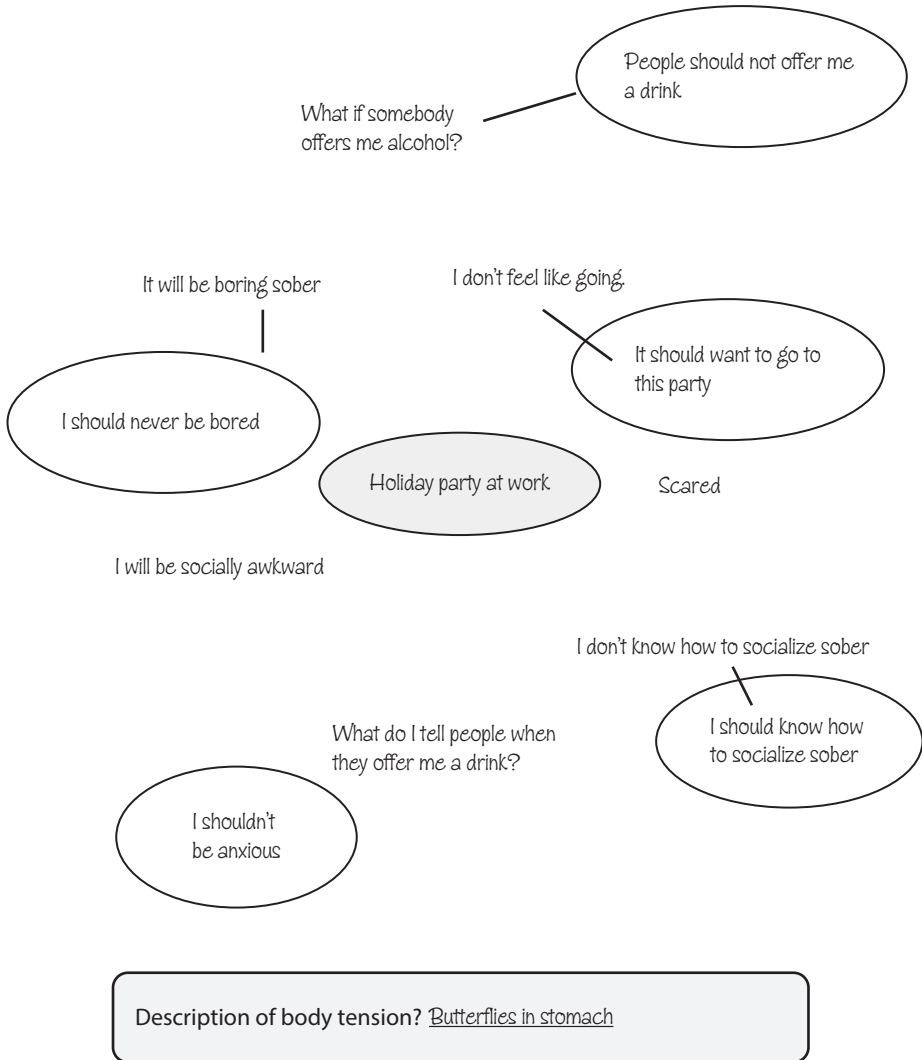
Go back to Map 1 (Exercise 1.8) and circle the thoughts on the Map that cause a great deal of mental clutter and body tension. Then ask yourself how you would like these items to be. Sometimes the Requirement is as simple as being the opposite of the thought on the Map (see the Example 1.10 on the next page: *I don't know how to socialize sober* -> *I should know how to socialize sober*); other times you can identify a Requirement by asking the question “What is my Requirement for this situation?”

Write the thoughts you circled as “should” or “must” statements. Connect each circled thought to its “should” or “must” statement with a line (see example Map of Exercise 1.10: Thought: *What if somebody offers me alcohol?* -> Requirement: *Someone should not offer me alcohol*). You may have written some of the thoughts on your Map as “should” or “must” statements. If you did, just circle them (see example Map of Exercise 1.10: Thought: *I shouldn't be anxious*).

As previously mentioned, when you realize that a Requirement has been violated and has triggered your I-System, you are using a Recovery Resilience Practice called **Recognize Requirements**. The aim of this practice is to become aware when a Requirement has been violated as you go through your daily activities. When you become aware of a Requirement, it causes it to lose power to keep your I-System overactive. For example, let's say you have a Requirement

Example

High-Risk Situation Map 1



that “*Life should be fair.*” When you experience unfairness in some way or another, you will notice body tension and mental clutter, which are signs of I-System activity. When you notice these mind and body signals, you simply say to yourself, “*I have a Requirement that life should be fair.*” Doing this in the heat of the moment, when the Requirement is violated, initiates the shift from I-System Functioning to Natural Functioning and quiets your I-System.

As you have learned, it is not the situation (the “what”) that causes your I-System to become active, but rather the Requirements we (often automatically and out of awareness) have regarding that situation. It is frequently a violated Requirement associated with a high-risk situation that makes it more difficult to manage. Why? Because when the violated Requirement triggers your I-System, your awareness and optimal functioning are restricted. Recognizing your Requirements for high-risk situations will make it easier to manage the situation because you will do it in Natural Functioning where you can draw on your recovery capital and skills to deal with the situation more effectively.

## Recovery Resilience Practice in Activities of Daily Living

Now let’s look at some examples of how you can apply your Recovery Resilience Practice throughout the day. As we will stress throughout this workbook, the arena of your practice is your **activities of daily living**. As highlighted, your I-System is like a compass that provides a signal when you are off course. The following examples illustrate how this moment by moment practice works.

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### **Example**

**Situation:** Taking a shower in the morning while clenching your jaws and having thoughts on how hard the day is going to be.

**Signal:** Clenched jaws and negative thoughts on how hard the day is going to be.

**My Requirement(s):** “The day should be easy.” “I should have more time for myself.” “I shouldn’t have to deal with hard days.”

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### **Example**

**Situation:** Getting dressed and experiencing a racing heart rate with thoughts of you not looking good enough in your clothes.

**Signal:** Racing heart and negative thoughts of how you don't look good enough and also experiencing cravings.

**My Requirement(s):** "The outfit should be perfect." "I should look good in my outfits." "I should always look my best." "People should accept me and my outfit choices."

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### **Example**

**Situation:** Getting an unexpected email at work about how you made a mistake and experiencing a tight chest while having thoughts of how you're failing.

**Signal:** Tight chest and thoughts of being a failure. Thoughts of wanting to drink.

**My Requirement(s):** "I should never make mistakes." "I shouldn't fail." "People should understand me." "People should be respectful."

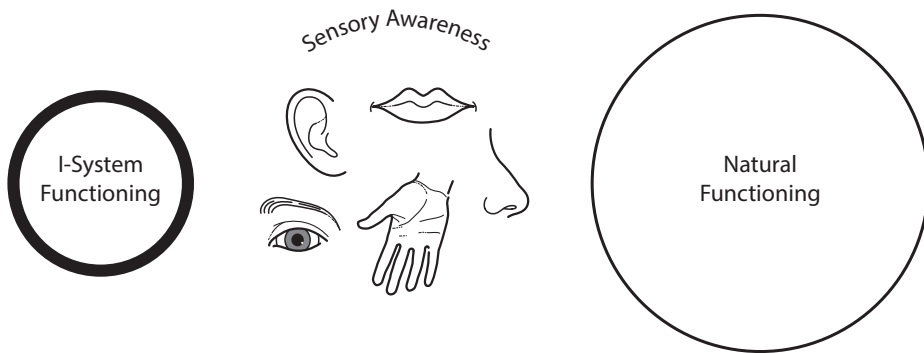
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Recognizing your Requirements doesn't make the situation better or erase mistakes of the past. However, it allows you to break free from the box the I-System puts you in and leads to the benefits of Natural Functioning, which permits you to optimally handle the situation at hand and move forward with your day.

## Sensory Awareness

When you completed Map 2 in the previous exercises (Exercises 1.2, 1.9), you likely experienced a shift from I-System Functioning to Natural Functioning, even though the troubling situation or high-risk situation was the same as the one on Map 1 (Exercises 1.1, 1.8). What caused this shift? Simply put, when you



**Figure 1** Sensory awareness skills.

completed Map 2 you literally “came to your senses” by focusing on the background sounds and your body sensations. When tuned into your senses the I-System automatically quiets and your mental clutter and body tension decrease. You shift from a limited and contracted state of being to a more expanded, flexible, and resilient state of being. You don’t have to stretch to move into Natural Functioning because it happens automatically when you rest your I-System.

When you did Map 2 in Exercises 1.2 and 1.9 you were performing a Recovery Resilience Practice called **Sensory Awareness**. It is as easy as listening attentively to the sound of an air conditioner, traffic outside, water going down the drain when you wash your hands, or the sound of a clock ticking. Anytime in the day when you recognize that your I-System has become overactive, practice Sensory Awareness to initiate the Shift. This is particularly useful in high-risk situations, as it will help you deal with the situation in Natural Functioning.

It is important to note that sometimes when you experience excessive or overwhelming I-System activity (this happens to all of us), applying Sensory Awareness will not necessarily completely quiet I-System activity. But with consistent practice, in the long run, you will find it to be a helpful component of your Recovery Resilience Practice.

Below is a list of various types of Sensory Awareness which you can practice throughout the day to quiet your I-System:

#### **Awareness of Background Sounds**

Your environment is full of sounds. During the day, pause and listen to background sounds, like the white noise of the heating or air-conditioning system, the wind blowing, traffic sounds, or the hum of the refrigerator.

**Awareness of What You Are Touching**

Be aware of what your fingers sense as you touch things like glasses, phones, pens, keys, computers, and other objects. Are these surfaces smooth or rough, cold or warm, pleasant or unpleasant? Sense what it's like to feel the sun's warmth on your face or the breeze on your skin.

**Awareness of Colors and Shapes**

Pay attention today to what you see when you look at scenery and objects. Notice their colors, shapes, and forms.

**Awareness of Your Body**

Because of the unpleasant body sensations often associated with your overactive I-System, you may have developed a habit of trying to block out or get away from the feelings in your body. Pay attention to various bodily sensations or any tension or emotions experienced in the body. When you walk, feel the sensation of your feet touching the ground. When you sit, feel the pressure of the chair against your body.

## Just for Today

In Twelve-Step fellowships, members are advised to live "Just for Today." The practice of Sensory Awareness increases our capacity to live "Just for Today." Contrarily, active addiction brings with it a kind of "mindlessness," in which attention is distractible, a sense of purpose inaccessible, where being in the present moment is encumbered by cravings and/or withdrawal – and shame and self-judgment are the order of the day (Creswell et al., 2007; Teyber et al., 2011). On top of this, active addicts often apply ineffective and maladaptive coping strategies in stressful and troubling life situations. Sensory Awareness and being present in the moment provide an alternative (Natural Functioning) for coping with stress, negative affect, and anxiety.<sup>4</sup> In the context of addiction, Sensory Awareness means "becoming aware of triggers for craving ... and choosing to do something else which might ameliorate or prevent craving, so weakening this habitual response" (Groves & Farmer, 1994, p. 189).

The practice of Sensory Awareness temporarily rests the I-System, thereby facilitating recovery resilience. It increases and expands our awareness, a necessary aptitude in recovery because activity without awareness is a feature of

impulsive, mood-dependent, and addictive behavior (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Sensory Awareness is a way of cultivating and strengthening this awareness (Nakamura et al., 2015). Addiction over a period of time distorts our view of reality. More specifically, the defense mechanism of denial, which is one of the primary obstacles to initiating and sustaining successful recovery, is itself a profound narrowing of awareness. This in turn leads to a fragmented understanding of the widespread damage that goes hand in hand with addiction, which then only perpetuates the negative, addictive cycle. As Gestalt psychology pioneer Fritz Perls (1969, p. 66) put it: “Without awareness there is no cognition of choice.” Conversely, with increased awareness there is increased choice, and consequently increased ability to break the cycle of addiction. When your I-System is overactive, your awareness contracts, leading to a more distorted and limited view of reality. When we practice Sensory Awareness and experience the Shift a more balanced awareness expands spontaneously, which leads to a more comprehensive point of view that allows us to see things as they really are, and thus to a better insight into the true nature of our addiction and the consequences of using substances.

The practice of Sensory Awareness can also lead to greater acceptance of one’s internal experiences. In the context of the above discussion, it leads to greater acceptance of cravings or other painful feeling states rather than counterproductive shaming and self-judgment. Enhanced coping may also be experienced as the capacity for intentional inaction, which can be described as a “letting go” and not acting on a craving or impulse to try to “fix” the negative feeling (The Asian wisdom traditions speak similarly of “actionless action,” or *wu wei*). From this perspective, the focus is on identifying and accepting the craving, thought, or feeling, not acting on it or attempting to fight it or *fix* it. This is sometimes referred to as “urge surfing” in relapse prevention programs. Instead of trying to eliminate the urge, one surfs it as one would surf a wave, until it naturally fades away. Cravings only last for a certain period of time and will eventually run out of steam if they are not attended to.

It must be noted that Sensory Awareness skills differ from other mindfulness-based interventions (Bowen et al., 2011) that also practice tuning into the senses, in that the aim is not to merely have a detached awareness of our thoughts but to understand the workings of our mind (in psychology this is called metacognition – simply meaning, thinking about thinking).<sup>5</sup> We want

to also label specific I-System thoughts and the various I-System narratives or stories. So instead of merely observing thoughts with detached awareness, we also want to be thinking about our thinking, and therefore “befriend” the various components of our I-Systems. Sensory Awareness is an important practice as it initiates a shift from I-System Functioning to Natural Functioning; however, on its own it is not sufficient. What is additionally required is an awareness of the components of your I-System which is the focus of the other Recovery Resilience Practices introduced later in the workbook.

Something we will stress throughout this workbook is that it is not the exercises herein that are your Recovery Resilience Practice but how you apply the practices in each moment of daily living – just for today. At the beginning of your practice, it may feel awkward and mechanical, but with more practice, it will become second nature. Like in Twelve-Step programs where participants are urged to apply the spiritual principles of the program in all their affairs, we suggest that a Recovery Resilience Practice is aimed at relating to all your activities in a state of Natural Functioning. When befriending the I-System, it will act as a guide and compass alerting you when any of its Requirements have been violated, thus giving you an opportunity to shift to relating to the situation in Natural Functioning, with expanded awareness and more practical wisdom and practical reasoning. Your practice hall or dojo is each moment.

I-System Functioning results in limited options for dealing with life because it restricts our capacity to use our recovery capital. It fundamentally results in a lack of creativity. The famous psychoanalytic thinker Otto Rank argued that most of life’s problems are due to a lack of creativity.<sup>6</sup> From the I-System Model perspective we can see that Requirements limit our choices to those that are only congruent with our Requirements. When encumbered by Requirements we have limited creativity to deal optimally with each moment in daily living and remain weighted down and boxed in them. In Natural Functioning, we do not have to force ourselves to be creative because in this state we are automatically creative and resourceful in the sense that the options we now have are expanded beyond those imposed on us by our I-System’s “tyranny of shoulds.”

Well done for completing Chapter 1 of the workbook! On the next page we provide an overview of the practices introduced in Chapter 1.



## OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER 1

### Recovery Resilience Practice

- Do **Mapping** related to any high-risk situation or troubling experience.
- **Recognize I-System Activity** by being aware of body tension and mental clutter.
- Practice **Sensory Awareness**.
- **Recognize Requirements** when performing daily activities.
- **Experience the Shift** as you move from I-System Functioning to Natural Functioning.

At the end of each chapter, we include certain scales and templates which will assist you in developing a Recovery Resilience practice.

On the next few pages please fill out the following:

**Flourishing Scale:** Complete the scale and calculate your score, from 1 to 7, for each question over the past week or two. The Flourishing Scale will provide a measure to help you track your progress as you work through this workbook and develop a Recovery Resilience Practice. The Flourishing Scale is designed to measure your subjective happiness, well-being, and quality of life. The same scale is included at the end of each chapter of the workbook.

**Recovery Resilience Practice Scale:** Complete the scale and calculate and write down the frequency of your Recovery Resilience Practice. Indicate whether it was never, hardly ever, occasionally, or regularly. The same scale is included at the end of each chapter of the workbook.

We recommend practicing what was outlined in this chapter for 1–2 weeks before moving on to the next chapter. As you incorporate your Recovery Resilience Practice into your life, it will feel more natural and instinctive. And remember “progress not perfection.”

# Flourishing Scale

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Below are eight statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1–7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by indicating that response for each statement.

- 7 – Strongly agree
- 6 – Agree
- 5 – Slightly agree
- 4 – Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 – Slightly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 1 – Strongly disagree

Indicate your agreement with each item	(1–7)
I lead a purposeful and meaningful life	
My social relationships are supportive and rewarding	
I am engaged and interested in my daily activities	
I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others	
I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me	
I am a good person and live a good life	
I am optimistic about my future	
People respect me	
Total score:	_____

The *Flourishing Scale* was developed by Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., et al. (2010). New measures of well-being: Flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 39, 247–266.

# Recovery Resilience Practice Scale

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Over the past week indicate the frequency of your Recovery Resilience Practice. Check the description that most closely reflects your practice: never, hardly ever, or occasionally.

<b>Frequency of Resilient Resilience Practice</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Hardly Ever</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Regularly</b>
Recognize I-System Activity				
Mapping				
Recognize Requirements				
Sensory Awareness				
Experience the Shift				