

Building Structure for a Sober Life

During active addiction, life is structured around finding and using your drug of choice. When we stop using addictive substances, we must build new structures to maintain a life of sobriety. During the first few years of recovery, it's important to work on *building structure of time*, *building structure of place*, *building structure of work* and *building structure of love*. One way to think of this is that structure of time, place, work and love are the four walls that hold up your house of sobriety.

Structure of Time:

All people need daily routines in order to be emotionally healthy. We know this from our children: children who have regular meal times, play times, rest times and bed times thrive. When their daily routines are disrupted, children become unhappy and irritable. If we have too much unstructured time on our hands, it's easy to become bored or depressed. This is a recipe for relapse.

What is your daily routine like? Does it include time for self-care activities such as exercise and meals? Does your daily routine have a good balance of time for work and time for play, time for yourself and time for others? Why or why not?

What aspect of structure of time are you working on at this point in your life?

Structure of Place:

In order to thrive in our recovery, we need to have places in our lives that feel safe and comfortable. Stable housing is crucial to maintaining recovery, and it's also very important for children to grow up in safe, stable housing. We all need a little bit of space to call our own, a space where we can relax and feel happy to be home.

What is your housing like now? Are you happy with your housing, or is this an area of your life that needs improving? Is your home clean and orderly enough to be comfortable? Do you know where to

find things? Do you have some private space in your life, even if it's just a drawer? What aspect of structure of space do you want to work on in the next year?

Structure of Work:

We all need to feel we are making a contribution in order to be satisfied with our lives. Building structure of work doesn't necessarily mean you are working at a paying job, although maintaining paid employment can be an important part of recovery, and it can also be an important part of taking care of your family. But structure of work includes the unpaid work we do raising children, and caring for our disabled or elderly family members. It also includes volunteer work, creative time (such as time spent making music, art, sewing, cooking, gardening) and going to school. An important part of recovery is also making sure we have our own legal source of income. If we are financially dependent on other people, we may be vulnerable to relapse.

What is your "work" at this point in your life? Is it satisfying? What are your immediate goals for building structure of work? What are your long-term goals?

Structure of Love:

Having structure of love in our lives means we have a variety of different people in our lives who care about us, respect us, and can provide us with support when times are tough. The "love" in our lives might include the love of parents, children, and other family members, the love of good friends, the companionship of neighbors, the respect and caring of coworkers or fellow AA/NA members, and the support of professionals such as a doctor or a therapist. There's a saying that "everybody needs a hand." "A hand" is five people who we can try to call if we are having a hard time or need a favor. Building structure of love can also mean we make space in our life for positive relationships by ending relationships that are destructive, violent or undermining of our recovery.

Who are the people in your life that are supporting your recovery? Do you have relationships that you need to change or end at this point? How do you want to build structure of love in the next year?