

Overcoming Addictions

Worksheet: Understanding Addiction as a Coping Strategy & Supporting Change

Important note

This worksheet is an educational support tool, not a replacement for professional mental health support. If addiction involves risk, physical dependence, or feels difficult to manage alone, seeking professional help is a sign of strength.

Purpose

This worksheet is designed to help you understand addiction as a **coping strategy that developed for a reason**, rather than a personal failure.

It focuses on awareness, compassion, and identifying safer ways to meet deeper needs — without analysing or revisiting harmful behaviours in detail.

You may skip any section that does not feel supportive.

Part 1: Normalising Addiction as a Coping Response

Read the statements below and note any that feel true or reassuring:

- Addiction often begins as a way to cope with something difficult
- What helped once can later start to cause harm
- Wanting to stop does not mean stopping is easy
- Struggling does not mean I lack willpower
- Needing support is part of recovery, not a failure

Reflection (optional):

What feels validating or relieving to read here?

Part 2: Shifting the Question

Many people ask themselves:

“What’s wrong with me?”

A more helpful question is:

“What was this helping me cope with?”

Without going into detail about the addiction itself, reflect gently:

- When life feels hardest, what tends to be present?
(e.g. stress, loneliness, pressure, emotional pain, numbness)

Part 3: Understanding the Deeper Needs

Addictions often act like a **band-aid** for unmet needs.

Read through the needs below and note any that resonate:

- **Connection** – feeling less alone or disconnected
- **Emotional relief** – reducing anxiety, pain, or overwhelm
- **Rest or escape** – switching off from constant demand
- **Safety or control** – creating predictability or calm
- **Meaning or comfort** – filling emptiness or boredom

Reflection:

- Which needs feel most relevant for me right now?

Part 4: Why Willpower Alone Isn't Enough

Addiction becomes powerful because it:

- Trains the nervous system to expect relief

- Becomes a familiar shortcut to coping
- Activates automatic urges under stress

This means urges are **learned responses**, not commands.

Reflection:

- How does viewing urges as learned (not personal failure) change how I relate to them?

Part 5: Replacing the Function, Not Just Removing the Behaviour

Sustainable change happens when the **need** is met differently.

Reflect gently:

- One *safe or healthier* way I could begin supporting a deeper need:

- One small source of relief, connection, or grounding I already have access to:

- One thing that helps my nervous system feel a little steadier:

(These do not need to be big or perfect — small shifts matter.)

Part 6: Support and Safety

Recovery does not happen in isolation.

- Who or what feels supportive, steady, or safe for me?

Closing Note

Addiction is not a sign that you are broken.
It is a sign that something inside you needed support.

Breaking free is not about punishment or force —
it is about understanding, replacement, and care.

You deserve support, dignity, and a life not shaped by coping strategies that no longer serve you.

And you do not have to do this alone.

How to Access Further Support in New Zealand:

- Contact your local GP
- Dial 111 for immediate support
- Free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor
- Lifeline – 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP)
- Youth line – free text 234, call 0800 376 633, webchat at youthline.co.nz, DM on Instagram @youthlinenz, message on Whats App 09 886 56 96.
- Samaritans – 0800 726 666
- Suicide Crisis Helpline – 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)
- Depression Helpline – 0800 111 757 or free text 4202 To talk to a trained counsellor about how you are feeling or to ask any questions
- Anxiety NZ – 0800 269 4389 (0800 ANXIETY)