Session 6: Riding the Wave: Cravings Have a Beginning, a Middle, and an End

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Timer; workbook Craving Ladder page; the Session 6 handout (Craving Ladder)

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe craving as a wave that rises, peaks, and falls rather than a state that only use can end
- Demonstrate two in-the-moment skills — urge surfing/delay and the 3-call rule
- Set a personal craving rating and response for scores of 4, 7, and 10

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 1 — Foundation. The one idea today is that a craving rises, peaks, and falls, and the minutes until the peak passes can be bought. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. The most useful fact in early recovery may be this one: a craving is a wave. It rises, it peaks, and — fed or not — it falls. Today we practice buying the minutes until the peak passes: urge surfing, the 3-call rule, and a craving ladder with your name on it.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: “How long do you believe a craving lasts if you do not feed it — and what has your own experience actually shown?” Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

Craving feels permanent while it is rising, which is why the single most useful fact in early recovery is this: a craving is a wave. It builds, it peaks, and — fed or not — it comes down. Our job is not to win an argument with the peak; it is to buy the minutes until the peak passes, using delay, distance, and people. We practice two tools. Urge surfing means noticing the craving like weather: where is it in my body, how strong is it now, is it rising or falling — curiosity weakens the spell of command. The 3-call rule means that before any other response at a 7 or above, we call three recovery people, or keep calling until a human answers. Feelings, including this one, are not orders.

- **Minutes, not forever** The decision is never 'never use again' in a craving moment; it is 'not in the next 15 minutes — and then we will see.' Stacking those decisions is how days are built.
- **The body first** Cold water, movement, food, a walk, a shower — physical state changes move craving faster than arguments do. Week 2 builds the daily version of this.
- **Tell somebody at the rise, not the fall** A craving reported at a 4 is a conversation; reported at a 10 it is an emergency. Early honesty is the skill.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Cravings are taught in this session as waves with a beginning, a middle, and an end, using present-focused coping and the HALT and structure tools; meditation research is background only (Goyal et al., 2014; Marlatt & Gordon, 1985). Key sources for this session: Goyal et al. (2014); Kabat-Zinn (1990); Benson (1975); Marlatt & Gordon (1985). Evidence strength: Moderate as practice guidance. Spiritual practice: Contemplative prayer — correlates with meditation and mindfulness (attention regulation, stress and craving response); evidence: Moderate (Goyal et al., 2014). Full citations: Appendix H. The session's Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, "What part of that sounds most like your life right now?" Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. What is your earliest body signal that a craving is building?
2. What has helped a craving pass in the past, even partially?
3. Who are your three calls — by name? If you cannot name three people yet, who in this room or program could become one?
4. What do you usually tell yourself at the peak, and what truer sentence could answer it?

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Practice in the room: facilitator leads a 3-minute urge-surfing exercise using a mild current urge or a remembered one at low intensity — breathe, locate it in the body, rate it, watch it for 90 seconds, re-rate it aloud in pairs. Then everyone writes their Craving Ladder in their workbook: at 4 I will ____; at 7 I will ____; at 10 I will ____ and go to ____.

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

This week, log every craving of 5 or above: time, trigger, peak rating, what you did, and how long until it fell by half. Bring the log — it becomes raw material for your relapse-prevention work in Week 6. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave. The craving log in this session is an entry in the one running daily log in the workbook, not a second log.

Facilitator notes and cautions

Never use guided imagery that recreates using scenes in vivid detail; keep the practice exercise at low intensity and offer an eyes-open, opt-out alternative. If a participant reports a craving of 9–10 in check-in today, the practice is not enough — connect them to their coach and support plan before they leave the building.

Closing (2 minutes)

Minutes, not forever. Stack enough fifteen-minute decisions and you have built a day; stack the days and you have built a life. Log your cravings this week — time, trigger, peak, and how long until it fell. Next week: we build the day that holds you.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐