Session 4: The Addiction Cycle

PHASE 1 — FOUNDATION: SURRENDER AND STABILIZATION (WEEKS 1–2) · WEEK 1 — UNDERSTANDING THE BATTLE

Date: _____ My craving today (0–10): _____ One word for my week: _____

Handout for this session: the Session 4 handout (Medication Support (MAT) Facts) — in the Handouts Packet.

What we're learning

Addiction is a cycle, not just one bad choice. Something triggers us. A thought says the substance is the answer. Craving builds in the body. We use. We get short relief. Then come the consequences — and then shame. Shame then becomes the next trigger, and the wheel turns again. The good news: a cycle has many points where it can be broken. The earlier we step in, the more strength we have to do it.

- The cycle has doors Every stage is an interruption point — triggers can be avoided or prepared for, thoughts can be examined (Weeks 2–3), cravings can be ridden out (Session 5), and shame can be answered with honesty and support instead of use (Week 3).
- The brain heals, and it takes time Sleep, mood, focus, and craving intensity commonly improve over weeks and months of recovery — one reason stabilization and patience are recovery strategies, not just virtues.
- Disconnection is in the cycle too Isolation and hopelessness are both fuel for the cycle and wounds it leaves; reconnecting with people and support is therefore part of the work, not decoration.
- Knowing the map is power A craving with a name and a location in a cycle is more manageable than a mysterious 'weakness.'

Goals for this session

☐ I can draw the addiction cycle in my own words — trigger, thought, craving, use, consequence, shame

☐ I can explain, in plain language, how repeated use changes the brain's reward and stress systems

☐ I can place my own most recent use inside the cycle without self-condemnation

Check-in

Tell us about a time you sincerely decided you were done — and used anyway. What happened between the decision and the use?

Discussion — write your answers

Write what you would say out loud — and more, if it comes. There is no right-length answer; there is only an honest one.

1. Where in the cycle are you strongest, and where do you usually lose the fight?

2. What role has shame played after use — did it ever lead you back toward use?

3. How does it change things to hear that your brain has been trained, not just that your will is weak?

4. Which interruption point will you build first, with whose help?

Session 4 — Skill Practice

On the whiteboard, the facilitator draws the cycle and the group populates it with (anonymous, general) examples. Then each participant draws their own cycle in their workbook from their most recent use, marking with a star the earliest point they could realistically interrupt next time.

Draw or write my addiction cycle: Trigger → Thought → Craving → Use → Relief → Consequences → Shame. Use my most recent experience.

The earliest point I could interrupt it next time (mark it with a star ★):

My takeaway

The one thing from this session I most need to remember — in my own words:

Homework — this week's application

☐ Carry your cycle drawing this week. Each evening, note one moment you entered the early stages of the cycle (trigger or thought) and what you did — interrupted it or not. Bring the notes; there is no penalty for honest data.

My log for the week:

Day / date	What happened — what I did	Notes

An optional Scripture handout for this session is available from your facilitator on request.