Session 16: Pain and Use: Understanding the Connection Safely

PHASE 2 — HEALING: MIND, HEART, AND PAST (WEEKS 2–4) · WEEK 4 — PAIN, TRAUMA, AND LAMENT

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

Handout for this session: the Session 16 handout (Grounding Card: 5-4-3-2-1) — in the Handouts Packet.

What we're learning

Many of us used substances to turn the volume down on pain — memories, loss, fear, or a body and mind that would not rest. The substance seemed to solve a problem, but at a terrible cost. Naming that link, safely and without forced stories, helps us find better volume knobs: grounding, movement, cold water, music, and people. Today we practice the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding exercise so it is ready before we need it. Heavy things that come up belong with your coach or counselor — telling them is part of the work.

- Understanding is not excavating Knowing that pain and use are connected guides today's choices. Re-living the pain in a circle of peers risks harm to the teller and the listeners, and helps neither.
- The body keeps the score in the present What we can work on here is today's responses — startle, shutdown, rage spikes, numbness — with grounding, structure, and support. Clinical treatment for the roots is available by referral, and taking it is strength.
- Safety is a treatment ingredient Predictability, choice, no forced disclosure, and facilitators who do what they said they would do — this room's design is itself part of the healing.

Headline level only in this room: name the topic in a few words, not the details. Details belong with a counselor. You may pass at any time without explaining yourself. If anything in this session needs a counselor, your facilitator will connect you warmly the same day — asking is a success, not a failure.

Goals for this session

☐ I can explain, at headline level, how trauma and chronic stress can drive substance use as self-medication

☐ I can state the group's trauma-informed ground rules and why detail stays out of this room

☐ I can identify one present-day stress response I can work on with present-day tools

Check-in

Without telling any story: on a scale of 1–10, how much of your using do you now believe was about numbing or escaping something?

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. How does it change your self-story to hear use described as coping — without removing responsibility?

2. What are your present-day volume knobs besides substances — what actually turns your stress down, even a little?

3. What makes a room or a person feel safe to you? How can this group protect that?

4. Is there a referral — counseling, medical, veterans' services — you have been avoiding that this session brings to mind? (Naming the category only is enough.)

Session 16 — Skill Practice

Grounding practice, taught as a tool for any overwhelmed moment: 5-4-3-2-1 senses exercise led slowly by the facilitator (five things seen, four heard, three felt, two smelled, one tasted), followed by a round where each participant names their most reliable present-day 'volume knob' — walk, cold water, music, a person — and writes it into their Crisis Plan as a step-two strategy. Change any step only with your counselor.

My most reliable present-day "volume knob" (walk, cold water, music, a person — name yours):

My 5-4-3-2-1: 5 things I see / 4 I hear / 3 I feel / 2 I smell / 1 I taste (practice it here once, on a calm day):

My takeaway

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

Homework — this week's application

☐ Add your volume knob to your Safety Plan this week. Change any step only with your counselor. Practice 5-4-3-2-1 once on a calm day so it is familiar before you need it. If this session stirred anything heavy, tell your coach or counselor this week — that conversation is the homework's most important form.

Space to do the homework and note how it went:

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