

# **Addiction and Recovery: The Emotional Highs and Lows of Early Recovery**

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When someone decides to seek help to quit drinking and using other drugs, everything begins to change. When individuals with a severe substance use disorder stop using, they often encounter withdrawal symptoms.

As the individual's body undergoes detox and consciously attempts to interrupt the cycle of addiction, including alcohol, they experience a multitude of changes. Physical detox can manifest in ways that involve physical, psychological, and emotional symptoms. Individuals separating themselves from the chemical often undergo an emotional rollercoaster. Depression, anxiety, and fear are common, as are mood swings, cycling rapidly from sadness, shame, and guilt to hope and joy about quitting.

Early recovery is also a period of introspection. Dealing with rapidly changing emotions, the newly recovering person strives to comprehend this surge of feelings. They also evaluate their relationships, work, social life, motivations, beliefs, and history, attempting to understand everything. Mood swings can be severe, and family members viewing these changes may assume that the person is still using. They struggle to comprehend these fluctuations, expecting immediate and steady improvement.

However, experiencing emotional highs and lows is typical in early recovery as the body gradually rids itself of chemicals. Previously numbed feelings come back with a vengeance, and unresolved issues resurface. Alcohol and other mood-altering substances fundamentally alter mood, affecting emotions. For example, recall times when you used alcohol or other substances to change your mood in response to boredom, anger, fatigue, pain, sadness, loneliness, or helplessness. Even positive feelings,

such as joy, can be altered by alcoholics and addicts. Therefore, when the numbing effect ceases, emotions resurge intensely.

Acknowledging the common rollercoaster effect on emotions in early recovery helps to contextualize this temporary condition. Viewing these highs and lows as an opportunity to acquire new skills in managing feelings is beneficial. Early recovery presents a prime opportunity to learn how to appropriately identify, label, own, express, and work through emotions. While some people who have substance use disorder already possess these skills, others do not. If you need to improve your emotional management skills, now is an opportune time to learn. These skills are indispensable for life, not just for people in recovery but for anyone seeking positive health and well-being. **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2009 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.**

*You don't have to struggle with overcoming the challenges of early recovery by yourself. You can benefit from a little help from your loved ones and foster deeper emotional connections by using The Couples' Feelings Meetings. It provide an invaluable avenue for couples to master the emotional tasks together. As individuals embark on their journey towards recovery, these meetings offer a structured platform for discussing each person's emotional experiences, their individual recovery efforts, and honing skills in empathy and stress management. The structure and committment to holding regular meetings enables you to tailor this meeting to topics pertinent to your current needs. Designed to strengthen bonds and deepen understanding, "Couples' Feelings Meetings: A Brief Lesson" serves as a comprehensive guide to conducting purposeful meetings, empowering couples to cultivate a relationship grounded in emotional intimacy.*



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