



## Addiction Recovery Intensive

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### TIMELINE INSTRUCTIONS

**relationship** – noun (re·la·tion·ship \-shən-, ship\): the way in which two or more people or things are connected

According to Merriam-Webster, your drug or alcohol addiction is a relationship. In fact, it's quite common to hear those in recovery circles refer to their sobriety as a "break-up" with drugs or alcohol. After all, there were likely some blissful years – a honeymoon period of sorts – before things got rocky. And once they got rocky, there were disagreements, lies, mistakes, and the inevitable reconciliations.

Eventually, though, the lows began to outweigh the highs and you got the sense that it was time to end things. But regardless of how toxic the circumstances have become, you know that ending a relationship is never easy. Frankly, you've grown accustomed to having your addiction around. Even imagining a life without it invokes panic and fear.

Timelines are a powerful way to explore the history of your relationship with substances. Getting the details in writing can afford you with a more objective standpoint and can also bring unexpected insights to the surface.

#### What You'll Need:

- Blank page (or two) for timeline
- Notebook/Journal
- Pen/Markers (several colors)
- A quiet space that's appropriate for reflection

#### Step 1:

Create a timeline (just like those you recall from your middle school history books) that covers your year of birth to the present



**Step 2:**

Select a new color and write in remarkable dates. They don't have to be exact, but should include both positive and negative markers in your life. Consider births, breakups/divorces, moves, deaths, weddings, accidents, vacations, graduations, awards, injuries, and any other monumental periods that surface as you reflect.

**Step 3:**

With a new color, jot down the history of your relationship with alcohol or drugs, beginning in childhood. Consider these questions as you reflect:

- When was I first aware that drugs/alcohol existed?
- What role did substances play in my childhood?
- When did I first try alcohol/drugs?
- Was there a period where I moderated my use?
- When did I first begin using substances in a problematic way?

**Step 4** With a different color ink write down your feelings associated with the different events. Don't limit yourself to "sad" and "happy" during this step. Consider feelings like loneliness, anger, pain, fatigue, and anxiety as well.

**Step 5:**

With your notebook/journal, write a reflection on Steps 1-4. Write freely about your impressions, but also consider the following questions as you process the exercise:

- Did anything unexpected surface in this process?
- Is it clear, from my timeline, when my substance use became problematic?
- What feelings surfaced most regularly on my timeline and how do they reflect my current relationship with alcohol or drugs?
- Has my substance use fluctuated, plateaued, or progressed in adulthood?
- What insights can I carry from this exercise into my recovery efforts?

By creating a visual of your history with substances, you can gain a firmer grasp on when and how your relationship devolved into troublesome territory. Processing your timeline with the group can afford you with additional insights.

There is no one-sized-fits-all approach to ending an abusive relationship. But by closely examining your personal history with drugs or alcohol, you will be more empowered to seek the solutions that work for you. Take comfort in the fact that the events you explored today are behind you. The remainder of your timeline is in your hands. You choose what comes next.