RECOVERY IN FOCUS

RECOVERY IN FOCUS · GROUP CURRICULUM · FACILITATOR GUIDE

Secrets, Honesty & the Double Life

Hiding habits, what secrets cost, and rebuilding honesty in order. Four parts, two group classes.

Topic category (billing anchor)	Communication Skills / Recovery Support, with Relapse Prevention
Clinical focus	Concealment behavior as relapse infrastructure; secrecy-related stress and isolation; early-disclosure skills (slip protocols); graduated honesty practice
Evidence base	CBT (behavior-pattern work) · Relapse Prevention (lapse management, the abstinence violation effect) · MI (honest self-report climate)
Format	One participant packet · two group classes of about 2 hours each · Class 1 = Parts 1–2 · Class 2 = Parts 3–4
Group rules	2 to 12 clients, same time · at least 1 active Medi-Cal beneficiary · no minors mixed with adults

This file: facilitator guide — class agendas, disclosure guardrails, FIRP

Companion file: participant packet (print one per member) — 4 parts · 8 exercises · 1 vignette · privacy-vs-secrecy test · 24-hour agreement

FACILITATOR GUIDE

How to run this session

- **THE ROOM MUST NOT BECOME A CONFESSIONAL:** the packet promises repeatedly that nobody confesses anything, and you keep that promise. Every exercise works at the pattern level; the content of members' secrets stays on their paper or in their heads. If a member starts a live confession, redirect gently ("that sounds like one for your counselor, and I'll help you get it there") and protect them from the room's curiosity.
- **KNOW YOUR DISCLOSURE DUTIES BEFORE YOU TEACH THIS:** this session invites honesty in a documented clinical setting. Be able to say plainly what you must document and report (recent use, safety risks, mandated-reporting categories) so no member discloses under a false assumption of secrecy. Saying it out loud at the opening is not optional; it IS the informed-consent moment.
- **LINK:** the automatic "I'm fine" answer and the exhaustion of keeping the cover story going are near-universal; the recognition laughter in Part 1 builds the safety Part 3 spends.
- **TALK PLAIN:** this packet was rewritten in plain language after field testing; use its exact wording (the cover story, hiding habits, the one-question test) and do not improvise metaphors on top of it.
- **MODEL THE REAL ANSWER:** this session more than any other is undermined by a facilitator running a performance. Plain, direct, no clinical theater.

Mixed-functioning group adjustments

- Read everything aloud; the cost check (Exercise 3) is private and needs no literacy to work as reflection.
- Lower-functioning rooms: run the session on three things: the cover-story idea, the 24-hour agreement (set up live), and the one-real-answer rep. The privacy-vs-secrecy test can be taught with two concrete non-personal examples.

DISCLOSURE GUARDRAILS (READ BEFORE TEACHING)

The limits statement, delivered at the opening, verbatim or close: "I want honesty to be safe here, so let me be exact about my side. What you share about cravings, urges, and struggles stays in this room and in your chart. If you tell me about recent use, I document it and we adjust your plan, which is support, not punishment. And like every counselor, I'm a mandated reporter for abuse of children and dependent adults, and I act on serious safety risks. Inside those lines, this room is built for the truth." **Slip disclosures in session:** affirm the honesty first, loudly; the group's response to the first honest slip disclosure teaches every member what honesty costs here. Then follow facility protocol (documentation, counselor notification, plan adjustment) and say that's what's happening. Never negotiate documentation away. **Legal-weight secrets:** the packet already routes disclosure strategy for anything with legal consequences to counselor-plus-lawyer; enforce that routing and do not let the group advise. **Partner/family disclosures (affairs, paternity, money):** big relational confessions get planned with the counselor, not rehearsed in group; the packet's "planned, not blurted" line is the handle. **The 24-hour agreement:** facilitate pairings or sponsor/counselor designations in the room, and make clear the agreement person is a bridge TO help, not a substitute for it.

HOOK SOURCE NOTE: the secrecy findings are Michael Slepian and colleagues (Columbia): across large samples, the harm of secrets tracks how often the mind spontaneously goes back to them (mind-wandering to the secret), not how often people actively hide them in conversation; that frequency predicts lower wellbeing and more fatigue and isolation. Present as "researchers who study secrets" and keep it directional. "You're only as sick as your secrets" is fellowship folk wisdom; present it as that, and let the research confirm rather than replace it.

CLASS 1 Parts 1 and 2 (about 2 hours)

Opening (10 min)

Deliver the limits statement from the guardrail box FIRST, then frame: "*Every addiction comes with a cover story, and keeping it going was a full-time job. This session looks at the habits that job trained into you and what carrying secrets costs. Nobody confesses anything here; we work on the habit, you keep the contents.*" Icebreaker: "One word for what keeping the stories straight used to feel like."

Part 1: The Hiding Habits (40 to 50 min)

Teach (5 min or less): the two full-time jobs (using, and hiding the using), the hook (the mind going back to the secret is what carries the cost, not the moments of hiding), and the reframe: hiding habits are trained skills still running, changed by reps, not shame.

PLAIN "What was the most exhausting part of your cover story? Pattern, not contents."

DEEPER "If the habit still answers 'how was your weekend?' with the edited version, who's actually talking in that moment, you or the training?"

- **Exercise 1** (yes/no): item 2 (rehearsed answers to harmless questions) gets the recognition laugh; build on it. Item 3 (someone still believes a false version) stays a private count, no elaboration invited.
- **Exercise 2** (hiding habits): go around on "the habit that still runs most on autopilot." Pattern level enforced.

Part 2: What Secrets Cost (50 to 60 min)

Teach (5 min or less): the three costs: quiet time stops being restful (tie to the Boredom session), staying on guard all day (tie to the Stress session), and the loneliness of being loved for the edited version of yourself.

- **Exercise 3** (the cost check): announced as never-shared before anyone writes; that promise is what makes honest writing possible. Allow real silence for it.
- **Exercise 4** (yes/no): item 3 (remember the relief of putting something down) ends the class on the session's hope note; take two volunteers on what the first hour after felt like.

Close Class 1 with the talk-it-out questions. Assign: just notice the produced answers this week; count them if you can.

CLASS 2 Parts 3 and 4 (about 2 hours)

Opening (10 min)

Check in on the counting assignment; the numbers will be comically high and that's the teach. Restate the limits statement in one sentence before Part 3.

Part 3: Secrets and Relapse (50 to 60 min)

Teach (5 min or less): both directions: relapse builds in the hidden zone before a slip (skipped meetings, unreported cravings), and a hidden slip grows into a run after one. The simple math: telling costs a fraction of what hiding costs. Name the abstinence violation effect in plain words: the shame spiral after a slip is what turns a slip into a relapse, and telling someone early starves that spiral.

- **Walt vignette + Exercise 5:** read aloud. Board "He decided five weeks early, before he had anything to be ashamed of." Question 3 (who holds YOUR agreement) is the setup for the live pairing in Part 4.
- **Exercise 6** (yes/no): item 1 (a private zone exists in my recovery) is the bravest hand to raise; honor it explicitly, because that hand is the session working.

Part 4: Rebuilding Honesty (45 to 55 min)

Teach (5 min or less): the privacy-vs-secrecy test (protecting my peace or protecting a lie), the rebuild order (safest rooms first, small reps, big disclosures planned with support, legal-weight ones through counselor and lawyer), and the goal: no cover story running for anyone important.

- **Exercise 7** (privacy or secrecy): verdicts on paper, contents nowhere. The share-able layer is the small honesty rep; every member names theirs out loud.
- **Exercise 8** (yes/no): item 3 converts to action: 24-hour agreements get NAMED and, where possible, set up before anyone leaves the room. This is the session's most protective deliverable; budget real time for it.
- **Skill of the day:** one real answer a day, sized to the relationship. Promise the check-in.

Close with the group questions and the summary read aloud. The last group question (what a life with no cover story would feel like day to day) is the right closer; let members describe it concretely.

FIRP scaffold (one note per member, per class)

Class 1. Focus: member's recovery-skills objective, plus today's topic: concealment patterns and their psychological cost. **Intervention:** *Reviewed confidentiality parameters and mandated-reporting limits to support informed honest participation; educated group on concealment behavior as a trained pattern persisting into recovery, citing secrecy research on intrusive recall, stress load, and isolation effects; facilitated each member's identification of personal concealment habits at the pattern level; guided private written reflection on secrecy-related costs with explicit no-disclosure group norms maintained; linked members' patterns and processed responses.* **Response:** individualize. **Plan:** self-monitor automatic managed responses; return for Class 2.

Class 2. Focus: same objective, plus today's topic: early-disclosure skills and graduated honesty practice. **Intervention:** *Reviewed self-monitoring; educated group on concealment as relapse infrastructure in both pre-lapse and post-lapse phases, including the shame-spiral mechanism and the protective effect of early disclosure; facilitated vignette analysis of an advance-commitment disclosure protocol; supported each member in establishing a named 24-hour disclosure agreement; taught the privacy-versus-secrecy discrimination skill and graduated honesty practice (safe-setting disclosure first, planned major disclosures with clinical support, legal-consequence disclosures routed to counsel); assigned daily honest-response practice.* **Response:** individualize; document any use disclosures per facility protocol with plan adjustments noted. **Plan:** daily honesty practice; 24-hour agreement confirmed; individual sessions for members preparing major disclosures.

COMPLIANCE NOTES: 2 to 12 clients, same time; at least one active Medi-Cal beneficiary; no one 17 or under mixed with adults (outside a certified school site). Facilitator: licensed/registered clinician or certified/registered AOD counselor, in scope. Participant list each class; one note per member per class with attendance plus that member's specific response, provider-signed, finalized within 3 business days (service day counts as day 0), tied to that member's problem list or objective. Confidentiality limits stated before honesty work begins; use disclosures documented and plans adjusted per policy, never concealed; group confidentiality norms (what is shared in group stays in group) reinforced both classes.