



DAY 14

Dealing with Emotions in Early Recovery

I've shared with lots of folks in early recovery the adage, "*The good thing about being sober is that you feel more ...and the bad thing about being sober is that you feel more.*"

We numbed ourselves to so much for so long. In early recovery (and at other points in our journey when stress and fears run high) we find ourselves emotionally raw.

Experiencing the highs and lows of our emotions can be completely overwhelming. Whether we're on top of the world or in a dark place, the good news is that this too shall pass.

H.A.L.T.

Add This to Your Toolbox:

*H.A.L.T. - It stands for **H**ungry, **A**ngry, **L**onely and **T**ired.*

H.A.L.T. works both as a preventative measure and a diagnostic tool.

Recovery wisdom dictates that we must not allow ourselves to accrue too much of these and that when we find ourselves overwhelmed we can ask which of these we are. It's simple and effective. It's also something our emotions can throw a wrench into.

We come to see that what we hunger for is much more than just food. We realize that anger never travels alone and that there is always at least one other emotion present (Hint: It's usually one that requires vulnerability to express and anger masks it).

We know that even in the company of good people we can be lonely when we shut down or deny ourselves opportunities to connect. Tired is perhaps the hardest one. It's more than fatigue, it's being drained physically, emotionally, mentally, and/or spiritually. It's an emptiness that demands to be filled and a spirit that must be replenished.

Identifying and Coping

Most of us in early recovery are immature emotionally. We may be very good at managing external things, yet struggle to regulate our internal experiences (emotions, thoughts, memories). We often feel "squirrelly" or "antsy."

Anxiety is extremely common in recovery. We struggle to feel safe inside our own skin. Many of us experience social anxiety, obsessions, compulsions, and occasional bouts of panic. Sobriety forces us to be acutely aware of the very things we've been running and hiding from.

There is no way to let go of pain in a way that doesn't hurt. There's no way to face fear without being afraid and there's no way to release anger without getting angry. Identifying and coping are key. I recommend to those I serve that they check in with themselves frequently. This is as simple as asking...

"What am I doing?" and "How am I doing?"

If we are completely honest with ourselves, we can then ask, *"What would I recommend to a friend in my shoes?"* Reaching out, using healthy self-talk, journaling, and meditation are foundational to our stability.

"I Let It Go"

I hear this expression a lot. It most often means that we're ignoring it and trying our best to pretend we're not messed up about it.

Acceptance and forgiveness hinge upon releasing our resentments but those only come when we're willing to express our true feelings and work toward resolution.

Again, there is no way to let go of pain in a way that doesn't hurt. There's no way to face fear without being afraid and there's no way to release anger without getting angry. You have to feel it to let it go. The most frustrating aspect of this is that letting it go is rarely a one-time event. It took us years to get here and there are no quick fixes.