



## **WEEK TEN: Cultivating Community Support - Your Tribe & The Importance of Giving Back**

One of the most challenging aspects of active recovery is the considerable shift in lifestyle. This can happen suddenly or gradually, as the habits you were used to begin to shift and grow in a new direction. You may begin to realize that the people you surround yourself with are no longer in alignment with your changing reality. Your former pals may not understand your new path, or you may feel uncomfortable around them if they are engaging in addictive behaviours, like drinking, smoking, poor eating habits or even negative thought patterns. You can't expect all of your friends to want to shift their lives to meet yours. Some may even attempt to enable your old behaviours to keep you in their paradigm - it is normal for your community to feel a loss in a similar way that you may be experiencing this loss. It's also entirely possible for your friend group to continue engaging in those behaviours while simultaneously supporting your new lifestyle - they will understand when you choose to limit your engagement with them during certain activities and some will be happy to join you in alternate activities. Don't assume you need to cut ties with everyone from your former life - you will realize over time who is willing to support you on your path and whether or not you need to have a conversation with those who you simply cannot continue a relationship with. Some may naturally drift out of your life.

This process can be overwhelming and isolating, and it can even lead you to "relapse" into old behaviour patterns. We now understand that a lack of love, human contact and mutually beneficial relationships can have a very real impact on how our brains are wired and in turn, why we reach for addictive substances or turn to certain behaviours in the first place. We cannot

do this life alone. In fact, we are specifically wired to connect and without that connection, we can't survive: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-we-are-wired-to-connect/>

So how can we support ourselves, each other and our clients, as we navigate this new terrain? There are so many options! One that you may be familiar with is the act of Seva, or selfless service. Selfless service can come in many forms, whether it be more bold gestures or simple, random acts of kindness. Seva offers us the opportunity to give back to our community, while supporting our own process of recovery - when we are in addictive patterns, we can find ourselves behaving in wholly self-serving ways. These behaviours serve one purpose - to support a demoting habit. The act of seva removes the singular thinking of the self, and promotes the idea that when we support each other with loving kindness, we can lift each other up, allowing us to remember that we are all in this together. The reinforcement of this connectedness is a powerful force in recovery.

Below is a list of examples that you can personally use or that you can give to your clients as options in building a new, supportive community through participation and giving back. It is important to note that everyone will come to this part of recovery in a different way, depending on where they are at in their process. Not everyone will be ready to support others who are on a similar journey, which is why it's important to reinforce options. If at any point a person feels taken advantage of, resentful or experience a sense of inequality, then they may need to return to setting boundaries and communicating compassionately and honestly, before being able to serve freely.

- Provide a listening ear to a friend, family-member or anyone who may need it.
- Volunteer for a number of hours with a community organization that needs help. Don't over-extend yourself, but offer what feels right within your own boundaries of self-care.
- Teach a by-donation/karma yoga class for your friends/community
- Hold the door open for someone! (simple acts, right? It doesn't take much)
- If you live in a communal space with others, show your willingness to contribute in ways that feel right to you: cooking a communal meal or dish, cleaning up once a week for others, watering the plants, making tea, sharing a laugh and a hug!
- Participate in or take yourself to a music event/live music. Music has been proven to be a very healing force, read more here: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/how-music-can-help-you-heal>
- Take some time to recall what it is that you enjoy, and internet-search free groups to connect with over similar interests. If you like star-gazing, attend a night at the local planetarium. If you're an animal-lover, spend some time in a shelter and ask about volunteering. If you love books, take yourself to the library. Sometimes it can be challenging to get out of the house if you're managing anxiety, so start with small steps in quiet spaces where there will be people around, but most of them are there for similar reasons: quiet space among others, books to read, tea to drink and if you wish, a conversation with someone. Book stores are also good spots. Take yourself to an independent movie premiere and stay for the Q&A. It may take time to establish what

you enjoy - and when you do find that, you can begin to reach out to the community that also enjoys these activities.