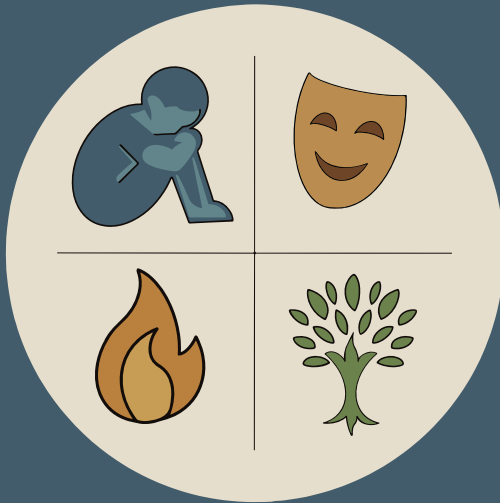


THE FOUR QUADRANTS OF SELF-ESTEEM AND BEHAVIOR



A PRACTICAL GUIDE
TO BREAKING ADDICTIONS
AND REBUILDING YOUR IDENTITY

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The Four Quadrants of Self-Esteem and Behavior

A Practical Guide to Breaking Addictions and Rebuilding Your Identity

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Preface

Opening this guide already shows a willingness to look at what is difficult. It's not easy to face the places in life where you feel stuck, ashamed, or worn out from trying to change. Many people avoid that kind of work for decades because it feels overwhelming. Wherever you are today, whether hopeful, doubtful, exhausted, or simply curious, it's always the right time to begin reclaiming your freedom from destructive patterns.

I wrote this guide to share what I've learned from years of working through my own addictions. Everything in these pages comes from what I studied in therapy, practiced with coaching clients, lived through personally, and observed in others. I worked my way out of addictions to alcohol, cannabis, and nicotine. I also broke out of highly addictive and unhealthy relationship cycles. Only then did I begin piecing together what had made change possible. The result of that process is the model you now hold.

The Four Quadrants of Self-Esteem and Behavior are not just theory. They are a way of describing patterns I have experienced myself and witnessed in many others. They show how destructive cycles take hold, and how a different way of relating to yourself can begin to change them. I've done my best to express these ideas as clearly and practically as possible, without unnecessary complexity. For clarity, I'll refer to the model simply as the **Four Quadrants** from this point on.

My hope is that this guide helps you move toward greater self-respect and everything that grows from it: dignity, honesty, stability, and a deeper connection with yourself and others. I have had many people support me along the way. This guide is one way I hope to offer that same support to others.

1

Introduction

Why This Model Was Created

The Four Quadrants were created to explain why willpower, good intentions, and even rational understanding are often not enough to create lasting change. Many people know exactly what they want to stop doing, yet still find themselves repeating the same behaviors. You might promise yourself you will not drink, only to reach for a glass again. You might step away from a toxic relationship, only to be drawn back. Patterns you thought were behind you may return when life gets difficult. This model offers a way to understand why those moments happen and how to move toward choices that reflect greater honesty and self-respect.

You're not alone in this effort to understand yourself. Everyone has places where willpower and good intentions are not enough. There are times when you know exactly what you need to do, but something in you pulls the other way. You might feel frustrated, discouraged, or simply tired from how many times you have tried to change. These feelings are a signal that the usual strategies are not working. When this keeps happening, it's time to look deeper and try to *understand what shapes your decisions and actions*.

The Four Quadrants give you a way to look beneath the surface and understand what is really driving your choices. It's a practical tool for noticing the patterns that show up, especially when old coping strategies reappear. The model helps you see what is happening in those moments and offers a map for returning to more honest and self-respecting choices, even when things don't go as planned.

If you're ready to look at your patterns with more honesty and less judgment, this guide can help you see where you are, why you get stuck, and how to take the next step forward. It doesn't matter if you feel hopeful, doubtful, angry, or tired. Every part of your experience is welcome here. What matters is that you approach this work with as much honesty as you can, even if that is difficult at times.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is meant to be read in a reflective way. Take your time with it. The sections build on each other, so it's best to read it in order the first time. After that, you can return to whatever parts speak to your current situation.

You'll gain the most by relating what you read to your own life. Even if it feels a bit theoretical at times, everything here is aimed at helping you create practical change. Without applying what you learn to your everyday life, there's little chance of that happening.

You may see yourself in more than one quadrant or notice patterns that are hard to face. That's a normal part of the process. When something difficult comes up and makes you uneasy, that's usually a good sign. It means you're doing the work that leads to change, not just reading about it.

2

The Emotional Roots Behind Addiction

Laying the Groundwork

This section lays the groundwork for everything that follows. Before exploring the quadrants or taking action, it helps to understand how this guide views addiction: what fuels it, what keeps it going, and what makes real change possible. The next pages outline those ideas so the model is easier to apply in practice.

How This Framework Defines Self-Esteem

Self-esteem, in this framework, is your felt sense of personal worth. It reflects the degree to which you trust yourself, respect your needs, and believe your life has value. When it's present, you don't need to prove yourself or perform to feel valid. You can make choices without constant second-guessing, hold healthy boundaries, and face emotions without needing to escape them.

Healthy self-esteem shows up as a stable sense that you can trust yourself. You follow through on promises you make to yourself, you take your own needs seriously, and you don't abandon your values under pressure. This steadiness makes it easier to choose self-respecting behavior even when life feels difficult.

When self-esteem is weakened, the opposite patterns appear. You second-guess your decisions, you ignore or minimize your needs, and you turn to self-betraying actions because they feel easier than facing discomfort.

Self-esteem shifts with experience, reflection, and practice. Trauma, neglect, and repeated self-betrayal can erode it. Honest

awareness, consistent action, and treating yourself with care can strengthen it. It's not something you achieve once and then keep forever. You cultivate it repeatedly by bringing your choices, values, and sense of self into alignment over time.

Why Identity Is the Key to Lasting Change

When people talk about change, they often focus on motivation, willpower, or habits. Underneath all of these is something deeper: identity.

In this framework, identity is the story you hold about who you are. It answers the question, "Who am I in this situation?" That answer may not always be conscious, but it shapes what you allow yourself to do, what you tolerate, and what you expect from yourself and others.

If your identity is "I always mess up," you will tend to act in ways that confirm it. You may give up quickly, ignore your needs, or return to familiar actions that fit the story. If your identity shifts to "I'm someone worthy of respect," you start making different choices. You keep promises to yourself, set clearer boundaries, and act in ways that protect your well-being.

Identity changes with evidence. *Each time you act in a way that challenges the old story and strengthens a new one, you reinforce a different sense of who you are.* This is why self-respecting behavior matters. It's more than just discipline, it's a way of creating a healthier sense of self.

Lasting change happens when identity evolves. You're no longer reacting to urges as someone seeking escape. You begin to respond to discomfort as someone capable of facing it directly.

How Behavior Shapes Self-Respect

Self-respect is a relationship you build with yourself, and behavior is one of its clearest expressions. How you act, especially when things are difficult, shows you what you truly believe about your worth. In this framework, your actions are emphasized not because they're the most important part, but because they're visible, trackable, and powerful enough to influence your inner state over time.

It's easy to assume that if you just felt better about yourself, you would make better choices. In reality, the process often works in reverse. When you begin to make choices that align with what you value, even if those choices are uncomfortable, they gradually change how you see yourself. You become someone you can trust.

Self-respecting behavior is about acting in ways that reinforce your own dignity, even when no one else is watching. This can mean telling the truth when it would feel easier to hide, following through on a promise to yourself, or choosing not to return a message from someone who has repeatedly crossed your boundaries. It can also be as simple as getting out of bed at the time you promised yourself, rather than hitting the snooze button.

When how you act repeatedly goes against your own values, it becomes difficult to feel at peace with yourself. That inner conflict often creates shame, frustration, or numbness, which in turn makes it harder to act with integrity. By contrast, when you act in ways that reflect your values, your internal state becomes more stable. You begin to feel more coherent inside. You begin to trust yourself and to treat your well-being as worth safeguarding.

This is not about harsh discipline or rigid control. You won't always get this right, and that is part of the process. What matters is noticing that your actions shape how you see yourself. Each time you act with integrity, even in small ways, you strengthen your sense of self. *Over time, that is what creates real and lasting change.*

Why Harmful Behaviors Can Feel Like Solutions

It can be tempting to view self-betraying or compulsive behaviors as irrational or purely destructive. In reality, every repeated action serves a purpose. It helps you cope, avoid, or regulate something that feels too overwhelming to face directly.

From the outside, these actions may look senseless. On the inside, though, they often make perfect sense. Drinking to take the edge off anxiety, scrolling endlessly to avoid loneliness, or returning to a toxic relationship for a moment of connection all provide short-term relief. Even when they cause damage, they may still feel safer than the emptiness or vulnerability underneath.

This framework doesn't excuse harmful behavior. It emphasizes that without understanding the emotional logic behind it, judgment takes over, and that rarely leads to transformation. When you can see what you're doing as part of a strategy to manage pain, you gain the freedom to choose differently without denying the need that created the pattern.

Compulsive behavior often begins as an attempt to resolve emotional pain in the absence of better tools, supportive relationships, or inner clarity. What you're doing may be visible, but the underlying need is what actually drives it. When you learn to address that need with honesty and care, the compulsion begins to lose its grip.

Compulsion is the mind's way of trying to solve emotional pain, even if the solution causes harm. Because it follows a kind of internal logic, it can also be understood and reshaped.

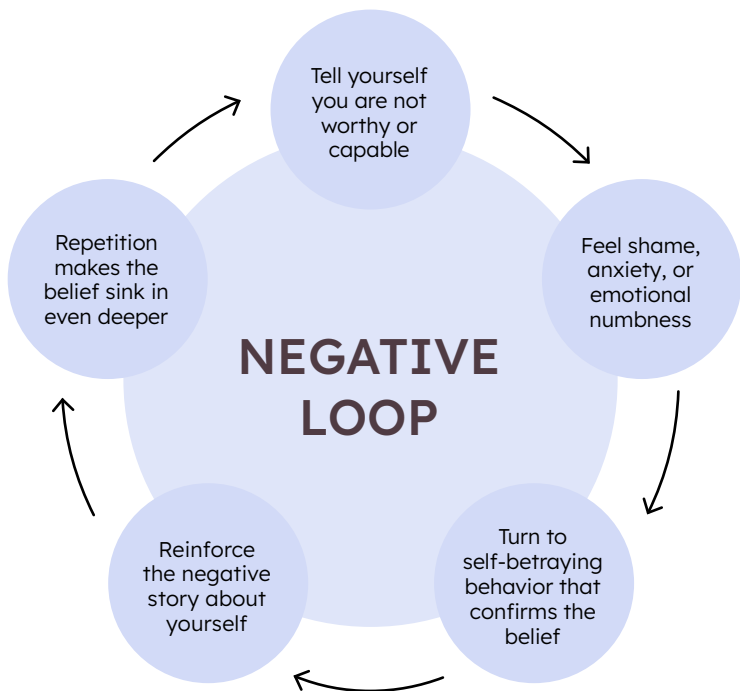
How Identity, Emotion, and Action Form Loops

This model rests on the understanding that identity, emotional state, and behavior are not separate parts of your experience. They form a single system, each one constantly influencing the others. The way you see yourself affects how you feel. How you feel affects what you do. What you do then reinforces or reshapes how you see yourself.

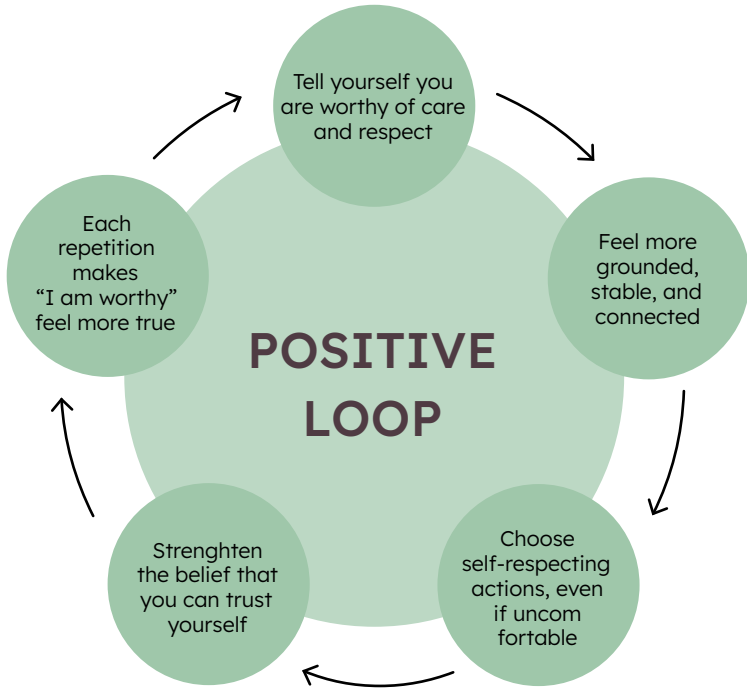
Because they form a loop, there is no single starting point. At times belief shapes emotion and action, while at other times a change in behavior is what begins to shift how you feel and who you believe yourself to be.

If you believe you're not worth much, that belief will color your emotions with shame, anxiety, or numbness. Those emotions make self-respecting action feel out of reach. When you act in ways that confirm the belief, such as breaking your own boundaries, hiding, or self-sabotaging, the cycle strengthens. For example, you may feel lonely, tell yourself you're unlovable, and then withdraw, which deepens the belief because isolation gives you even less human connection.

This is what the model calls a negative loop. Each part feeds the others until the cycle becomes automatic. Over time, the pattern can feel like your true self, when in fact it's only a conditioned response. This self-reinforcing cycle is not your identity, and it can change when you begin to interrupt it with different choices.



The same structure can also support growth. Sometimes this shift begins with action, such as interrupting an automatic behavior and choosing something aligned with your values, even if it feels uncomfortable. At other times it begins with belief, such as telling yourself you're worthy of respect and care. It can also begin with an emotion that helps you feel more stable, like the calm that comes from connection or taking a quiet moment for yourself. Wherever it begins, each part reinforces the others until a new cycle takes shape.



Repeated acts of self-worth, even small ones, begin to shift the emotional tone of your inner world. For example, you may feel lonely, but instead of withdrawing, you reach out to a friend. That action nurtures connection and gradually helps to reshape how you see yourself.

This is what the model calls a positive loop. It doesn't mean you feel good all the time. It means you're building a reinforcing pattern where belief, emotion, and action support one another rather than work against each other. The effect is a growing sense of consistency and trust in yourself.

This is why the model doesn't treat behavior, emotion, or belief in isolation. All three must be observed and engaged if meaningful change is going to take hold. The goal is to recognize these loops and know how to bring yourself back toward self-respect when you need to.

Understanding Primary and Secondary Pain

In the last section you saw how loops of belief, emotion, and behavior can reinforce themselves. One practical way to notice where those loops begin is to separate **primary pain** from **secondary pain**. Understanding the difference helps you face what is real without multiplying your suffering.

What Is Primary Pain?

Primary pain is the original hurt, loss, or emptiness you experience. It comes from real needs that are not being met. Sometimes this pain is rooted in the past, and sometimes it reflects your current reality.

Primary pain can feel like a hollow ache in your chest when you long for connection that isn't there. It can feel like a weight pressing down when financial insecurity or health struggles dominate your days. It can feel like a fog of confusion when your life lacks meaning or direction, or the raw ache of grief when you lose someone or something you can't replace.

This pain is legitimate. It's not caused by weakness, wrong thinking, or personal failure. It's the honest signal of a need that matters. Facing it takes courage, because primary pain can be overwhelming. Acknowledging it is the first step toward responding with self-respect instead of self-judgment.

Examples of primary pain:

- Longing for intimacy but feeling alone
- Struggling with financial stress that causes constant anxiety
- Feeling trapped in a draining job or environment
- Grieving the loss of someone or something irreplaceable
- Having a health problem that causes everyday difficulties

What Is Secondary Pain?

Secondary pain is the extra suffering created by how you interpret or judge your primary pain. It's what happens when shame, harsh stories, or hopelessness are layered on top of an already difficult reality.

Feeling lonely is painful, but telling yourself it means you're unlovable adds a deeper cut. Facing financial insecurity is frightening, but collapsing into the belief that nothing will ever change makes it feel unbearable. Grieving is heavy, but attacking yourself for "not moving on fast enough" multiplies the suffering.

This is the fuel for negative loops: pain triggers harsh stories, which drive unhelpful behavior, which reinforces the belief that nothing can change. Secondary pain doesn't come from the original wound itself. It comes from the judgments, shame, and self-blame that attach themselves to the wound. The good news is that while primary pain may be part of life, this added layer of suffering isn't inevitable.

Examples of secondary pain:

- Telling yourself loneliness means you're unlovable
- Collapsing into hopelessness because your need remains unmet
- Attacking yourself for not changing faster
- Feeling ashamed for needing support or "ending up back here again"
- Believing that life has lost its value because you've been diagnosed with a serious health condition

Why the Distinction Matters

When you don't separate primary pain from secondary pain, your negative loop becomes automatic. The original need or wound remains, but now it's surrounded by layers of judgment, collapse, and reactive behavior. This spiral keeps you stuck and often makes the pain feel worse than it truly is.

Recognizing the difference changes the cycle. Naming your primary pain honestly, without shame or harsh stories, reduces the extra suffering. Facing your pain directly doesn't erase it, but it keeps your inner world more stable and less reactive. That stability gives you the clarity to act in alignment with your values, even when your needs are not yet met.

Primary Pain and Secondary Pain Side by Side

Primary Pain (original need or wound)	Secondary Pain (added suffering)
Feeling lonely	Telling yourself loneliness proves you're unlovable and will never find a partner
Financial insecurity causing daily anxiety	Collapsing into hopelessness that you will never make more money and that others will look down on you for being poor.
Feeling trapped in a draining job or environment	Attacking yourself for not being stronger or for not having found a new job by now
Grieving a loss	Shaming yourself for "not moving on fast enough" or blaming yourself for not saying what you needed to say
Having a serious health condition	Imagining you will never feel joy again, that others will abandon you, or that you're a burden to your loved ones

What Can and Cannot Be Changed

Building self-respect means learning to see what you can change and what you can't. Primary pain isn't always solvable right away. Some needs will go unmet for longer than you'd like. That's an unfortunate but very human experience.

Sometimes progress simply looks like endurance. It's continuing to move forward with dignity, refusing to let pain define your worth or pull you back into old patterns.

Secondary pain, however, can be changed. You can reduce shame, despair, and self-blame by refusing to add suffering on top of what is already difficult. The Four Quadrants model supports you in staying out of self-betrayal and staying connected to what matters, even when life feels uncertain.

With the emotional groundwork in place, the next section gives you a quick look at how coaching can support you in this work. If you're going through this guide on your own, it can help you decide whether some kind of structured support would be useful. Coaching isn't required, but sometimes working through this with another person can make a real difference.