



## Plateau to Progress

Opening Discussion: Review the following phrases below. Do any of these phrases resonate with you? If so, explain a life situation that reminds you of that phrase.

### HITTING A WALL

Emotionally exhausted	Chronic burnout	Progress stagnated
Stuck in a rut	Repeating the cycle with no escape	Frustrated and not moving forward
Going through the motions	Daily unmotivated	Disconnected and disengaged
Uninspired about the future	Stuck in the grind with no growth	Momentum lost
Paralyzed by indecision	Sinking into a state of apathy	In a fog of uncertainty
Overwhelmed by life's expectations	Persistently feeling defeated	Running out of options
Sensing that hope is lost	Hitting a wall	Prolonged mental fatigue

**A plateau in progress brings a choice: stay in your comfort zone or push forward for a breakthrough. Growth happens when you embrace new challenges.**



## Read and Discuss

### Case Example: "The Art of Avoidance"

Jared had been in recovery from opioid and alcohol addiction for 6 months. He had moved through early recovery with surprising ease, attending IOP and focusing on his job as a tattoo artist. Despite some ups and downs, he was proud of his progress and sobriety. But lately, things had shifted.

The edge and excitement of his early recovery had worn off, and Jared found himself drifting. He wasn't using, but he was stuck. Instead of growing or setting new goals, he poured himself into his tattoo work, avoiding personal development. His relationships were shallow, mostly revolving around social media, memes, and the surface-level interactions with clients at the shop.

He found ways to distract himself—hours scrolling online, gambling on sports apps, and playing video games at night. Jared knew something was missing but avoided talking about it in groups or therapy, thinking that since he wasn't using drugs any longer, he didn't need to open up. One night, a buddy he hadn't seen in years offered him "something special" that he got through a connection on the dark web, promising a high that would get his creative juices flowing. Jared was intrigued. Jared felt a spark, a dangerous flicker in the back of his mind. The offer wasn't just a drug to him—it was a doorway, tempting him with the idea that he could tap into that old rush without fully crossing the line. It loomed over him like a flame at the end of a fuse, enticing, whispering, daring him to come closer.



### Questions for Reflection:

1. What factors contributed to Jared's feelings of being "stuck" in his recovery?
2. How might his choice of distractions, like social media and gambling, have played into the concept of hitting a plateau?
3. What strategies could help Jared face this situation without turning to unhealthy habits?
4. How does avoidance (emotional or behavioral) maintain a recovery plateau? What might happen if Jared avoids addressing these feelings?
5. If you were advising Jared, what are some specific steps he could take to re-engage with his recovery?



## Overcoming Plateaus

If you are experiencing any of these types of situations you may be experiencing a plateau in your progress. In the context of recovery, a plateau refers to a period during which our progress toward healing, whether from substance use, mental health issues, or both, slows down, stalls, or just feels like it is standing still. While we may not be regressing, we can feel stuck at a certain stage and find it difficult to make further improvements or reach new milestones. This can lead to frustration, complacency, or a sense of stagnation, as we're no longer experiencing the same momentum or growth we had earlier in our recovery journey. Plateaus are quite common in recovery and should be expected. Moving forward out of a plateau often requires a shift in strategy, perspective, support, and motivation to overcome.

**Overcoming Plateaus** – As a group discuss each of the 7 recommendations for overcoming plateaus. (Even if you are not in a plateau yourself try to participate by providing your thoughts and insights on each point.)

### 1. Self-Reflection:

Try to be honest and open-minded with yourself - What factors may be contributing to your plateau?

Some possibilities (There are many. This list is some of the most common, but there can be more)

- Boredom
- Complacency
- Burnout
- Isolation
- Loss of inspiration
- Facing triggers
- Increased stress or pressure
- Repeated routine without challenge
- Unresolved trauma
- Return of negative or self-defeating thinking
- Stagnant support system
- Other? Discuss: \_\_\_\_\_



### 2. Reevaluate Goals – Make New Ones

Take time to assess your current goals. Are they still relevant or challenging enough? Adjust or create new goals that reflect where you are now and what you want to achieve. Set realistic, specific targets that push you out of your comfort zone.

*Example:* If your goal was to abstain from substances and that is working, consider some other life areas to add new goals like getting a job, going back to school, building family relationships, etc.)

### 3. Support and Suggestions

Reach out to your support system—whether it's friends, family, or a professional. Discuss your plateau and ask for suggestions and feedback. Fresh perspectives and ideas from others can give you the motivation or direction needed to move forward. It can be difficult to accept feedback without being defensive but try.

*Example:* A friend might suggest joining trying a new hobby or social activity to help bring variety and excitement into your recovery or perhaps reading a self-help book for a new perspective.



#### **4. Flex and Adapt – Be Creative with New Ideas**

Being adaptable is key. Think outside the box and try new approaches in your recovery. Experiment with different coping skills, routines, or activities that may rekindle your engagement or challenge you in new ways.

*Example:* If you've always relied on one-on-one therapy, you could try joining a group for a different experience and social interaction.

#### **5. Seek Inspiration and Motivation – Appeal to the Senses and Emotions**

Find sources of inspiration that ignite your passion and emotions. This could be music, art, nature, or stories of others who have overcome similar challenges. Stimulating your senses can help reignite motivation and reinvigorate your recovery journey.

*Example:* Watching a documentary or reading a book about someone who has overcome addiction or mental health issues could inspire new energy in your own change process.

#### **6. Make a New Plan and Stick to It**

Create a structured plan that outlines steps to overcome the plateau. Be disciplined in following this plan, focusing on consistency and persistence to rebuild momentum. Consider things that have worked in the past for you.

*Example:* You could create a new daily schedule that includes new activities, like exercising or journaling, and hold yourself accountable.

#### **7. Ongoing Reevaluation and Readjustment (As Needed Until Plateau is Behind You)**

Continually assess your progress. If you hit another barrier, don't hesitate to tweak your plan or approach. Regularly reevaluating and adjusting your strategy ensures you stay proactive and prevent stagnation until the plateau is fully overcome.

*Example:* If after a few weeks you find yourself losing motivation again, reevaluate and consider adding a new challenge to your plan.

#### **Optional Close Out Activity**

Ask if anyone in the group feels they have reached a plateau and would be open to sharing their experience and receiving feedback. The person can briefly describe their current situation, then the group will have an opportunity to offer concise feedback and suggestions. Afterward, the person can share which ideas they find helpful and plan to try to overcome the plateau.

***Plateaus are not the end, but a chance to gather strength for your next climb. When progress stalls, take a step back, reassess your approach, and make small, intentional changes. Embrace the journey, knowing that steady, mindful action will push you forward once again.***