The Addiction Tree

Facilitator Guide | The Addiction Tree & The Recovery Tree | 60–75 minutes

Purpose: Use two tree metaphors to explore vulnerability, protective factors, coping responses, and possibilities for recovery without assuming that trauma causes every substance-use disorder.

Learning objectives

Participants can describe each part of the two metaphors, identify possible risks and strengths, distinguish past experiences from current choices, and create one realistic next step.

Trauma-informed facilitation

Invite participants to use a fictional character, general examples, or their own experiences. Do not require disclosure of abuse, family history, grief, or spiritual beliefs. Avoid assigning blame to caregivers or participants, diagnosing trauma from a drawing, or interpreting silence as resistance. Allow breaks and private work. If someone becomes distressed, offer grounding and support according to your program procedures.

Session outline

• 0–10 min: Introduce tree metaphor, voluntary participation, and group agreements.

• 10–20 min: Explore The Addiction Tree as one possible pathway, not an inevitable progression.

• 20–35 min: Draw or write The Addiction Tree; participants may use fictional examples.

• 35–50 min: Draw or write The Recovery Tree, including supports and strengths.

• 50–65 min: Compare the two trees; identify one protective action.

• 65–75 min: Optional sharing, grounding, and closing.

Teaching framework: The Addiction Tree

Soil and seeds: Adversity, emotional/physical/sexual/spiritual neglect or abuse, and hereditary vulnerability may influence risk. Social context, stress, exposure, and access to support matter too.

Roots: Shame, fear, anger, grief, loneliness, or other painful experiences may be present; not everyone experiences these feelings.

Trunk: A person’s sense of self, isolation, or unmet needs can affect coping. A person is more than their wounds.

Branches: Substance use or other coping responses may provide temporary relief while creating harm. Do not label ordinary hobbies, exercise, or relationships as addictions without meaningful impairment.

Teaching framework: The Recovery Tree

Soil and seeds: Safe relationships, community, care, practical resources, and access to treatment.

Roots: Safety, self-acceptance, confidence, compassion, gratitude, and coping skills, developed at each person’s pace.

Trunk: A growing sense of agency, emotional regulation, connection, and personal meaning; spirituality is optional.

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Branches and fruit: Healthy relationships, daily routines, meaningful goals, support-seeking, and quality of life.

Two Trees activity

Invite participants to sketch two trees or complete the companion workbook. For each tree, write one or more examples at soil/seeds, roots, trunk, and branches. Ask: “What conditions would help the recovery tree grow?” “Which supports are available now?” “What can you influence, and what is outside your control?”

Discussion prompts

- Which parts of the tree metaphor feel helpful? Which parts do not fit your experience?
- Can a person develop a substance-use disorder without a history of trauma?
- What is the difference between recognizing a painful history and blaming yourself or someone else?
- Which protective factors can be developed even if the past cannot be changed?
- What is one practical step that supports growth this week?

Clinical cautions and closing

This is a reflective metaphor, not a validated assessment, causal theory, or fixed sequence of recovery. Addiction is multifactorial. Encourage individualized care, harm reduction, medication treatment when appropriate, and ongoing support. Close with a grounding option and invite participants to choose one action and one support contact.

Suggested evidence-informed background

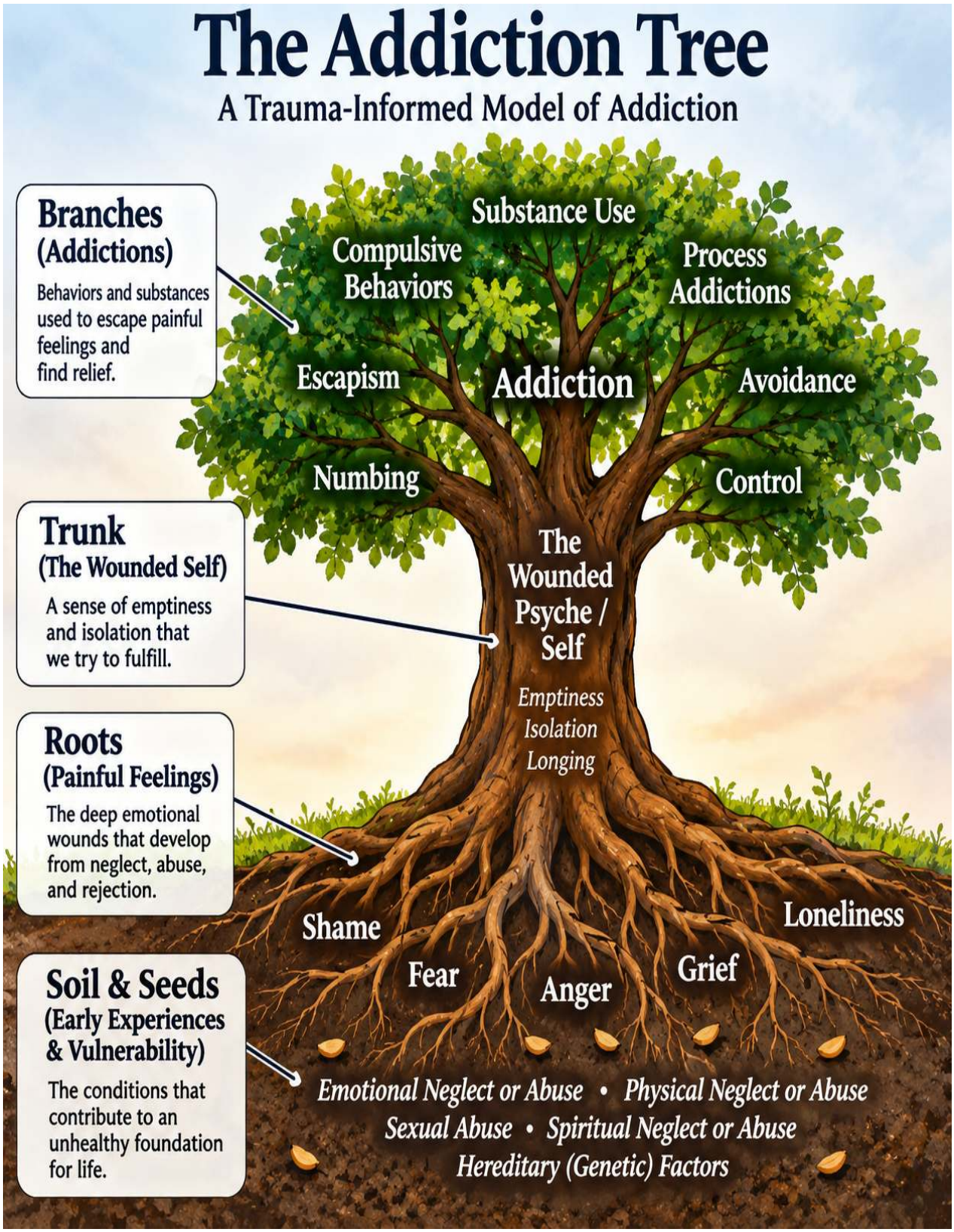
NIDA: Drugs, Brains, and Behavior—The Science of Addiction, risk and protective factors (nida.nih.gov).

SAMHSA: Recovery and Recovery Support (samhsa.gov/substance-use/recovery).

Editorial note: The tree language was adapted from user-supplied source text. The original source attribution was not supplied; verify provenance and rights before publication. This is an educational draft for clinical and accessibility review.

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THE ADDICTION TREE | GROUP VISUAL



A reflection metaphor, not a universal explanation of addiction.

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BUILD YOUR OWN ADDICTION TREE

Add your own words, examples, or connections to each section. You may use fictional examples, initials, or keep details private. You can pass on any prompt.

BRANCHES | Behaviors and coping patterns

TRUNK | Sense of self and needs

ROOTS | Feelings and unmet needs

SOIL & SEEDS | Experiences and vulnerabilities

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FACILITATOR NOTES | ADD TO THE TREE

? Invite participants to add examples to the illustration or their own trees.

? Use the four sections as discussion prompts: soil/seeds, roots, trunk, branches.

? Offer fictional examples and allow participants to pass or write privately.

? Avoid asking participants to recount trauma or treating the metaphor as a diagnosis.

? Ask: What protective factors and supports could help this tree change?

? Option: create a Recovery Tree beside it, showing strengths and growth.

? Emphasize that trauma is not required for addiction and recovery is possible.

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