

9 Tips For Using 12-Step and Recovery Music As A Holistic and Therapeutic Support Tool For Enhancing Addiction Recovery

From SunlightOfTheSpirit.com

Table of Contents

- Why SunlightOfTheSpirit.com Exists 3
- The Purpose Of This White Paper 3
- What Is Recovery Music? 3
- What Is 12-Step Music? 5
- TIP #1: Use Music To Spark A Discussion 6
- TIP #2: Journaling About Recovery 6
- TIP #3: Improve Meditation Sessions 7
- TIP #4: Say A Prayer 7
- TIP #5: Provide Focus To Your Lectures 7
- TIP #6: Use Music As A Mile Marker 8
- TIP #7: Create A Listening Station 8
- TIP #8: Stream Recovery Music From Your Computer 8
- TIP #9: Gain Ongoing Support For Relapse Prevention 9
- Closing Thoughts 9
- Appendix: Music Recommendations 10

Why SunlightOfTheSpirit.com Exists

On January 1, 2006, I founded an Internet music store called Sunlight of the Spirit Music (<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/>) in order to make 12-step and recovery music more accessible to the worldwide recovery community. SunlightOfTheSpirit.com specializes in offering 12-step and recovery music CDs and MP3s as a support tool for ongoing recovery from alcoholism and addictions. It is widely regarded as the best resource for online recovery music. Our high-quality recordings are created exclusively by artists in recovery who share their experience, strength, and hope through their music.

The Purpose of This White Paper

Recovery is a journey of the heart. Music travels a path to the deepest corners of our hearts where words alone cannot go.

As a person in recovery, I understand the importance of having a wide variety of tools in my spiritual kit. Recovery music helps me quickly connect to my higher power, feel gratitude, and it gives me inner peace (even on a bad day!).

My purpose for writing this white paper is to (1) share my expertise on 12-step and recovery music recordings that I've had the pleasure of working with; and (2) offer specific suggestions for how you can use 12-step and recovery music as a holistic and non-traditional resource for enhancing addiction recovery.

All of the ideas offered here are being utilized by various treatment providers across the United States who have purchased music from SunlightOfTheSpirit.com.

What is Recovery Music?

Recovery music helps guide us on our continuing journey of healing and growth. It holds up the mirror of experience, and gently whispers, "I've been there, and I'm not there anymore." Lyrics can address what it was like (before recovery), what happened (the moment of clarity), or what it's like now (being in recovery). As an example, here are lyrics to a song of personal reflection called *By My Own Hand*:

By My Own Hand

Written by Jack Sundrud & Randy Handley

I've got scars of battles, more than I can count
I've seen bad luck running when it won't run out
I've had friends desert me, turn around they're gone
I've had love torn from me while I'm holding on
But what fate has put me through
Can't hold a candle to
The damage that's been done
By my own hand

I denied my spirit, I ignored the truth
Can't believe the hell I put this body through
Looking back on the road I have travelled down
But for the grace of God, I'd be in the ground
There's no use layin' blame
It's time to break these chains
'Cause the damage has been done
By my own hand

I know a man is not forgiven
While he shakes his fist at heaven
And so I pray
For those who called me friend
And strength to rebuild again
The damage that's been done
Oh, the damage that's been done
Oh, the damage has been done
By my own hand

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By My Own Hand can be found on *Trail of Light – Fifteen Songs Reflecting the Journey From Alcoholism & Addiction To A New Life In Recovery*. (See Appendix.) The compilation CD received a 2008 PRISM Award from the Entertainment Industries Council, Inc. (EIC), in collaboration with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and FX Network, reflecting the entertainment industry's commitment to the accurate depiction of addiction and health issues in film, television, music, comic books and interactive entertainment. It comes with its own Discussion Guide covering each of the fifteen songs on the CD.

What is 12-Step Music?

12-step music, a subset of recovery music, can be defined as songs that specifically address one or more of the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. 12-step CDs only contain songs where each track on the CD reflects the artist's experience on a particular step. Sometimes more than one step is addressed in the same song. Listening to songs about the 12-steps helps to reinforce their message.

Here's an excerpt from Jim W.'s CD, *One Man's Walk* (See Appendix). His song, "I Surrender," shares his experience on steps 1, 2, and 3. It carries the message of the guiding principles of those steps as well.

Step One: We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable (principle: honesty); Step Two: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity (principle: faith); and Step Three: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him (principle: trust).

I Surrender

Written by Jim W.

"My Way" was the anthem I lived by
Lyn', cheatin', ego-feedin', anything to stay high
Lately my dead end street turned worse
This road leads to an institution, a jail cell, or a hearse

Put myself through the mill - I surrender
I let go of my will - I surrender
I believe that your way works better - I surrender

I'm told that you give unconditional love
That's the glue my shattered soul could use a truckload of
Blind eyes should never be allowed to drive
So put your hand on the steering wheel,
I'm riding on the passenger side

Put myself through the mill - I surrender
I let go of my will - I surrender
I believe that your way works better - I surrender

No more contempt without investigation
Carry me to your destination

Put myself through the mill - I surrender
I let go of my will - I surrender
I believe that your way works better - I surrender

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Tip #1: Use Music To Spark A Discussion

It takes two hours to watch a movie, and much longer than that to read a book. A song can touch your heart and cut through the mental chatter in three minutes.

**- Kathy Mattea,
Award-Winning Recording Artist**

Listen to a recovery song. When it's over, ask group members what they identified with in the song. Then play the song again, only this time ask for any new awareness that came after the second listening, as well as zeroing in on any specifics that you may wish to discuss about recovery.

When working with the 12-steps, choose a song that relates to the corresponding step and use it to open up a discussion around the step.

Tip #2: Journaling About Recovery

In recovery, learning to be honest with oneself takes practice. Journaling is a way of practicing self-honesty. It can become a valuable coping tool. It prepares us for the "fact-finding and fact-facing process" of step 4 (thoroughness); It gives us a vehicle for practicing the principle attached to step 8 (honesty).

Recovery music offers a safe starting point for journaling by helping those who are new in recovery to focus on the message and the emotions delivered in the song.

I had an English professor who was fond of saying, "When it's in your head it's private; When it's on paper it's public." In many recovery rooms we're told, "We're only as sick as our secrets." Journaling creates a bridge that connects us from being stuck in "stinking thinking" to new awareness and the potential for change - - a valuable piece for one's spiritual kit.

Ask group members to quietly journal their thoughts and feelings after listening to a recovery song. Set a time limit – perhaps fifteen minutes. You may wish to give specific instructions, such as "This is a song called [fill in the title]. After it ends, you'll have the opportunity to sit quietly and write for fifteen minutes, allowing your thoughts and feelings to land on the page. After you start writing, do your best to keep writing without stopping and editing your thoughts. If you discover you're stuck, start writing something like 'I don't know what to write' and keep writing that until you land on another thought that has to do with your recovery. Remember to keep your pen on the page no matter what comes out and remember to be gentle with yourself."

If you would like to start a discussion after the exercise, ask if there are any brave volunteers who would like to read out loud what they wrote. After your group discussion, play the song again and

ask for any new awareness that came after the second listening, either by allowing participants to do additional journaling, or by continuing your group discussion.

Tip #3: Improve Meditation Sessions

Choose a piece of meditation music that's approximately five to ten minutes in length. Practice with the music prior to the session so that you are able to give verbal instructions on the relaxation process and/or guide group members into contemplating one of the 12 steps. Music then becomes the background to the guided imagery offered by the leader. Using instrumental music in the background gives you an opportunity to speak to the specific consciousness of the group you are working with.

Or, you may choose to use a recording that includes guided imagery with the music.

Tip #4: Say A Prayer

Begin or close each day with a morning prayer in song!

There are some wonderful CDs with spoken prayers and instrumental music supporting the message, and there are also CDs where prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer or the Serenity Prayer, are beautifully sung.

Tip #5: Provide Focus To Your Lectures

Set the tone for lectures by opening with a song from a recovery music CD. Music adds an additional dimension to your audience's experience. For continuity, play the same song to close out your session, or play a different piece of recovery music that carries messages of hope.

There's power in music. When I share my recovery journey in song at treatment centers, I have a favorite song that I perform called, "Attitude Adjustment." It's about isolation, self-obsession, procrastination – you get the picture. I encourage audience participation, asking for hands to go up anytime someone relates to what I'm singing about. One time, my son came with me. When the concert was over, he told me that the boy sitting next to him in the back of the room had kept his hands folded in his lap the entire time. During "Attitude Adjustment," whenever the boy related to the lyrics, he didn't raise his hand, but he did raise one finger. The music had given him a new awareness; he was just too tender to let everyone else see.

Tip #6: Use Music as a Mile Marker

Use recovery music during special ceremonies, such as when patients graduate from treatment. When a group of people experience a performance in a room, they become connected by the common experience. It creates community in a way that other art forms do not.

Pick a song that reinforces the feeling of *look how far I've come*. Not only will it celebrate how hard the graduate has worked to better his or her self, it will also inspire others in attendance.

We used the song, "God's Time, Not Mine," in a graduation ceremony for the first graduate of our newly opened treatment center. The song perfectly defined this young woman's journey in recovery. After struggling, she was now able to become patient and allow things to happen in God's time. She was very touched by the song and how she related to it.

**- Marcie D. Gray, LSAC,
Southwest Behavioral Health Center**

(God's Time, Not Mine appears on Sonia Lee's CD, Chance To Start Over – See Appendix)

Tip #7: Create a Listening Station

Create a listening station (with headsets) for exploring recovery music during free time. Offer a wide variety of 12-step and recovery music for self-exploration.

Listening to 12-step and recovery music allows patients to take a breather from lectures, group discussions, and one-on-one sessions, yet they still hear the message of recovery.

Tip #8: Stream Recovery Music From Your Computer

The music player on the home page of SunlightOfTheSpirit.com streams a full-length song from each CD available in its store – It is especially helpful for those who are new to recovery and are in need of redirecting their train of thought before it travels further down the old track. Visit <http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/>

The Sober Café Podcast offers music as well as interviews with artists, actors, authors, and musicians in recovery. Visit <http://www.sobercafe podcast.com/> and look for the subscribe block in the upper right corner of the website. By subscribing, new episodes are delivered directly to iTunes in your computer. The Sober Café Podcast won a 2008 Entertainment Industries Council PRISM Award for making a difference in interactive media.

Tip #9: Gain Ongoing Support For Relapse Prevention

Recovery music is a useful and spiritual support tool that can be used between 12-step meetings or therapy sessions. Typically, the first thing we do when we get in our cars is turn on the radio. By listening to recovery music on the go, we are reminded that we are not alone on our journey.

Support ongoing recovery by adding a "Compliments of . . ." sticker with your contact info and present a recovery music CD to patients as they graduate from treatment or reach milestones in recovery.

I have not been able to listen to my music during my recovery, too much association and it takes my thoughts where I don't want them to go (know what I mean?) - so these recovery CDs are the answer to my prayers. I can now play my air guitar and sing with gratitude, identification and sheer enjoyment, another gift of sobriety.

- Ian

Closing Thoughts

I hope you found these tips helpful. Feel free to share this paper with your colleagues.

As you apply some of the techniques offered here, I would love to receive your feedback. Any experiences you would like to share or new ideas you would like to suggest are most welcome. As I collect ideas, I'll post them at [SunlightOfTheSpirit.com](http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com).

Feel free to email me through the [SunlightOfTheSpirit.com](http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com) website at <http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com> if I may be of service to you and your community.

I can also be reached through my personal website at <http://www.gracievandiver.com>.



-Gracie Vandiver

*Two-time PRISM Award recipient,
Founder of Sunlight of the Spirit Music,
Producer & Host of the Sober Café Podcast*

Appendix: Music Recommendations

Our music library offers useful tools to our clinical staff for helping patients connect emotionally and spiritually. The music is also helpful in exploring the struggles, joys and victories of living in recovery.

**- Patrick Haggerson, M.A., CADC-II
Training Specialist, Betty Ford Center**

Follow the links below to hear song samples or purchase music from Sunlight of the Spirit Music's Internet store.

Subscribe to the monthly newsletter to stay informed of new music added to the store and special discounts offered from time-to-time only to subscribers.



Recovery Music CDs

Trail Of Light, by Gracie Vandiver & Friends

Trail of Light received an Entertainment Industries Council 2008 PRISM Award! The songs on Trail of Light reflect the journey from alcoholism and addiction to a new life in recovery. The compilation CD includes music from a variety of very talented artists and award-winning songwriters.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/84-Gracie-Vandiver-Friends--Trail-Of-Light>

Chance To Start Over, by Sonia Lee

Kerrville New Folk Finalist, Sonia Lee, has been sober for over eleven years. Anyone who has ever needed a chance to start over will find hope and inspiration in her newest CD. It is filled with authenticity and recovery to soothe and comfort your spirit.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/1-Sonia-Lee-Chance-To-Start-Over>

Learning To Live Again, by Just Ray

For over twenty years, Ray W. crafted songs for various Nashville publishers, accumulating sixty-four cuts and three top ten singles. In 2000, Ray returned to his hometown in Georgia to regroup after getting into recovery, realizing he not only had to change playgrounds and playmates, but the type of music he wrote as well. He's always written songs about life as he sees it and now that includes life in recovery.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/3-Just-Ray--Learning-To-Live-Again>

12-Step CDs

Twelve Songs, by Mary Lyn B.

Twelve Songs is a compilation of songs that have been inspired through the 12 steps of recovery. Each song uniquely relates to a corresponding step. Mary Lyn's journey of recovery is reflected in songs that will bring strength and encouragement to anyone at any stage of recovery.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/5-Mary-Lyn-B--Twelve-Songs>

Twelve Steps To Freedom, The Serenity Songs Project

Crafted around the principles of the twelve-steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and its many related organizations, Twelve Steps To Freedom is recorded in a variety of musical styles from pop, to R&B and country.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/13-The-Serenity-Songs-Project--Twelve-Steps-To-Freedom>

The Gift Of Brokenness, by Laura C.

The Gift of Brokenness is a raw and honest musical journal of one woman's recovery from drugs and alcohol. Dark and haunting at first, this body of work quickly explodes both in tempo and spirit, as you actually hear light pour into Laura C's blackest places.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/125-Laura-C--The-Gift-Of-Brokenness>

One Man's Walk, by Jim W.

Jim W.'s journey out of his own personal hell and into a community of recovery has become the substance of "One Man's Walk." Exploring the simple spiritual tools that have helped Jim and countless others to break the chains of addiction, these songs - these stories, shed light on one man's walk - out of despair.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/6-Jim-W--One-Man-s-Walk>

Guided Meditation CDs

SpiritStep One: Beginning Meditation: Relax & Let Go

The SpiritStep objective is to develop an understanding of the 11th step from Alcoholics Anonymous, learn to apply it from the very 1st step, and to teach easy and understandable methods of meditation as a tool for recovery and overcoming any life situation.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/53-SpiritStep--SpiritStep-One-Beginning-Meditation-Relax-And-Let-Go>

Sitting In The Light, by Angela Hryniuk

The six meditations on Sitting in the Light are instructional as well as comforting. Explanation of optimum meditation posture begins the CD then you are guided through various meditations that ultimately will calm the mind, relax the body and balance the self.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/105-Angela-Hryniuk-Sitting-In-The-Light>

Instrumental Meditation CDs

Peaceful Sounds For Meditation, by Desert Spirit

Desert Spirit uses a unique blend of acoustic guitar, Native American flute, and Inca pan flute to express peaceful, relaxing melodies, which flow like a soft desert breeze.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/91-Desert-Spirit--Peaceful-Sounds-For-Meditation>

Meditations Of The Harp, by David Zasloff

Eight serene instrumentals offering seventy-two minutes of consistent meditative harp music with some shakuhachi flute. Great for meditation, massage, or putting little kids to sleep.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/99-David-Zasloff-Meditations-Of-The-Harp>

Faith-Based Recovery CDs

Courage & Wisdom, by David Zasloff

Courage & Wisdom contains five spiritual songs fully arranged with orchestra and choir, including beautiful new music for The Lord's Prayer and The Serenity Prayer.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/98-David-Zasloff-Courage-Wisdom>

Prayers From The Mountain, by Andrew Pace

Prayers From the Mountain offers narrated prayers with beautiful music behind each narration. Experience this adventure of meditation with free flowing prayers and musical soundscapes; within minutes you will feel yourself slip into deep spiritual connection, a vision of faith and clear perception of what is important and why you don't need to sweat the small stuff.

<http://www.sunlightofthespirit.com/product/51-Andrew-Pace-Prayers-From-The-Mountain>