Relapse Prevention

Plan

**What is a Relapse?**

A relapse is defined as the return to drugs or alcohol use after a period of abstinence.

A number of different factors may cause someone to relapse, including;

* **EXPERIENCING STRESS**
* **LACKING A RELAPSE PREVENTION PLAN**
* **BELIEVING THAT YOU CAN USE ALCOHOL OR DRUGS AGAIN AFTER A PERIOD OF ABSTINENCE.**
* **BEING AROUND PEOPLE WHO ARE STILL ABUSING ALCOHOL OR DURGS**
* **HAVING STRONG CRAVINGS TO USE**
* **HAVING UNHEALTHY COPING SKILLS**
* **RELAPSING IN THE PAST**
* **BEING AROUND TRIGGERS, SUCH AS PLACES WHERE YOU USED OR PARAPHERNALIA**
* **EXPERIENCING RELATIONSHIP, FAMILY OR FINANCIAL PROBLEMS.**

Most people relapse because they don’t understand what relapse is and how to prevent it. With a relapse prevention plan you can identify early warning signs that lead to relapse and learn to manage these warning sings while abstinent from alcohol or drugs.

Relapse is a process that begins long before people start drinking or drugging. Most people return to alcohol and drug use because they experience a sequence of problems which causes them to become so dysfunctional in sobriety that a return to chemical use seems like a reasonable choice. The pathway into dysfunction includes changes in attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. These changes are often referred to as “stinking thinking” or “building up to drink, use”.

You can interrupt the relapse process before you start using alcohol and drugs if you learn to recognize the warning signs that indicate that you are moving away from recovery and toward relapse. This work booklet is intended to help you identify your own personal relapse warning signs, learn to recognize them when they occur, and make a plan to interrupt them when you become aware of them.

**Immediate Relapse Prevention Plan**

**Exercise 1**

Before you begin developing a comprehensive relapse prevention plan, it is import to take some immediate steps to identify the problems or situations which can cause you to relapse within the immediate future and develop plans for coping with them. These exercises will ask you to identify three situations that can put you at risk of relapsing. They will then ask you to identify the thoughts, feelings, and actions that you used in that situation that set you up for relapse.

A high-risk situation is any experience that puts you at risk of using alcohol or drugs. Examples of high-risk situations may be: (1) having dinner in a restaurant that services drinks (2) hanging out with friends you used to do drugs with. Any situation that creates a strong temptation to use alcohol or drugs to cope with it is a high-risk situation.

**Exercise 1-B**

Instructions: List three situations that you may be involved in that could cause you to feel like starting addictive use.

1. Immediate High-Risk Situation #1:

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2. Immediate High-Risk Situation #2:

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3. Immediate High-Risk Situations #3.

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**Immediate Relapse Prevention Plan #1**

**Exercise 1-B**

Instructions: Write down your Immediate High-Risk Situation #1 from the previous exercise.

1. Immediate High-Risk Situation #1:

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2. Irrational Thoughts: What thoughts are you likely to think in this situation which could cause you to relapse?

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3. Unmanageable Feelings: What feelings are you likely to have in this situation which could cause you to relapse?

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4. Self-defeating Action Urges: What are you likely to have an urge to do in this situation which could cause you to relapse?

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5. More Effective Ways of Thinking: What is another way to think about this situation that can help you not to relapse?

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6. More Effective Ways of Managing Your Feelings: What is another way to manage your feelings in this situation that can help you stay sober and avoid relapse?

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7. More Effective Ways of Acting: What is another way of acting in this situation that can help you stay sober and avoid relapse?

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**Immediate Relapse Prevention Plan #2**

**Exercise 1-C**

Instructions: Write down your Immediate High-Risk Situation #2 from the previous exercise.

1. Immediate High-Risk Situation #2:

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2. Irrational Thoughts: What thoughts are you likely to think in this situation which could cause you to relapse?

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3. Unmanageable Feelings: What feelings are you likely to have in this situation which could cause you to relapse?

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4. Self-defeating Action Urges: What are you likely to have an urge to do in this situation which could cause you to relapse?

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5. More Effective Ways of Thinking: What is another way to think about this situation that can help you not to relapse?

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6. More Effective Ways of Managing Your Feelings: What is another way to manage your feelings in this situation that can help you stay sober and avoid relapse?

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7. More Effective Ways of Acting: What is another way of acting in this situation that can help you stay sober and avoid relapse?

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**Immediate Relapse Prevention Plan #3**

**Exercise 1-D**

Instructions: Write down your Immediate High-Risk Situation #3 from the previous exercise.

1. Immediate High-Risk Situation #3:

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2. Irrational Thoughts: What thoughts are you likely to think in this situation which could cause you to relapse?

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3. Unmanageable Feelings: What feelings are you likely to have in this situation which could cause you to relapse?

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4. Self-defeating Action Urges: What are you likely to have an urge to do in this situation which could cause you to relapse?

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5. More Effective Ways of Thinking: What is another way to think about this situation that can help you not to relapse?

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6. More Effective Ways of Managing Your Feelings: What is another way to manage your feelings in this situation that can help you stay sober and avoid relapse?

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7. More Effective Ways of Acting: What is another way of acting in this situation that can help you stay sober and avoid relapse?

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**Challenging Relapse Justifications**

**Exercise 2**

Before people return to addictive use they convince themselves that it is reasonable, safe, or justifiable that they do so. Cognitive therapists call it irrational thinking. The irrational thoughts that you use to convince yourself that it is okay to use alcohol or drugs are called relapse justifications.

Relapse justifications are things we say to ourselves that convince us that it is okay to use alcohol or drugs. A typical relapse justification begins with a justification and ends with a decision to use. Here are some typical relapse justifications:

1. I can never relax and enjoy myself without drugs or alcohol, so I might as well get high or drunk.

2. I am having worse problems with my boyfriend/girlfriend since I stopped using alcohol or drugs, so I might as well start drinking and drugging again.

3. I can only fit in if I go with the crowd and drink and use drugs too.

Identify three common relapse justifications and then ask yourself how you can challenge that relapse justification and convince yourself not to use alcohol or drugs and remain abstinent.

**Challenging Relapse Justification # 1**

**Exercise 2-A**

Relapse Justification #1: I can convince myself that I am justified in using alcohol and drugs by saying to myself…

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Challenge #1: I can challenge this relapse justification and convince myself to stay sober/clean by saying to myself…

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**Exercise 2-B**

Relapse Justification #2: I can convince myself that I am justified in using alcohol and drugs by saying to myself…

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Challenge #2: I can challenge this relapse justification and convince myself to stay sober/clean by saying to myself…

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**Exercise 2-C**

Relapse Justification #3: I can convince myself that I am justified in using alcohol and drugs by saying to myself…

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Challenge #3: I can challenge this relapse justification and convince myself to stay sober/clean by saying to myself…

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**The Causes of Relapse**

**Exercise 3**

There are always causes for relapse. You may not be aware of them, but they are there. Sometimes the causes are internal, something happens inside of you that causes you to start addictive use. At other times the causes are external. You get involved with people or situations that are so stressful or frustrating that it seems like you need to use alcohol or drugs in order to cope. These are called **“Triggers”.**

WHAT ARE RELAPSE TRIGGERS?

Triggers for relapse are situations that remind individuals of their drug use. Triggers are psychological, emotional, social and situational cues that can induce cravings. Strong cravings that crop up in response to triggers can be difficult to curb without the right support and resources. Relapse triggers are conditioned. Like Pavlov’s dogs, which learned to salivate when they heard a bell ringing, people with addiction learn to crave drugs as a response to certain situations. Your brain links those cues to using drugs. It’s not easy to unlearn that paired association. For example, if you used drugs every time you were with a specific group of people, you might feel triggers whenever you’re in the same social situation. If you always cracked open a beer after you came home from work, took off your shoes and sat down in front of the TV, that routine may give you the urge to drink. Cravings are powerful and can lead to relapse. Learning to identify cravings and triggers is a crucial step in recovery. You also need to learn new ways to cope with the relapse triggers as well as your cravings so that you can overcome them and avoid relapse.

External triggers are factors outside of yourself that make you want to use drugs. These triggers may involve people who influence cravings, such as drug dealers, coworkers, friends, spouses, partners and employers. Even people who are incredibly close to you may act as relapse triggers. That’s one reason that it’s so important for your loved ones to be on board with your recovery. Places can be external triggers too. Going to concerts, restaurants, bars or certain friends’ houses might bring back memories of using. You might not be able to disassociate the place with the drug use. If you return to those places, you might feel an uncontrollable urge to follow the same patterns as you used to in those locations. Some situations are external triggers for relapse. Situational triggers are different for everyone. The situations may involve stress, such as meeting new people. However, situational external triggers may include intimacy, family gatherings, parties and major life changes. Cravings may also be sparked by situational triggers such as:

**Examples of External Triggers**

**A place where you used to use drugs or drink alcohol**

**A person who you associate with prior substance abuse**

**A song that reminds you of the period of time you used**

**Stressful situations that you used to alleviate with drug use**

Finally, objects serve as external triggers. The most insignificant item can spark intense cravings. For example, powdered sugar can elicit an urge for drugs in someone who used cocaine. A belt may remind a heroin user of their addiction.

**INTERNAL TRIGGERS**

Internal triggers for relapse are those that come from within. These triggers are thoughts or emotions that make you want to use drugs.

Negative feelings are strong internal triggers for relapse. **Fear, guilt, shame, anger and depression** are common internal triggers. If you feel criticized or belittled, you might want to turn to substances to numb those feelings or push them aside.

Positive feelings can also serve as internal triggers. For example, when you’re celebrating with friends and feeling confident, you might feel as though you can have just one drink because you deserve it. Some other positive emotions that are associated with relapse include happiness, strength and sexual arousal.

In many cases, when you feel “normal” again, you might be overly confident that you can handle being in situations that serve as external triggers. That confidence is one of the most difficult internal triggers to manage. You have to make sure that you prepare yourself with the proper tools and coping methods to avoid being surprised by cravings.

You probably experience nervousness, frustration, pressure, fatigue, embarrassment or boredom from time to time in your everyday life. While some people process these feelings easily and let them roll off their back, individuals in recovery can have a hard time managing these emotions.

Stress is a crucial element that can lead to a relapse. Because many people begin using drugs to manage pressure, they might not know how to handle stress triggers if they haven’t developed other coping mechanisms.

**Exercise 3-A**

Identify 5 of your External Triggers:

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Identify 5 of your Internal Triggers:

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Identifying triggers is essential to managing your recovery. However, that’s not all it takes. Many people who want to avoid relapse need to avoid the triggers once they recognize them.

That’s often easier said than done. While you may be able to avoid going to a bar or attending a party where you might have used drugs in the past, you can’t realistically stay away from some triggers, such as your friends, family, work, forever.

Furthermore, internal triggers can follow you around. Because they’re created by your psyche, they’re part of you. You might feel helpless to avoid them.

Therefore, it’s essential to develop coping methods that allow you to work through your triggers without resorting to drugs. You might need to find alternative places to hang out or take time away from the family for self-care on a regular basis. This takes experimentation. Moreover, it requires time.

Relapse doesn’t always happen overnight. It often starts with strong emotions that make you neglect your physical and psychological well-being. Then, you might begin to justify why and how you can use again in a more controlled way.

**Coping Skills**

**Exercise 4**

Coping skills can help you healthily confront and overcome the very things that led to your substance abuse – negative emotions, stressful situations, peer-pressuring relationships, past traumatic experiences, mental illness, or other struggles. Coping skills for substance abuse differ for everyone. Everyone’s addiction story is unique, and everyone has different histories of drug and alcohol use. That said, different coping skills will work for different people. It’s all about finding the addiction coping skills that work best for you and your recovery journey.

Cravings are brutal. They grow and grow, gnawing at your willpower, demanding that you relapse. In the middle of a craving, it might feel as if there’s no escape but to use. But then, if you resist, the craving starts to fade. Eventually, it disappears. Most cravings end within one hour of starting.

**Exercise 4-A**

**Diversions**

The goal of diversions is to buy yourself time during a craving. If you can distract yourself for just *one hour*, you will have a much better chance of avoiding relapse.

Examples of diversions:

go for a walk read a book play a sport listen to music watch a movie

practice a hobby go for a run clean or organize do yard work draw or paint

do a craft cook or bake play a game go for a bicycle ride write or journal

play an instrument call a friend lift weights go swimming go hiking nature

take photographs play with a pet rearrange a room

Give 3 examples of when you have experienced a craving in the past and a diversion you could have utilize to cope with the craving instead of alcohol/drug use.

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**Exercise 4-B**

**Social Support**

Few things are as powerful as having a supportive person in your corner. Just knowing that friends, family, or even a fellow group member or sponsor are pulling for you can make all the difference.

**Daily Social Support**

There’s more to social support than having someone to call during moments of crisis. People who have strong relationships are more resilient when facing life’s obstacles, and more likely to beat addiction. Make a point to strengthen your relationships, attend support groups, and build new friendships.

**Crisis Social Support**

When in crisis, it’s helpful to have a person you can count on for support-someone who you can call, who will help to talk you through the situation. Make a list of people who you can contact during these situations, and how you can reach them.

List the individuals you can call if you feel an urge to start addictive use who will support you in staying abstinent.

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**Exercise 4-C**

**Building New Habits**

Most addictions require a lot of time. Thinking about it, acquiring, and indulging an addiction can fill most of a day. When you quit, one of your greatest new resources is time. However, if your newfound time isn’t filled with healthy activities, it will pose a risk for falling back into old habits.

**Building new habits** is different than diversion because of the focus on long-term or permanent life changes. This isn’t about riding out cravings-this is about building a better life for yourself.

**Foster New Relationships**

* Join a casual sports league, campus clubs/organizations
* Attend a local meetup for one of your interests or hobbies
* Get involved in your community by volunteering or supporting a cause you care about.

**Develop New Skill**

* Build new skills on your own using free online resources, or practice your existing skills
* Don’t practice until you get it right, Practice until you can’t get it wrong.

**Refocus on Existing Relationships**

* Build a routine around socializing with friends and family, for example, schedule a time to talk to your family/friends every day or week.
* Be proactive-don’t wait for others to reach out to you.
* Say “yes” to every social invitation that will not put you at risk of relapse.

Describe in detail 3 new habits you can build

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**Exercise 5**

**Managing Emotion/Relaxation**

Now that you have some helpful strategies for coping with cravings, you will need skills on board for dealing with some of the other unpleasant feelings that are common in early abstinence, such as anxiety, sadness, irritability, and anger. Most addictions serve as an escape from uncomfortable emotions such as stress, anxiety, and anger. When the crutch of addiction is taken away, you may need to re-learn how to manage your emotions. If you don’t learn how to relax, tension will build and build, until it leads to relapse. The following techniques, when practiced regularly, will help you manage your emotions in a health way.

**Exercise 5-A**

**Deep Breathing**

Deep breathing is a simple technique that’s excellent for managing emotions. Sit comfortably and place on hand on your abdomen. Breath in deeply enough that your hand begins to rise and fall. Imagine you are trying to completely fill your lings with air. Time the inhalation (4s), pause (4s) and exhalation (6s) during every breath. Practice for 3 to 5 minutes at a time.

Now describe your experience when utilizing this method.

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**Exercise 5-B**

**Journaling**

Writing about personal experiences gives your brain the opportunity to process information and organize it into manageable chunks. Some of the many benefits of journaling include improved mental wellbeing, and the reduction of uncomfortable emotions. As you journal, be sure to describe your feelings alongside the facts of your experience.

Feel free to journal however you like. However, if you feel stuck, try these prompts:

* **Daily Log:** Jot a few notes about each day. Whatever comes to mind if fine.
* **Letter:** Write a letter to someone with whom you would like to tell something. Remember to describe your feelings. Do not send the letter!
* **Gratitude:** Describe three good things from your day, no matter how minor they seem.

Below list 10 things you are grateful for.

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**Exercise 5-C**

**Imagery**

Your brain has the power to turn thoughts into real emotions, and physical responses., Think about it: Your mouth waters at the thought of your favorite food, and a happy memory can make you laugh. With the imagery technique, you will use this power to your advantage.

Take a moment to think of a relaxing location or situation. This could be a memory, or something entirely make up. Maybe you’re on a warm beach, alone at the top of a mountain, or at dinner with a loved one. Next, imagine this scene through each of your senses. Don’t just think about each detail for a second and move on-really imagine them.

Follow the above outline and conjuer up an image of a place where you like to be.

What do you see? What sounds do you hear? What do you feel? What smells are around you?

Describe your experience below.

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**Exercise 6**

**Prevention**

Substance abuse can threaten the safety of workers by contributing to accidents and injuries.

Many studies, reports and surveys suggest that substance abuse has a very negative effect on the workplace. Drugs and alcohol cause lower productivity. They also increase:

•accidents

•absenteeism

•turnover and

•medical costs

Substance abusers are:

•three to four times more apt to be involved in workplace accidents, and

•five times more likely to file a workers’ compensation claim.

Users can cost employers from $7,000-$25,000 per year.

(Drug and Alcohol Prevention Department of Labor)

Don’t wait until you’re in a bad situation to figure out how to escape it. Instead, avoid those situations altogether.

**Exercise 6-A**

**Avoid Triggers**

Create a list of people, places and things that will likely lead to relapse.

**People you associate with that will likely lead to relapse.**

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**Exercise 6-B**

**Places where you are most likely to relapse**

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**Exercise 6-C**

**Things you do that will most likely lead to relapse**

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**Exercise 7**

**Healthy Lifestyle**

A healthy lifestyle will make you more resilient when faced with obstacles. Many unhealthy habits, such as insufficient sleep and exercise, have been closely linked to many forms of mental illness and relapses. Focus on creating a routine that accounts for the following aspects of a healthy lifestyle

* Sleep
* Exercise
* Medical Compliance (e.g. taking medications as prescribed and attending appointment)
* Healthy Diet.

**Exercise 7-A**

Describe how you will maintain a healthy lifestyle.

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**Exercise 8**

**Final Relapse Prevention**

Now that you have learned a great deal regarding Relapse Prevention such as triggers, situations to avoid, coping skills, high risk situation, develop and come up with a plan to avoid returning to alcohol and drugs and live a healthy lifestyle. Use the information from all of the exercises.

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