



Relapse Prevention Plan

Coping Skills: List activities or skills you enjoy that can get your mind off of using.

1	
2	
3	

Social Support: Who are three people you can talk to if you are thinking about using?

1	
2	
3	

Consequences: How will your life change if you relapse? How about if you stay sober?

Outcomes of Relapse	Outcomes of Sobriety

Tips to avoid relapse:

- Cravings will eventually pass. Do your best to distract yourself and ride it out.
- Don't become complacent. Relapse can happen years after you've quit using. It probably won't ever be safe to "just have one".
- Avoid situation that you know will put you at risk of relapse, such as spending time with friends who use drugs or going places that remind you of past use.
- The decision to relapse is made when you put yourself in risky situations, long before you actually use.
- Don't view relapse as a failure. Falling back into old patterns because of a slip will only make the situation worse.

Tips for When You Feel Triggered:

If you're a recovering addict, it is inevitable that you will at least occasionally feel triggered toward relapse. You'll find yourself feeling lonely or bored or anxious or stressed out, and then you'll start thinking about the emotional escape your addiction once provided. Or you'll be at the gym working out, minding your own business, and someone with a great body and not enough clothing will wander into your sightline and sexual thoughts will immediately pop into your head. Or whatever. My point is that you will be triggered, and this will happen more often than you might like. It will also tend to happen without any warning.

That's the bad news. The good news is that with a bit of preparation, you can equip yourself to handle even powerful and unexpected triggers without relapsing. The following tips can help you with this.

- **Have a Plan:** In elementary school, we had fire drills on a regular basis. The fire alarm would go off. The students in the class would line up single-file behind the teacher. The teacher would quickly count heads to make sure we were all in line. And then we would calmly walk down the hall, out the door, and into the parking lot. Then the fire department would do a walk-through of the school to make sure that everyone had indeed exited the building as planned.
Having a plan for an emergency worked and worked well when we were children, and it works just as well when we are adults. So, if we know what our most common triggers are, we can develop a plan to cope with them. When the "addiction alarm" goes off – i.e., when we feel triggered – there is a plan in place for how we're going to behave (and not behave).
- **Practice the Plan:** How many times did you participate in a fire drill when you were a child? I'm guessing that when I was in elementary school, we did at least three or four fire drills each year. This practice served multiple purposes. First and foremost, it made sure we all knew exactly what to do when the fire alarm went off. Second, it helped us stay calm in case of a real emergency. If the building caught fire, our teacher could simply say, "OK everyone, line up single-file and follow me outside, same as always." And that's exactly what we'd do – without panicking because we'd practiced it so many times.
Once again, what worked for us as children will work for us as adults? Whatever plan it is that we have in place for both specific and general triggers toward relapse, we learn what that plan is and how to calmly and rationally implement that plan when the chips are down by practicing that plan.

As recovering addicts, it is imperative that we are prepared for the triggers that inevitably arise. The simple truth is that willpower alone is not enough to keep us sober when our addict-brain rises to the surface. To prevent relapse, we need a plan for dealing with triggers, and we need to practice that plan on a regular basis, particularly when we are not at risk so the steps in our plan have a chance to sink in and take root in the rational, thinking parts of the brain. Then, like schoolchildren, we know what to do and we can do it, calmly and automatically, when a real emergency arises.

To illustrate, I'll use an example from my own recovery, looking at how I stay prepared for one of my biggest and most common triggers: **boredom**. My hope is that you will apply the format I use for my "addiction fire drill" to your own trigger/relapse scenarios.

Three Ways to Deal with the Trigger:

- Call sponsor or mentor, sober friends in recovery just to chat.
- Engage in any “outer circle” behavior (any of the healthy behaviors listed in my sobriety plan).
- Ask a sober person to go do something with you (coffee, lunch, movie, walk, etc.)

How to Practice These Emergency Action Steps

- When not bored, use the phone. Call people simply to see how they are feeling.
- Keep a copy of my “fire drill card” with me at all times, either a printed copy in my wallet or a digital copy on my phone.
- Socialize talk with sobriety family at least three times per week.

If, as a recovering addict, you are serious about lasting sobriety, you should create a list of your most common triggers, plus a general “I feel triggered” category, create a plan for dealing with each trigger, and then you should practice that plan.

In all likelihood, you will find that the steps you need to take to stay sober (your plan for dealing with emergencies) will boil down to five or six “go to” actions – calling a friend in recovery, going to a meeting, journaling, engaging in an activity with a friend or family member, prayer and meditation, etc. If so, that is great. Having fewer action steps makes it easier to practice your action steps.

I suggest that as you do this exercise, you consciously think about practicing your action steps. For example, these days I find myself socializing with friends (especially friends in recovery) on a regular basis – not because I’m struggling to stay sober, but because I enjoy it. But I still remind myself that hanging out with my buddies is a sobriety tool, and I’m practicing it because occasionally I need it.