

Preventing Relapse
Using the “Social and Environmental Triggers For Relapse” Worksheet
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Associations between particular feelings, people, places, and events becomes intertwined with the alcoholic or addicts drinking and drugging behavior. When alcoholics and addicts find their way to recovery, the old associations between the drinking and drugging and the old feeling, people, places, and events persist, often triggering cravings to drink or use. When these cues trigger drinking or using memories and perhaps euphoric recall, unless you take action to prevent cravings and possible relapse, you remain extremely vulnerable to losing your recovery. These cues are ever present, but relapse can be averted.

It is important to avoid the external triggers that are your most dangerous and that are within your power to avoid. Many of these would be the obvious ones such as hanging out with old drinking/using friends, or going to bars or liquor stores. Triggers that can't be avoided can be neutralized. To be ready and able to neutralize triggers that arise, you need to be able to anticipate and identify them, then have a plan of action on how you will deal with them without drinking/using. Below are areas that serve as triggers that can set up cravings to return to drinking or using. Use this work sheet to help identify your probable risks.

Social and Environmental Triggers for Relapse Worksheet
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People

Who are the people you used to drink or use drugs with? Make a list. Make a list of other people that could serve as a trigger for relapse. It could be extended family members, spouse, girlfriend, your children, boss, coworkers, neighbors and any others.

Places

Where did you used to drink or use drugs?
What are the places that could trigger cravings or euphoric recall? Make a list of the places that might remind you of drinking/using or serve as trigger. Examples might include: bars, clubs, golf courses, football games and tailgating, school, work, certain streets, certain parts of town, concerts, pool halls, certain country roads, lakes, backyards.

Events

What kinds of events did you routinely participate in while drinking or using drugs? What are some of the routine events that you might participate in now that could trigger cravings? Make a list of possible trigger-provoking events. Examples might include

going to the lake and fishing, mowing the lawn, fund raising events, going gambling, attending music festivals, and others.

Celebrations

What are some of the celebrations or special events that you might participate in that could serve as a trigger for relapse? Make a list. Examples might include: weddings, graduation, birthdays, vacation, holidays (with or without extended family members).

Other stressful events or activities

Identify other stressful events or activities that could serve as a trigger. Examples might include such things as deaths of family members, divorce, separation, money problems, getting paid, getting a raise, calls from creditors, paying bills, group meetings, long work hours, unemployment, having a baby, retiring, home alone, vacation, going by an ATM machine, home alone, finding paraphernalia, a long "to do" list.

Relationship events

What kinds of relationship events were associated with your drinking or drug use? Identify relationship events that could serve as a trigger. Examples might include meeting new people, going out on a date, hanging out with friends, after an argument, before sex, after sex, viewing pornography, family visits, having a baby, separation, divorce, marriage.

Time

When did you usually drink or use?

Identify specific times of day, week, month or year that may serve as a trigger for relapse. Examples might be Monday (Monday night football), Sunday (gearing up to go back to work), anniversary date or month of traumatic events, after work, before work, trying to get to sleep, waking in the night, and any other times that are significant.

Making a plan.

Looking back over your lists above, identify actions that you can take to reduce the threat to your recovery. Which events can you avoid?

Which events or situations can you escape from if you feel vulnerable? How can you empower yourself to escape?

Ex: Practice being assertive with leaving a risky situation. Use cognitive therapy to challenge unrealistic thinking that might keep you from leaving when you need to.

Make a plan on how you could escape. Example: Drive yourself, walk out, call a cab, have an AA call list and have someone come get you.

What can you do to change how you think or feel when you find yourself in an inescapable position that is triggering a desire to use?

Ex: Use thought stopping techniques to manage cravings when they occur. Use the phone. Call your sponsor. Call your counselor or someone in AA/NA. Engage someone who is supportive of your recovery in a conversation. Remind yourself that cravings are temporary and that they will go away if you do not use. Remember that cravings are a normal part of recovery and that they do not doom you to failure. Remind yourself that you have the choice whether you act on your cravings. Think of a craving as a contest between you and your disease. Who will win?

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