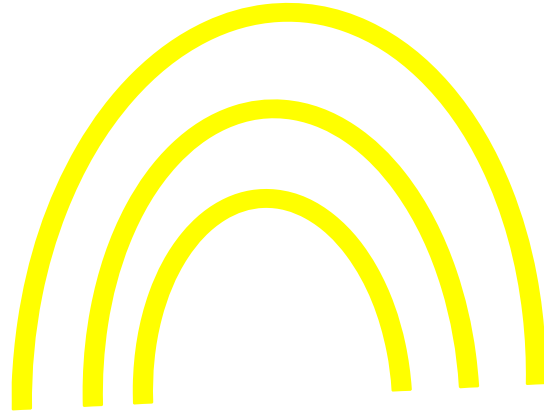




Relapse Prevention Plan

NAME

DATE

Understanding Your Readiness To Change

There are so many tools and skills that you will learn in treatment that will help you understand how to stay sober, but if you don't really want it for yourself, these tools will not be effective. Consider the following questions to understand how ready you are to make changes in your life to support recovery.

- What worries me about continuing to use?
- What benefits do I see in staying sober?
- On a scale of 1–10, how important is sobriety to me right now? Why?
- What steps have I already taken toward recovery?
- If I continue using, where do I see myself in 6 months? If I stay sober?

Understanding Relapse Using Gorski's Framework

Relapse is a **process**, not a single event. It typically progresses through:

- **Emotional relapse:** Poor self-care, bottling feelings, isolating.
- **Mental relapse:** Cravings, bargaining, glamorizing past use.
- **Physical relapse:** Actual substance use.

Understanding what your triggers will help you to reflect on changes that need to be made in your life to either avoid or minimize triggering feelings (for example, you can minimize the trigger of stress by regularly engaging in self-care), or situations (avoiding people who still use or drink).

If you struggle to know what your triggers are, consider the following:

Have I relapsed before and what were the circumstances surrounding the relapse?

When, where, and with whom do I usually use/drink?

What times of day do I use/drink and how am I usually feeling at that time?

Common Feelings That Lead to Relapse

- ☐ Anger
- ☐ Boredom
- ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ Depression / sadness
- ☐ Shame / guilt
- ☐ Hopelessness
- ☐ Overconfidence (“I got this”)
- ☐ Fatigue / exhaustion
- ☐ Nostalgia for using
- ☐ Anxiety /stress
- ☐ Other: _____

List your 10 Primary Relapse Triggers

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Finding New Ways To Cope

Relapse prevention *planning* is a process of planning because you must learn to find new ways of responding to your triggers, whether those are feelings, people, circumstances, etc. This might feel overwhelming at first, but the brain is good at forming new habits, and slowly your new habits and recovery simply start to feel like a new way of life, one that is filled with hope, joy, connection, and unlimited possibilities. Keep in mind as you go through your relapse prevention planning that **putting in the work now** will help you to eventually achieve a new lifestyle that supports your recovery and *works for you*.

Coping Strategies Toolbox

Healthy coping tools include: breathing exercises, mindfulness, journaling, exercise, distraction, grounding, talking to supports, self-care, structured scheduling, positive affirmations, removing triggers, and volunteering.

Cravings

Cravings follow triggers. Triggers are simply the people, places, and things that we (consciously or unconsciously) associate with our substance use.

Avoiding triggers early on is the best possible way to reduce relapse risk, but some triggers cannot be avoided. In those cases, it's important to remember that cravings will pass. However, there are things you can do to help make intense cravings pass more quickly.

Play the tape through. When you think about using, the fantasy is that this time you'll be able to control your use. You'll just have one drink, and everything will be fine. But play the tape through. One drink leads to more drinks. The next day, you wake up feeling disappointed in yourself. You might have a hangover. You start drinking more each time, and pretty soon you're in the cycle all over again. And then what? You have to go back to treatment, and all the consequences you were worried about last time come looming again...And what if this time you don't come back? When you play the tape all the way through to its logical conclusion, taking that first drink doesn't seem so appealing anymore.

A common urge is that you could get away with using again because no one will know . Perhaps your spouse goes away for the weekend, or you're away on a trip. That's when your addiction will try to convince you that you don't really have a problem, and you're only in recovery to please other people. Play the tape through.

Remind yourself of the negative consequences you've already suffered, and the negative consequences that are just around the corner if you relapse. If you could control your use, you'd have done it by now.

Tell someone you have urges to use. Call a friend, a support, or someone else in recovery. Share with them what you're going through. The magic of sharing is that the minute you start to talk about what you're thinking and feeling, the urges start to dissipate. They don't seem quite as big and you don't feel so alone.

Distract yourself. When you think about using, do something else to occupy yourself. Do something fun like a hobby. Call a friend. Go to a meeting. Take a walk. If you just sit there with your urges and don't do anything, you're giving your mental relapse room to grow.

Wait for 30 minutes. Most urges last for less than 15-30 minutes. When you're in the middle of a craving, 30 minutes can feel like an eternity. But if you can keep yourself busy and do the things you're supposed to do, the craving will quickly be gone.

Do your recovery one day at a time. Don't think about whether you can stay abstinent forever—that's a paralyzing thought. It can be overwhelming, even for people who've been in recovery a long time. Instead, focus on more manageable amounts of time that you know you can stay sober for.

Taking things in manageable chunks means you should match your goals to your emotional strength. When you're feeling strong and motivated not to use, tell yourself you won't use for the next week or the next month. When you're struggling and having lots of urges to use, tell yourself you won't use today, or for the next half hour, or for the next 5 minutes, or for the next 60 seconds. Do your recovery in bite-size pieces and don't sabotage yourself by thinking too far ahead.

What behavior I will replace drinking/using with (for example, call a supportive friend, attend a meeting, go for a walk). You will likely need to experiment with different activities and add in new ones until you figure out what works best for you.

High-risk time #1

How I normally feel at this time: _____

What I will do? _____

High-risk time #2

How I normally feel at this time: _____

What I will do? _____

High-risk time #3

How I normally feel at this time: _____

What I will do? _____

High-risk time #4

How I normally feel at this time: _____

What I will do? _____

High-risk time #5

How I normally feel at this time: _____

What I will do? _____

Strengths In Recovery

What are the strengths that you have that will help you to stay sober?

Examples: resilience, honesty, courage, insight, spirituality, social support.

My Strengths

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

If you are having difficulty thinking of your strengths, write a narrative of difficult situations in life that you overcame. How did you do it?

The Importance of a Sober Support System

Recovery thrives when you have sober people to lean on.

A strong support system helps you:

- Stay accountable
- Share struggles without shame
- Celebrate milestones
- Learn from peers

Ideas for building a stronger sober support system:

- Join recovery-based online groups
- Volunteer in sober or service-oriented spaces
- Ask a trusted person to be your accountability partner
- Work with a sponsor, mentor, or counselor
- Build friendships with people who live healthy, sober lifestyles

How do you feel about your social support system?

What activities will you commit to on a weekly basis that will help you stay connected and feel supported? (list at least two)

1.

2.

3.

Who can I reach out to today?

1.

2.

3.

Stress Management

Stress is a leading relapse trigger.

Create a personal stress management plan

Healthy Stress Management Strategies

- Daily physical movement (walks, stretching, exercise)
- Deep breathing, yoga, meditation
- Setting boundaries to reduce overload
- Scheduling regular breaks and downtime
- Talking with supportive people instead of bottling stress
- Breaking big tasks into smaller steps

My Personal Stress Management Plan

Early signs of stress I notice _____

My top 3 stress management tools:

1.

2.

3.

Improving Impulse Control

Impulsivity can drive relapse when urges hit. Learning to pause before acting helps.

Impulse Control Strategies

- HALT check (am I Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired?)
- Use a 5-minute delay rule before making decisions
- Practice mindfulness (“urge surfing”)
- Write down urges instead of acting on them
- Remove yourself from triggering situations
- Call a support person immediately
- Reward yourself for choosing healthy behavior

My Impulse Control Plan

When I feel an urge I will

Post-Acute Withdrawal Syndrome (PAWS)

What it is: After detox, the brain and body may still be healing. Symptoms can last weeks or months and often **come and go in waves.**

Common PAWS Symptoms

- Mood swings
- Anxiety, irritability
- Fatigue or low energy
- Insomnia
- Difficulty concentrating or memory issues
- Cravings
- Feeling “flat” or unmotivated

How To Manage PAWS

- Educate yourself — remind yourself these symptoms are normal and temporary
- Stick to a routine: meals, sleep, exercise
- Practice stress management and self-care daily
- Use grounding/mindfulness when symptoms flare up
- Avoid major life changes during early recovery
- Stay connected to recovery supports (don't isolate)

Dopamine Depletion in Early Recovery

What it is: Substances overstimulate the brain's dopamine system. After stopping, dopamine levels can be low, leading to:

- Feeling unmotivated
- Difficulty enjoying life (“anhedonia”)
- Flat mood or boredom

Ways to Rebuild Dopamine Naturally:

- Exercise (especially cardio, strength training, yoga)
- Sunlight exposure
- Balanced nutrition (protein, omega-3s, vitamins)
- Creative outlets (art, music, writing)
- Learning new skills (language, hobby, education)
- Positive social interactions
- Practicing gratitude and celebrating small wins
- Adequate sleep

My Dopamine-Boosting Activities

1.

2.

3.

My plan for celebrating wins

What activities bring me a sense of joy/fulfillment?

Support & Recovery Resources

Online: SAMHSA, SMART Recovery, AA, NA, Celebrate Recovery, Recovery Dharma, Wellbriety, In The Rooms.

Washington State

- **Lacey:** Northwest Resources II, Thurston County AA/NA
- **Mead:** Spokane County Behavioral Health, District 3 AA
- **Sumner:** Pierce County Intergroup AA, Comprehensive Life Resources
- **Spokane:** Spokane Recovery Café, Alano Club, Frontier Behavioral Health, Spokane Intergroup, Recovery Dharma (also offered virtually).

My Relapse Prevention Summary

- Top relapse triggers: _____

- Early warning signs I'll watch for: _____

- Coping skills I'll use: _____

- Support people I'll call: _____

My Relapse Prevention Summary

- Stress Management Plan-Design a weekly calendar featuring self-care activities aimed at reducing stress. Be sure to include specific days and times for each activity.
- Impulse control strategy:
- PAWS management plan:
- Dopamine-boosting plan:

What activities bring me a sense of joy/fulfillment?

Commitment Statement

“I commit to using my relapse prevention plan daily, leaning on my strengths, and reaching out for help when I need it.”

Signature: _____

Date: _____