



Events – A Worksheet for Preventing Setbacks

What challenging event is on the horizon?

- ☐ Holiday/Birthday/Anniversary
- ☐ Family/Friend/Social Gatherings (Wedding, Funeral, Reunion, Work Event, etc.)
- ☐ Anniversaries of Losses
- ☐ Parties
- ☐ Other?

Coping with Triggering Events: Setback and Relapse Prevention Planning

Introduction: Events like family gatherings, parties, work celebrations, or any special occasion can bring unique challenges for anyone working on a substance use issue or co-occurring mental health concern. Preparation is key and it is helpful to develop a personalized plan that empowers you to manage triggers, stay grounded, and maintain your progress during any event.

Identifying Potential Factors That May Influence Setbacks (Triggers): There may be social pressure, emotional stress, environmental triggers and many other factors that may increase the likelihood of a setback or full relapse. Discuss the list below:

- ☐ **Substance Availability:** The presence of alcohol, drugs, or other substances at the event.
- ☐ **People Who Enable or Trigger Use:** Friends or family members who may encourage you to use substances or have not yet adjusted to your recovery journey. Arguments or difficult conversations with family members or other attendees, which can lead to emotional distress.
- ☐ **Emotional Stress or Trauma:** Family conflict, loneliness, negative memories associated with people at the event, feeling left out, emotional abuse, shaming, or ridicule. Being where you feel disconnected, alone, or like an outsider, especially when others are drinking or using substances.
- ☐ **Return to Familiar “Risk” Environments:** Locations where past use occurred (e.g., a particular bar, house, or venue).
- ☐ **Overcrowding or High-Stimulation Environments:** Large parties, noisy events, or places with too many people, which can cause sensory overload, anxiety, or discomfort.
- ☐ **Perceived Social Expectations:** Feelings of needing to “fit in” or participate in activities you associate with old habits.
- ☐ **Lack of Routine or Structure:** A disruption to your usual routine, such as skipping meals, poor sleep, or missing exercise. This can affect mental health and increase vulnerability.
- ☐ **Financial Stress or Pressure:** Expenses associated with the event, like buying a gift, paying for travel, or contributing to a shared event fund.
- ☐ **Unrealistic Expectations:** Putting pressure on yourself to have a “perfect” time, leading to feelings of disappointment or guilt if the event doesn’t go as planned.
 - **Social Media or Comparison Triggers:** Seeing others post about events, parties, or lifestyles that may feel out of reach or induce feelings of jealousy or sadness.



Building Your Coping Strategies Once you've identified potential triggers, think about how you will cope with them. Below are some examples of coping strategies, but feel free to write down your own:

Self-Awareness/Mindful-Relaxation and Self Calming/Self Compassion Skills:

- ☐ Deep breathing exercises to calm your nervous system
- ☐ Grounding techniques to help you stay present (e.g., 5-4-3-2-1 technique, focusing on physical sensations like touching a textured surface)
- ☐ Positive thinking/self-talk to reframe negative thoughts
 - Remind yourself that it's okay to feel uncomfortable and that you don't have to be perfect
 - Use affirmations to reframe negative self-talk (e.g., "I am strong, and I am in control")
 - Practice self-kindness and forgive yourself if you make a mistake
 - Positive visualization (Imagine soon you will be back home, and it will all be over)
 - Prayer (If applicable)

Support System:

- ☐ Reaching out to a sponsor or recovery support network for advice or encouragement
- ☐ Texting or calling a recovery buddy for quick check-ins
- ☐ Arranging a "check-in time" with someone during or after the event to debrief
- ☐ Having a "safe word" with a trusted person in case you need immediate support

Assertive Responses:

- ☐ Practicing how to say "no" firmly if offered substances (e.g., "I'm in recovery, and I choose not to drink" or "I don't use that anymore, but thank you")
- ☐ Politely remove yourself from conversations that feel uncomfortable or triggering
- ☐ Setting clear boundaries on what you're willing to talk about or engage in during the event

Healthy Distractions:

- ☐ Taking a walk or stepping outside to get fresh air
- ☐ Engaging in a hobby or something that brings you joy (e.g., sketching, reading, journaling)
- ☐ Having a non-alcoholic drink to hold in social settings to avoid pressure
- ☐ Finding a quiet corner or retreat space where you can regain focus and calm

Preparation and Planning:

- ☐ Creating an exit plan for the event (e.g., how to leave if things get too overwhelming)
- ☐ Pre-selecting a "buddy" at the event who can help if things get tough
- ☐ Preparing yourself for certain scenarios (e.g., what to say if someone offers you a drink or a substance)

Healthy Communication:

- ☐ Setting clear expectations with family or friends ahead of time (e.g., explaining your recovery and asking for support)
- ☐ Asking for space when needed or making sure you have a moment to yourself during the event
- ☐ Practicing active listening and empathy during conversations to avoid feeling overwhelmed

Other? – What else comes to mind as an effective skill for you?

Group: Discuss your plans, offer encouragement, and ensure everyone feels supported before and after event