



Event Planning: Preparing for Upcoming Events to Prevent Setbacks

Background: This activity is designed for active preparation for an upcoming event that may be challenging to deal with as related to substance use and co-occurring mental health issues. Often events can bring with them various triggers and other obstacles that can make it challenging to maintain a course of progress. It makes sense to plan ahead when a challenging event is on the horizon so as to prevent setbacks.

There are many examples of the types of events that can qualify for use of this exercise – Review:

- **Holidays** – Or celebrations
- **Anniversaries** - (Either positive or negative such as anniversary of a loss)
- **“Firsts”** – First date, first day at new job, first day at school, first time going somewhere sober, etc.
- **Social events** – Meeting new people, meeting people from the past, large gatherings, being around people we don't know, etc. Knowing we are going to have to be around certain types of people and places can also be a challenge, including:
 - People who are intimidating, rude, mean, ignorant or aggressive
 - People who we feel like we may have “unfinished business” from the past
 - People we have not seen in a while, and we do not know how they are going to react today
 - People whom we have a negative or traumatic past or history with
 - Places associated with substance use
 - Places associated with emotional stress, trauma, or bad memories
 - General life situations where we know there will be pressure to use
- **Performances** - Public speaking for example or anything where we may be “in the spotlight”
- **Challenging or anxiety inducing appointments** – Court date, important doctor appointment, etc.
- **Other** - Any event that is known to be coming up soon that is has factors that could derail a pattern of progress can qualify for this activity. Some issues of concern may be events that trigger the following:
 - Past trauma
 - Difficult emotions
 - Anxiety
 - Insecurity/Self-esteem struggle
 - Anger or fear inducing





Activity – Choose an event using the list on the previous page that needs **Event Planning to Prevent Setbacks** - Then fill out the blank grid on the last page and then discuss what you came up

There are three columns to fill out in the grid:

Potential Setback Factor – Anything that can set you off, lead to difficult emotions or urges, or put you in the general wrong direction that you may encounter at this upcoming event. These can be seemingly positive situations as well such as celebratory feelings or excitement.

Impulsive & Emotional Reaction- What negative reactions might you need to watch out for? These are the reactions that happen when we don't think or plan ahead. What might you do when you are not prepared?

Planned & Practical Reaction – Think now about what an effective way is to handle this setback factor if you should you come across it. What is a positive plan that you can follow to avoid trouble? Think of coping skills and supports that you know work for you

Sample Grid:

Event: “Going back to visit my family for the first time since I stopped using drugs recently”

Potential Setback Factor	Impulsive & Emotional Reaction	Planned & Practical Plan
<i>My father putting me down or insulting me might get me upset and hurt</i>	<i>Curse him out and start big family fight then storm out and go get high</i>	<i>Calmly tell him “Don’t speak to me that way” and then change the subject. If he keeps at it leave the room calmly for a while. Call or text a friend for support if needed</i>
<i>Mom’s nagging might irritate me and make me have urges to get high</i>	<i>Go get high so I can just tune out the nagging</i>	<i>Take deep breaths like I learned in treatment and think calming thoughts, so I don’t stress. Try to remember she is only nagging me because she cares</i>
<i>Old friends may hear I am back in town and reach out to invite me to go places that I know I should stay away from</i>	<i>Just give in and go and see the old crew and worry about the consequences later</i>	<i>Prepare some refusal statements ahead of time like “I can’t go out with you, I promised to spend time with my parents” Also don’t answer unknown phone calls and texts</i>

As a group decide if everyone is going to do the same event (like a holiday if one is coming up) Or else everyone can come up with their own event based on their own lives. Fill out the chart on the following page while trying to come up with the best plan that you can. Discuss your Event Planning grids as a group.

Shorter version – The group can fill out one grid collectively as a group instead of everyone doing their own



Name/Type of Event (For example “My first time speaking at a meeting”, “Anniversary of losing my beloved family member”) etc. **[Look at the list on page 1 for ideas]** - _____

Potential Setback Factor	Impulsive & Emotional Reaction	Planned & Practical Plan