

TRIGGER IDENTIFICATION WORKSHEET

Recognize the Trigger. Understand the Pattern. Choose Your Response.

A trigger is a person, place, situation, thought, memory, emotion, or physical sensation that can create an urge to return to an old behavior.

You may not always be able to control what triggers you.

But you can learn to recognize your patterns and prepare a healthier response.

PART 1 — WHAT ARE MY TRIGGERS?

Check any that commonly affect you.

PEOPLE

- ☐ Certain friends
- ☐ Former using partners
- ☐ Family members
- ☐ Romantic relationships
- ☐ Coworkers
- ☐ Someone from my past
- ☐ People who create conflict
- ☐ Feeling rejected by someone
- ☐ Other: _____

PLACES

- ☐ Bars or clubs
- ☐ Certain neighborhoods
- ☐ Parties
- ☐ Concerts/events
- ☐ Someone's house
- ☐ Work
- ☐ Being home alone
- ☐ Places associated with past substance use
- ☐ Other: _____

EMOTIONS

- ☐ Anger
- ☐ Anxiety

- ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ Sadness
- ☐ Boredom
- ☐ Rejection
- ☐ Shame
- ☐ Guilt
- ☐ Frustration
- ☐ Fear
- ☐ Stress
- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed
- ☐ Feeling unappreciated
- ☐ Other: _____

SITUATIONS

- ☐ Arguments
- ☐ Relationship problems
- ☐ Financial stress
- ☐ Work stress
- ☐ Family conflict
- ☐ Social situations
- ☐ Celebrations
- ☐ Having extra money
- ☐ Being alone
- ☐ Lack of structure
- ☐ Seeing other people use substances
- ☐ Major life changes
- ☐ Other: _____

PHYSICAL STATES

- ☐ Hungry
- ☐ Angry
- ☐ Lonely
- ☐ Tired
- ☐ Poor sleep
- ☐ Physical pain
- ☐ Exhaustion
- ☐ Restlessness

- ☐ Feeling overstimulated
- ☐ Feeling physically uncomfortable
- ☐ Other: _____

THOUGHTS & MEMORIES

- ☐ Remembering past experiences
 - ☐ Romanticizing past substance use
 - ☐ "I can handle it this time."
 - ☐ "One time won't matter."
 - ☐ "I deserve this."
 - ☐ "Nobody cares."
 - ☐ "I've already messed up, so why bother?"
 - ☐ "I'll start again tomorrow."
 - ☐ Other: _____
-

PART 2 — MY TOP FIVE TRIGGERS

TRIGGER #1

My trigger:

What usually happens before it?

How strong is the trigger?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

TRIGGER #2

My trigger:

What usually happens before it?

Intensity: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

TRIGGER #3

My trigger:

What usually happens before it?

Intensity: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

TRIGGER #4

My trigger:

What usually happens before it?

Intensity: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

TRIGGER #5

My trigger:

What usually happens before it?

Intensity: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

PART 3 — BREAK DOWN THE TRIGGER

Think about a recent situation when you felt strongly triggered.

1. WHAT HAPPENED?

Describe only the facts.

2. WHAT DID I THINK IT MEANT?

What immediately went through your mind?

3. WHAT DID I FEEL?

- ☐ Angry
- ☐ Anxious
- ☐ Afraid
- ☐ Lonely
- ☐ Rejected
- ☐ Sad
- ☐ Ashamed
- ☐ Guilty
- ☐ Frustrated
- ☐ Overwhelmed
- ☐ Other: _____

Emotion intensity:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. WHAT HAPPENED IN MY BODY?

- ☐ Heart racing
- ☐ Tight chest
- ☐ Shallow breathing
- ☐ Sweating
- ☐ Shaking
- ☐ Muscle tension
- ☐ Restlessness
- ☐ Stomach discomfort
- ☐ Feeling numb
- ☐ Other: _____

5. WHAT DID I FEEL LIKE DOING?

6. WHAT DID I ACTUALLY DO?

7. WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

PART 4 — THE CBT CONNECTION

WHAT HAPPENED?

TRIGGER

↓

WHAT DID I TELL MYSELF?

THOUGHT

↓

WHAT DID I FEEL?

EMOTION

↓

WHAT DID I WANT TO DO?

URGE

↓

WHAT DID I DO?

BEHAVIOR

↓

WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARD?

CONSEQUENCE

Now ask yourself:

Where could I interrupt this pattern next time?

PART 5 — CHALLENGE THE THOUGHT

What was the automatic thought?

Ask yourself:

Is this thought completely true?

What evidence supports it?

What evidence challenges it?

Am I predicting the future, assuming what someone else thinks, catastrophizing, or thinking in all-or-nothing terms?

What would I tell someone I care about if they were having this thought?

A MORE BALANCED THOUGHT:

PART 6 — CREATE A TRIGGER RESPONSE PLAN

Complete this sentence:

WHEN...

I notice this trigger:

AND I NOTICE...

These warning signs:

INSTEAD OF...

My usual reaction:

I WILL...

PART 7 — MY COPING TOOLBOX

Choose at least five actions you can use before responding to a trigger.

- ☐ Leave the situation
- ☐ Call someone supportive
- ☐ Attend a recovery meeting
- ☐ Take a walk
- ☐ Exercise
- ☐ Practice slow breathing
- ☐ Journal
- ☐ Pray or meditate
- ☐ Listen to music
- ☐ Take a shower
- ☐ Eat something nutritious
- ☐ Rest
- ☐ Use grounding techniques
- ☐ Challenge the thought
- ☐ Delay the decision for 15 minutes
- ☐ Spend time somewhere safe

- ☐ Contact my counselor/therapist
- ☐ Contact my sponsor/peer support
- ☐ Other: _____

MY THREE GO-TO RESPONSES

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
-

PART 8 — KNOW YOUR EARLY WARNING SIGNS

My behavior starts changing when I:

- ☐ Isolate
- ☐ Stop answering calls
- ☐ Become irritable
- ☐ Stop exercising
- ☐ Stop attending meetings
- ☐ Sleep poorly
- ☐ Stop eating normally
- ☐ Begin romanticizing past substance use
- ☐ Start contacting unhealthy people
- ☐ Stop following my routine
- ☐ Become secretive
- ☐ Feel like nobody understands me
- ☐ Stop asking for help
- ☐ Other: _____

THE THREE WARNING SIGNS I NEED TO TAKE MOST SERIOUSLY:

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
-

PART 9 — MY SUPPORT PLAN

People I can call:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Professional/recovery support:

A safe place I can go:

Something that helps me regulate:

My reason for protecting my recovery:

MY PERSONAL TRIGGER PLAN

My biggest trigger is:

My earliest warning sign is:

The thought I need to watch for is:

Instead of automatically reacting, I will:

The first person I will contact is:

One reason I want to keep moving forward:

REMEMBER

A trigger is not a command.

You can experience an emotion without immediately acting on it.

You can have a thought without believing it.

You can experience an urge without following it.

And you can interrupt an old pattern by making one different decision.

Notice it. Name it. Pause. Choose your next action.

CENSOZO I MINDSTRONG

Supporting the person. Supporting the journey.

Important

This worksheet is intended for educational and personal-development purposes. It is not a substitute for medical care, psychotherapy, detoxification, or professional substance-use treatment.

If you believe you may be experiencing a medical emergency, seek emergency medical care. In the United States, call or text 988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) provides treatment information and referrals.