

# My Relapse Prevention Plan

Write it now, while things are steady, so that it is ready for the days that are more difficult than others.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Started \_\_\_\_\_ Review on \_\_\_\_\_

## How to use this plan

Relapse is rarely a single moment. It usually starts as a change in how you feel, then in how you think, and only later in what you do. This plan is here to help you catch that change early, while it is still only a feeling.

- ☐ **Fill it out on a good day**, not during a craving. Your judgment is better when nothing is going wrong.
- ☐ **Be specific, even when it is uncomfortable**. Instead of "stress," write "Sunday night before a Monday shift."
- ☐ **Complete it with someone**. A therapist, counselor, sponsor, or peer will see patterns you have stopped noticing.
- ☐ **Share it**. Your counselor, your sponsor, and the person you live with should each have a copy.
- ☐ **Revisit it every 90 days**, and after any move, job change, loss, or discharge from a program.

## What is inside

- |                                    |                            |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 What I am protecting             | 5 My support network       |
| 2 My warning signs, stage by stage | 6 Weekly check-in          |
| 3 My trigger map                   | 7 If I use again           |
| 4 What I do when a craving hits    | Cards to cut out and carry |

This worksheet is an educational self-management tool. It is not a clinical assessment, a diagnosis, or a substitute for treatment from a licensed professional. If you are in danger right now, call **911**. For free, confidential support 24 hours a day, call or text **988**, or reach the SAMHSA National Helpline at **1-800-662-4357**.



## ① What I am protecting

Cravings are persuasive, and they tend to erase your reasons at exactly the moment you need them. Write the reasons down now, so that you can read them instead of trying to recall them.

### Three things my recovery makes possible

Name actual people and actual things. For example, "being at my daughter's games" works better than "family."

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### What it has already cost me

Write the honest version. This is the page to return to when your memory of using begins to soften.

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### What a steady week looks like for me

You cannot notice a drift without knowing what steady feels like. Describe yours in plain terms.

When I am doing well

What that actually looks like in my week

Sleep

Eating

People I talk to

Meetings or sessions

How I spend a free evening

Something I do for my body

### My non-negotiables

This is the short list you hold to even in a difficult week, and it should hold two or three items rather than ten.

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## 2 My warning signs, stage by stage

Tick anything you have felt or done before, then add your own in the blank lines.  
The specific, personal ones are the ones that will actually warn you.

### Stage one: emotional relapse

You are not thinking about using. You are quietly stopping the things that keep you well.

- |                                                                           |                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Skipping meetings, sessions, or medication       | <input type="checkbox"/> Saying "I'm fine" when I am not               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letting calls and texts go unanswered            | <input type="checkbox"/> Bottling up anger, grief, or resentment       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sleeping too little or sleeping to avoid the day | <input type="checkbox"/> Neglecting meals, hygiene, or my living space |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Snapping at people who have done nothing wrong   | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling bored, flat, and restless             |
- 
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### Stage two: mental relapse

Part of you starts negotiating. This is the last stage where stopping is still easy.

- |                                                                       |                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Remembering only the good parts of using     | <input type="checkbox"/> Finding reasons to pass an old place                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telling myself I could handle it "just once" | <input type="checkbox"/> Bargaining over a different substance, a limit, or a date |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Editing what I tell my counselor or sponsor  | <input type="checkbox"/> Resenting the people holding me accountable               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Looking up old contacts "for no reason"      | <input type="checkbox"/> Keeping cash or an old contact "just in case"             |
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### Stage three: physical relapse

It starts before the first drink or pill, with small decisions made in a row that look unrelated. Name yours, because they are your last chance to stop.

- |                                                                |                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arranging to be alone and unreachable | <input type="checkbox"/> Going somewhere I promised I would not go      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Making the call or answering one      | <input type="checkbox"/> Deciding it does not count if nobody finds out |
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**The person who will tell me the truth.** Pick one person who has permission to say "I am seeing stage one in you," and agree now that you will not argue when they do.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_



### 3 My trigger map

Some triggers you avoid. Some you cannot avoid, so you plan for them. Sort yours honestly, then mark each one **A** (avoid entirely), **P** (only with a plan), or **S** (safe for me now).

#### People

Examples: people I used with, people who supplied, and people I cannot be honest with.

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#### Places

Examples: routes, rooms, bars, neighborhoods, and a specific parking lot.

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#### Situations and dates

Examples: paydays, holidays, anniversaries, conflict, travel, and celebrations.

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#### What I feel first

Examples: lonely, humiliated, bored, exhausted, agitated, and unfairly treated.

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#### The situations I cannot avoid, and what I will do instead

Examples: a wedding, a family holiday, or a job site. Write the plan before the invitation arrives, covering who comes with you, what you drink, what you say, and when you leave. Continue on the back of this page if you need more room.

Unavoidable situation

My plan going in

My exit plan, and who knows it

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#### What I am changing this week to lower my risk

Examples: deleting numbers, changing my commute, asking someone to hold my bank card, or telling one person the truth.

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## 4 What I do when a craving hits

A craving is not a decision. Cravings rise, peak, and fall rather than climbing forever, which is why waiting works even when it does not feel like it will. How long that takes varies, so the timer below is a commitment rather than a prediction.

### My if-then plans

Decisions made in advance survive cravings; decisions made during them usually do not.

| When this happens... | ...I will do this, straight away |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| If I notice          | then I will                      |
| If I notice          | then I will                      |
| If I notice          | then I will                      |
| If I notice          | then I will                      |
| If I notice          | then I will                      |

### The twenty-minute protocol

- 1 **Change your surroundings.**  
Stand up and go somewhere else, outside if you can. Cravings attach to places, so changing rooms often takes some of the edge off before you have to fight it.
- 2 **Say it out loud to one person.**  
Call rather than text. Saying it out loud to another person takes a lot of the pressure out of it.
- 3 **Set a timer and do not negotiate until it rings.**  
Twenty minutes is arbitrary. What matters is that you are only deciding about the next twenty minutes, not about the rest of your life. Reset it if you need to.
- 4 **Occupy your hands and your breath.**  
Try cold water on your face, a walk, the dishes, a shower, or breathing out for longer than you breathe in. Choose something physical and undemanding.
- 5 **Think it through to the end.**  
Think past the first ten minutes to the next morning, the phone calls, and what you would have to tell the person you named on page 3.
- 6 **When it passes, write down what set it off.**  
Add it to your trigger map. Each craving you get through tells you something about your own pattern.

### Three things that reliably settle me

These should be things you have used before and can still do late at night.

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## 5 My support network

Support only works when it is specific. Alongside each name and number, write down what that person is actually good for, so that you are not deciding who to call while you are struggling.

| Name | Phone | Their role | What I call them for |
|------|-------|------------|----------------------|
|      |       |            |                      |
|      |       |            |                      |
|      |       |            |                      |
|      |       |            |                      |
|      |       |            |                      |

### The person I can call in the middle of the night

Agree this with them in advance.

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### Meetings or groups I attend

Note the day, time, and place, and add them to your calendar.

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### Available at any time, at no cost

| Resource                      | How to reach it     | When to use it                            |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Emergency services            | 911                 | Any immediate danger to life              |
| 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline | Call or text 988    | Any crisis, including thoughts of suicide |
| SAMHSA National Helpline      | 1-800-662-4357      | Treatment referrals, 24 hours a day, free |
| Crisis Text Line              | Text HOME to 741741 | When you cannot speak out loud            |
| Voyager Recovery Center       | (949) 991-6279      | Admissions and support, answered 24 hours |

### Boundaries I need people to respect

Boundaries are part of protecting your recovery. Examples include drinking in your house, asking about your history in front of other people, or offering you "just one." Say it clearly, and say it in advance.

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## 6 Weekly check-in

Emotional drift is almost invisible from the inside, and much easier to see across four weeks on one page. Same day each week, five minutes. Tick what held, and rate the week 1 to 10.

| This week                            | Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Slept enough to think clearly        |        |        |        |        |
| Ate regularly                        |        |        |        |        |
| Went to my meeting or session        |        |        |        |        |
| Told someone the truth about my week |        |        |        |        |
| Was physically active                |        |        |        |        |
| Took my medication as prescribed     |        |        |        |        |
| Spent time with someone in recovery  |        |        |        |        |
| Strongest craving this week (1-10)   |        |        |        |        |
| How steady I felt overall (1-10)     |        |        |        |        |
| Warning signs I noticed from page 3  |        |        |        |        |

### One question to answer honestly each week

*What am I not telling anyone at the moment?* Write the answer here, then tell one person.

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### If two or more weeks look worse than the one before

Two weeks in a row is a pattern worth acting on. Call the person on page 3, get back to a meeting, and book a session with your counselor this week.

I will call \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_

### What went well this month

It is easy to measure recovery only by what has gone wrong. Record the other half as well, because it is the part you will need to remember later.

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## 7 If I use again

A return to use calls for a prompt, practical response, and it is not a verdict on you. Complete this section while you are steady, so that you are not making these decisions under pressure.

### Your tolerance is lower than it was. Read this before anything else.

After any period without using, your body no longer handles what it once did. This is when overdoses happen. **Do not use alone.** Call **911** immediately for anyone who is hard to wake, breathing slowly or not at all, or whose lips or fingertips look grey or blue.

Keep naloxone within reach if opioids are anywhere in your history, or could be, since fentanyl turns up in counterfeit pills and in supplies sold as something else. California's 911 Good Samaritan law gives limited protection from arrest for personal-use possession or being under the influence when you seek help in good faith and do not obstruct responders. It does not cover every offense; the risk of not calling is far greater.

### My first four steps

#### 1 Stop, and get yourself somewhere safe.

Do not drive. Leave the situation, and get to a place and a person that are safe.

#### 2 Tell one person within the hour.

The longer you keep it to yourself, the harder it gets to stop. Name that person now:

I will call \_\_\_\_\_

#### 3 Get medical advice if there is any doubt.

This applies especially to alcohol, benzodiazepines, or opioids. Call your clinician, or 911.

#### 4 Book the next appointment before the day ends.

Call a counselor, a program, a meeting, or admissions, and get something on the calendar within the next 48 hours.

I will book \_\_\_\_\_

### What I learned afterwards

Fill this in once you are steady again, and with someone else if you can.

#### Question

#### What actually happened

What was going on in the days before

The first small decision that led here

The warning signs I skipped past

What I will change in this plan

### What I want the people around me to do

Write it in your own words now, because panic and shame make bad instructions.

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## Two cards to cut out

Cut along the dashed border and fold down the middle. Fill in both: the first is yours, the second goes to whoever is most likely to notice that something is wrong.

Card one, for your wallet

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| <p><b>Before I do anything else</b></p> <p>Wait twenty minutes before you decide anything. Change rooms, and call one number on this card.</p> <p>My person _____</p> <p>My sponsor or peer _____</p> <p>My counselor _____</p> | <p><b>Numbers that answer at any hour</b></p> <table> <tr> <td><b>Emergency</b></td> <td><b>911</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td>988 Suicide &amp; Crisis Lifeline</td> <td>call or text 988</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Crisis Text Line</td> <td>text HOME to 741741</td> </tr> <tr> <td>SAMHSA National Helpline</td> <td>1-800-662-4357</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Voyager Recovery Center</td> <td>(949) 991-6279</td> </tr> </table> <p><b>Tolerance drops during time away from a substance. Do not use alone. Call 911 for anyone hard to wake or breathing slowly.</b></p> | <b>Emergency</b> | <b>911</b> | 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline | call or text 988 | Crisis Text Line | text HOME to 741741 | SAMHSA National Helpline | 1-800-662-4357 | Voyager Recovery Center | (949) 991-6279 |
| <b>Emergency</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>911</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                  |            |                               |                  |                  |                     |                          |                |                         |                |
| 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline                                                                                                                                                                                                   | call or text 988                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                  |            |                               |                  |                  |                     |                          |                |                         |                |
| Crisis Text Line                                                                                                                                                                                                                | text HOME to 741741                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                  |            |                               |                  |                  |                     |                          |                |                         |                |
| SAMHSA National Helpline                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 1-800-662-4357                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                  |            |                               |                  |                  |                     |                          |                |                         |                |
| Voyager Recovery Center                                                                                                                                                                                                         | (949) 991-6279                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                  |            |                               |                  |                  |                     |                          |                |                         |                |

Card two, for the person who supports me

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                  |            |                               |                  |                  |                     |                          |                |                         |                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| <p><b>If you are worried about me</b></p> <p>Say what you have noticed, plainly, and ask me directly. You will not put the idea in my head. You do not need to have the answers. Staying with me is what helps.</p> <p>Their name _____</p> <p>My counselor or program _____</p> <p>Someone else who should know _____</p> | <p><b>Numbers you can call</b></p> <table> <tr> <td><b>Emergency</b></td> <td><b>911</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td>988 Suicide &amp; Crisis Lifeline</td> <td>call or text 988</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Crisis Text Line</td> <td>text HOME to 741741</td> </tr> <tr> <td>SAMHSA National Helpline</td> <td>1-800-662-4357</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Voyager Recovery Center</td> <td>(949) 991-6279</td> </tr> </table> <p><b>Keep naloxone available and know how to use it. Call 911 for anyone hard to wake, breathing slowly, or with grey or blue lips.</b></p> | <b>Emergency</b> | <b>911</b> | 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline | call or text 988 | Crisis Text Line | text HOME to 741741 | SAMHSA National Helpline | 1-800-662-4357 | Voyager Recovery Center | (949) 991-6279 |
| <b>Emergency</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>911</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                  |            |                               |                  |                  |                     |                          |                |                         |                |
| 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | call or text 988                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                  |            |                               |                  |                  |                     |                          |                |                         |                |
| Crisis Text Line                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | text HOME to 741741                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                  |            |                               |                  |                  |                     |                          |                |                         |                |
| SAMHSA National Helpline                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 1-800-662-4357                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                  |            |                               |                  |                  |                     |                          |                |                         |                |
| Voyager Recovery Center                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | (949) 991-6279                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                  |            |                               |                  |                  |                     |                          |                |                         |                |

## Where this comes from

The three stages on page 3 come from Terence Gorski and Merlene Miller (*Staying Sober*, 1986), condensed into emotional, mental, and physical form by S. M. Melemis, *Relapse Prevention and the Five Rules of Recovery*, Yale J Biol Med 2015;88(3):325-332. Pages 4 and 5 follow the relapse prevention model of G. Alan Marlatt. Reduced tolerance after abstinence is documented by NIDA. Helpline details verified against SAMHSA and the 988 Lifeline.

Clinically reviewed by \_\_\_\_\_ Credentials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## When a plan is not enough on its own

If cravings are winning, if the check-in page has moved in the wrong direction for weeks, or if you have already used, that is not a failure of willpower. It usually means the level of support needs to change. Voyager Recovery Center provides medical detox and residential treatment in Lake Forest, California, with dual diagnosis care on site.

**(949) 991-6279**

We answer 24 hours a day, and calls are confidential and carry no obligation.

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