

Exploring Triggers

Triggers	Thoughts and Feelings	Behavior	Positive Consequences	Negative Consequences

Facts about Cravings

Cravings are a common occurrence when stopping or reducing alcohol and/or drug use. Understanding cravings helps people overcome them, so here are some simple facts.

1. Cravings are the result of long-term alcohol and/or other drug use and can continue for some time after the use has stopped. People with a history of heavier use might experience stronger or more frequent urges. These are **common**.
2. Cravings can be triggered by people, places, things, feelings, situations, or anything associated with past use. Cravings are **predictable**.
3. A craving is just like a wave at the beach. Every wave in a set starts off small, builds up to its highest point, and then breaks and flows away to shore. Each individual wave never lasts more than a few minutes. A craving is just the same. It starts off small and then builds up. But it peaks, just like a wave, and will eventually break and disappear. This whole process usually doesn't last more than minutes. Cravings are **time-limited**.
4. Cravings will lose their power if they are not reinforced by using or drinking in response. Even if use occurs only once in a while, it will still keep those cravings alive. Cravings are like stray animals – keep feeding them and they will keep coming back. So in a very real sense these cravings are **controllable**.
5. Cravings tend to be stronger earlier on, then weaken, and eventually fade over time.
6. Each time a person does something other than drink and/or use others drugs, the craving loses power.
7. Stopping alcohol and other drug use completely is the quickest way to get rid of the cravings.
8. There are medications that help people manage cravings for alcohol and some other drugs.

Common Ways to Experience Cravings and Urges

Thoughts	Physical Sensations	Positive Expectancies	Emotions	Behaviors
"Wouldn't it be nice to have a drink."	Racing heart	I'd feel better with just a few hits.	Anxiety	Pausing when passing the wine isle in the store.
	Shakiness		Depression	
		A couple of drinks and I am more sociable.	Irritability	Holding onto the phone number of a dealer.
"I'd rather be out watching the game and getting high with buddies."	Sweating		Anger	
	Muscle aches	I've been good. I deserve one.	Elation	Keeping a pipe around.
			Happiness	

Common Ways to Experience Cravings and Urges

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Coping With Triggers

Trigger	Coping Strategy

Common Coping Strategies

- **Coping with External Triggers.** There are 4 basic strategies for coping with external triggers.
 1. **Avoid** – perhaps the easiest way to deal with high risk situations is to avoid them in the first place. How can you reduce your exposure to people, places, and situations that trigger urges?
 2. **Escape** – you cannot avoid all high-risk situations. When the unexpected occurs, get out of the situation as quickly as possible. How might you be able to leave a high risk situation that you know can trigger you?
 3. **Distract** – urges pass relatively quickly as long as you don't indulge them. This is especially true if you get interested in something else. What are some things you can do to distract yourself during an urge?
 4. **Endure** – Not all situations can be avoided, escaped, or distracted from. These are particularly risky situations for those in early recovery. These coping skills may be helpful:
 - **Talk it through** with a trusted person. This can help relieve the feeling as well as help identify the trigger.
 - **Ask for help.** Take someone with you or ask someone to help you get through the urge without using.
 - **Wait it out.** Everything passes in time, especially something as temporary as an urge. Don't try to make it stop, just wait it out and don't use.
 - **Take protection.** Other than a helpful friend, what can you bring with you to help you endure an urge? A reminder card? A treasured object? A photo? No money?
- **Coping with Internal Triggers.** The coping strategies for internal triggers are similar to external triggers, except you cannot avoid internal triggers.
 1. **Distract** – *This strategy can work for internal triggers too.*
 2. **Letting Go**—Letting go means moving on, not dwelling on the experience. Having a thought does not mean you need to pursue it, act on it or to keep thinking about it . Recognize the thought, stop it, analyze the errors in it, and replace it with a more helpful thought.
 3. **Enduring It** – this is helpful for triggers that cannot be let go of. Enduring the thoughts, feelings or physical sensations until they pass.
 - **Talk it through** with a trusted person. This can help relieve the feeling as well as help identify the trigger.
 - **Ask for help.** Take someone with you or ask someone to help you get through the urge without using.
 - **Wait it out.** Everything passes in time, especially something as temporary as an urge. Don't try to make it stop, just wait it out and don't use. Urge surfing is helpful in this situation

What other coping strategies have you found to be helpful?

Urge Monitoring Instructions

1. Keep a couple of cards and a pen or pencil with you at all times.
2. Whenever you feel an urge to use alcohol or drugs, write it down as soon as possible. Records are much less accurate and useful if they are made later. Whenever possible, write down the urge immediately rather than waiting for the end of the day and then trying to reconstruct what happened. However, if something prevents you from writing down an urge immediately, do it as soon as you can. Better early than late, but better late than never.
3. Write down the following four things with each entry:
 - Date and time of day.
 - The situation: Where you were, whom you were with, what you were doing or thinking
 - Rate how strong the urge was, from 0 (no urge at all) to 100 (strongest urge you've ever felt)
 - What you did – how you responded to the urge. If you do use, write that down. If you don't, write down what you did instead.

Sample Urge Monitoring Card

Date/Time	Situation	Rating (0-100%)	How I Responded
9/12 at 2:10 pm	Talking about drinking with friends. Started to feel a little antsy.	40%	Practiced riding out the urge and using the urge surfing instructions. Did not drink.

Urge Monitoring Card

Date/Time	Situation	Rating (0-100%)	How I Responded

Urge Monitoring Card

Date/Time	Situation	Rating (0-100%)	How I Responded

Urge Surfing

Many people try to cope with urges and cravings by gritting their teeth and toughing it out. Some distract themselves from urges. But some urges may be too strong to ignore. When this happens, it can be useful to stay with your urge to drink until it passes. This technique is called *urge surfing*.

Urges are like ocean waves. They start out small, grow to a peak, then break and fade away. You can imagine yourself riding the wave, staying on top of it until it crests, breaks, then turns into less powerful, foamy surf. The basis of urge surfing is similar to that of many martial arts. In judo, it is possible to overpower your opponent by first *going with* the force of the attack. By joining the opponent's force, control is taken and redirected to obtain the advantage. To practice this type of technique, of gaining control by first going with the opponent, take the following steps:

1. Take inventory of your craving experiences. Sit in a comfortable chair with your feet flat on the floor and your hands in a comfortable position. Take a few deep breaths and focus inward. Allow your attention to wander through your body. Notice where in your body you experience the craving and what the sensations are like. Notice each area where you experience the urge and tell yourself what you are experiencing. For example, "Let me see. My craving is in my mouth and nose and stomach."
2. Focus on one area where you experience the urge. Notice the exact sensation in that area. Do you feel hot, cold, tingly, or numb? Are your muscles tense or relaxed? How large an area is involved? Notice the sensations and describe them to yourself. Notice the changes that occur in the sensation. For example, "My mouth is watering and I keep swallowing. As I exhale, I can imagine the smell and taste of a cold beer."
3. Refocus on each part of your body that experiences the craving. Pay attention to and describe to yourself the changes that occur in the sensations. Notice how the urge comes and goes.

Many people notice that after a few minutes of urge surfing, the craving vanishes. The purpose of this exercise, however, is not to make the craving go away, but to experience the craving in a new way. If you practice urge surfing, you will become familiar with your cravings and learn how to ride them out until they easily go away.

Situations, Thoughts, and Feelings

- Your Situation: These are the people, places, and things around you. People often think that they feel certain moods or emotions *because* of what is happening around them, but this is only one part of the complete picture.
- Your Thoughts: No situation affects you until you *interpret* it. How you think about what is happening has a powerful influence on how you feel about it. Different thoughts or interpretations lead to different feelings.
- Your Feelings: Feelings may include being happy, excited, agitated, angry, upset, afraid, and so on.

Three-Column Thought Record

Situation Describe the people, place, or thing that triggered the urge/craving.	Thought Write down any automatic thoughts (or self-talk) you had about using.	Feeling What feeling(s) did you experience?

Feelings A to Z

Afraid	Free	Relieved
Agitated	Frenetic	Resentful
Alive	Funny	Reserved
Angry	Giddy	Sad
Annoyed	Guilty	Safe
Anxious	Happy	Satisfied
Ashamed	Hurt	Scared
Awful	Impish	Shy
Awkward	Inhibited	Silly
Bashful	Irritated	Suspicious
Betrayed	Joyful	Sympathetic
Bored	Jumpy	Terrible
Carefree	Kind	Terrific
Confused	Lonely	Tired
Cozy	Loving	Trusting
Cranky	Mad	Uneasy
Crazy	Mean	Upset
Crushed	Mischievous	Vicious
Depressed	Naughty	Violated
Distressed	Open	Vivacious
Down	Overjoyed	Wild
Elated	Passionate	Wonderful
Embarrassed	Peaceful	Yucky
Empty	Proud	Zany
Excited	Relaxed	Zonked

Five-Column Thought Record

Situation Describe the people, place, or thing that triggered the urge/craving.	Thought Write down any automatic thoughts (or self-talk) you had about using.	Feeling What feeling(s) did you experience?	Alternative, Realistic Thought Use questions to come up with a more balanced, realistic thought.	Outcome What feeling or behavior might result from the alternative, realistic thought

Checklist of Social Pressure Situations

To what extent do you expect that these situations could pose a problem for you in staying sober?

	✓	✓	✓
1. I am around other people who are drinking and/or using other drugs.			
2. Someone who is important to me is still drinking and/or using other drugs.			
3. Family members disapprove of my not drinking and/or using other drugs.			
4. Friends disapprove of my not drinking and/or using other drugs.			
5. Other people feel uncomfortable because I am not drinking and/or using other drugs.			
6. People offer me a drink and/or other drug.			
7. I am embarrassed to tell other people that I am not drinking and/or using other drugs.			
8. Someone I live with is a drinker and/or uses other drugs.			
9. Most of my close friends drink and/or use other drugs.			
10. I go to parties and celebrations where there is drinking and/ or other drug use.			
11. I try to help someone who drinks (and/or uses other drugs) too much.			
12. Someone I love drinks (and/or uses other drugs) too much.			

Identifying Social Pressure Situations and Coping Responses

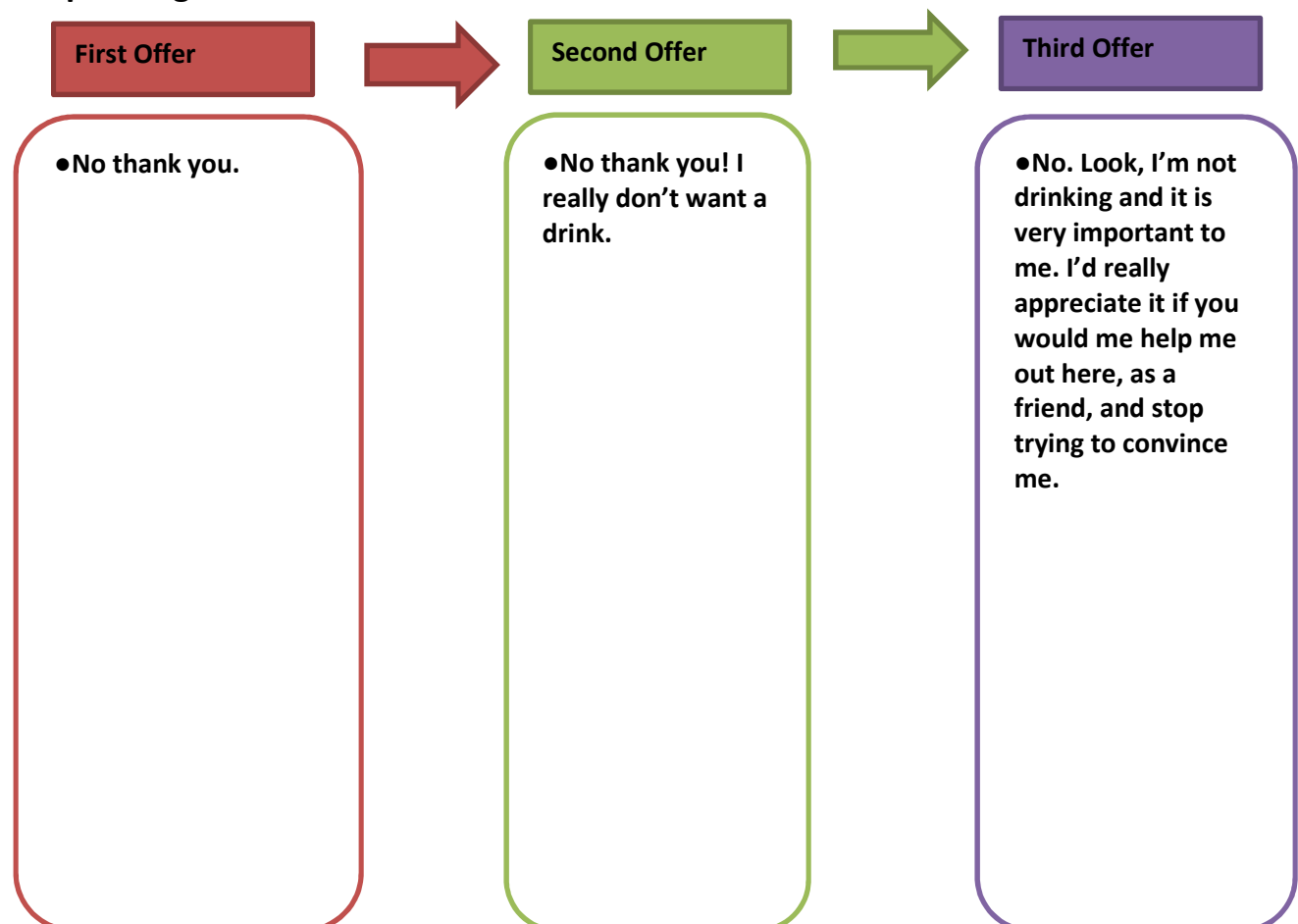
Situation	Coping Response

Refusal Skills

Do not use vague excuses	Vague excuses are not necessary and can be dangerous (e.g. "Not right now. I have a headache, but maybe later," or "Not now, it's too early in the day") because they leave the door open to another invitation.
Keep it short, clear, and simple	Keep it short, clear, and simple. Speak in a clear, firm, and unhesitating voice. Long explanations are not necessary and tend to prolong the discussion about whether you should use or have a drink.
Suggest alternatives	If the situation warrants an alternative suggestion, recommend an activity that does not involve drinking or using, such as, "Let's go out to dinner or the movies instead of a bar." This shuts the door on drinking but leaves it open to social activity.

Tips for an effective, assertive refusal:

Responding to Continued Offers:



Coping Plan

It is not always possible to avoid triggers. Be prepared with some different coping strategies when you are confronted with an urge.

If I run into a trigger situation:

1. I will escape/leave or change the situation.

Safe place I can go:

2. I will delay/put off the decision to drink or use drugs for 15 minutes. I'll remember that my craving usually goes away in ____ minutes and that I have dealt with cravings successfully in the past.

3. I'll distract myself with something to do.

Good distracters:

4. I'll call my list of emergency numbers.

Name/Number:

Name/Number:

Name/Number:

5. I'll remind myself of my success to this point.

6. I'll think of the positives of not using and/or the negative consequences of using.

7. I will reward myself for taking positive actions by (list rewards below):