



Building Your Recovery Plan

Warning signs, supports, and the structure that holds · Recovery in Focus · Session Packet

Nobody relapses out of nowhere. It looks sudden from the outside, but up close a relapse is a process: a series of small steps and small decisions, most of them made long before anything gets used. The same is true in the other direction. Sobriety isn't one giant decision made once; it's a structure built out of small, repeatable pieces: people, meetings, routines, warning lights, and what you do when one comes on. Counselors call the whole structure a **recovery plan**, and researchers who study long-term recovery keep finding the same thing: people with more of this structure, more support, more routine, more purpose, hold their recovery through storms that knock unsupported people down. They call those assets **recovery capital**. In plain terms: the stuff you've got in the bank when a bad week comes.

This session is a building session. We'll map your warning signs, the early ones that show up weeks before a craving does. We'll take inventory of your supports, honestly, including the gaps. And you'll leave with a written plan: the weekly structure, the people, the warning-light responses, and the purpose that makes all of it worth running. A plan on paper beats a plan in your head for the same reason a grocery list beats memory: bad days scramble memory, and bad days are exactly when the plan is for.

What is in this session?

This session has four parts, usually covered over two group meetings:

CLASS 1 1. Relapse Is a Process 2. Your Warning Lights

CLASS 2 3. Your Supports, Honestly 4. The Written Plan

After this session you will be able to

- Explain why relapse is a process and name the small steps that start one
- Recognize your personal early warning signs, the ones that show up first
- Rate your supports honestly and fill the biggest gap
- Carry a written, specific recovery plan you'll actually run

What will be asked of you?

You'll be asked to be honest about your warning signs and about which parts of a full recovery program you've been skipping. The plan you build is yours; nobody's handing you a one-size template. But you will leave with it written down, because written is what survives a bad week.

Part 1: Relapse Is a Process

WAIT, REALLY?

People who study recovery long-term find that what predicts lasting sobriety isn't willpower. It's **structure and support**: the people, routines, and resources around a person. They call it recovery capital, and unlike willpower, you can build it on purpose.

The small steps: the decision to relapse is usually made weeks before anything is used, in moves that look tiny: skipping a meeting, letting the phone calls lapse, keeping a secret, letting sleep and meals slide, drifting near old people and places with a good excuse in hand. Each step makes the next one easier. The process works like a dimmer switch, not a light switch, and that's good news: a dimmer can be caught at ten percent.

EXERCISE 1

Answer yes or no:

1. Looking back, my relapses (or close calls) started well before the day anything was used. ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. I can name at least one small step that was part of the slide. ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Some part of my current routine has already quietly slipped. ☐ Yes ☐ No

EXERCISE 2: THE SLIDE, MAPPED

Think of a past relapse or close call, yours or one you watched up close. List three small steps that came before it:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Which step was the real beginning, looking back? _____

Part 2: Your Warning Lights

Warning signs come in an order, and the early ones don't look like relapse at all. They look like attitude, schedule, and mood. By the time cravings show up, the process is already weeks old. Learn your early ones and you get those weeks back.

EXERCISE 3: THE WARNING-LIGHT PANEL

Check the ones you recognize from your own history:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Skipping meetings or group "just this once" | ☐ Resentments getting daily airtime |
| ☐ Letting calls and texts to sober people lapse | ☐ Romanticizing the old days |
| ☐ Keeping a secret, any secret | ☐ Picking fights, or picking at myself |
| ☐ Bored with recovery, "I've got this" | ☐ Drifting near old people or places with good excuses |
| ☐ Sleep or meals sliding | ☐ "What's the point" thinking |
| ☐ Isolating, canceling, going quiet | ☐ Other: _____ |

My earliest light, the first one that comes on: _____

The one other people see in me before I do: _____

Andre

Andre's relapse, when he finally mapped it, started six weeks before he used. Week one: he picked up extra shifts and dropped his Tuesday meeting, a good reason, even a responsible one. Week three: his sponsor's calls started going to voicemail; he was tired. Week four: an old resentment about his brother got nightly airtime in his head. Week five: he stopped eating real dinners and started sleeping at 2 a.m. The Friday he used, it felt like it came out of nowhere. It came out of six weeks.

EXERCISE 4

1. Name Andre's warning lights in order: _____

2. Which one was the easiest to fix, and when? _____

3. What's your week-one move, the responsible-looking first step of your slide?

End of Class 1. Talk it out:

- What's your earliest warning light, and who sees it before you do?
- What's quietly slipped in your routine right now? (Say it in here; that's what the room is for.)

Part 3: Your Supports, Honestly

Recovery capital comes in four accounts: **people** (sober friends, sponsor, family that helps, this group), **structure** (meetings, work, school, a schedule that fills the dangerous hours), **health** (sleep, meals, movement, medications, treatment), and **purpose** (work that matters to you, people you show up for, faith or meaning, goals with dates). Most people in early recovery are rich in one account and broke in another, and relapses tend to find the broke account.

EXERCISE 5: THE FOUR ACCOUNTS

Rate each account honestly, 0 to 10, and name what's in it:

Account	0-10	What's actually in it right now
People		
Structure		
Health		
Purpose		

My broke account: _____

EXERCISE 6: THE PEOPLE LIST

List five people you could call on a bad day. Then mark each one: A = would answer at 2 a.m., B = business hours, C = honestly not sure.

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____
5. _____

Fewer than five names, or no A's, is not a failure. It's the gap this plan exists to fill, and this room is where filling it starts.

Part 4: The Written Plan

The plan has four pieces, and every piece is specific: days, times, names. Vague plans are wishes.

EXERCISE 7: MY WEEKLY STRUCTURE

My meetings/groups this week (which, when): _____

My standing check-in (who, what day): _____

My dangerous hours (from my own week), and what's planned in them:

The health basic I'm rebuilding first (sleep, meals, movement):

EXERCISE 8: MY WARNING-LIGHT RESPONSES

If this light comes on, I do this, within 24 hours:

My earliest light: _____ → my move:

My second light: _____ → my move:

The person allowed to call my lights out loud: _____

EXERCISE 9: THE PURPOSE LINE

Structure holds better when it's holding something. Finish both:

I'm building this recovery for: _____

One goal with a date on it, ninety days out: _____

SKILL OF THE DAY: RUN THE PLAN FOR SEVEN DAYS

Run the written plan exactly as written for one week: the meetings, the check-in, the dangerous-hour plans. Mark what you actually did. Next group, the plan gets adjusted from evidence, not guilt.

Take it to the group

- Which of your four accounts is broke, and who in this room is rich in it?
- Andre's slide started with a responsible-looking move. What's yours?
- Who's your 2 a.m. name? If you don't have one yet, what's the path to one?
- What's your ninety-day goal, out loud, with the date?

Session summary

Relapse is a process that starts weeks early in small, respectable-looking steps, which means it can be caught early, while it is still easy to stop. This session you mapped your slide and your warning lights, rated your four accounts of recovery capital honestly, listed your people, and wrote a specific weekly plan with warning-light responses and a purpose line. Written plans survive bad weeks. That's why this one is on paper.

Words used in this session

- **Recovery plan:** the written structure: people, schedule, warning lights, responses, purpose.
- **Recovery capital:** everything you've got in the bank for a bad week: people, structure, health, purpose.
- **Warning lights:** the early signs, weeks before craving, that the slide has started. Attitude, schedule, mood.
- **The slide:** the small-steps process that relapse actually is, as opposed to the out-of-nowhere event it pretends to be.

Takeaway: Nobody falls off a cliff. People walk down a slope, one respectable-looking step at a time. Learn your first step, write the plan that catches it, and give one person permission to say your lights out loud.
