

# Relapse Preparation

## What is Relapse?

Many people think of relapse as a complete return to where they started. In TEAM-CBT, relapse is understood very differently.

Relapse does **not** mean you have failed or lost your progress. The goal of therapy is not to eliminate sadness, anxiety, urges, or negative thoughts forever. That would be impossible (and unrealistic). Being human means that difficult emotions and thoughts will show up again.

A relapse usually begins as a **temporary slip**:

- A bad day
- An old negative thought resurfacing
- A spike in uncomfortable emotions

What leads to real suffering is not the slip itself, but **giving up**, believing the negative thoughts are true again, and stopping the use of tools for an extended period of time.

Relapse Preparation is about learning how to respond skillfully when symptoms return, rather than reacting with discouragement or avoidance.

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## How Can I Prepare for Relapse?

After doing meaningful work in therapy and learning powerful tools, it's important to anticipate that symptoms may return in the future. Stress, fatigue, life changes, or unexpected events can make old patterns show up again.

Preparing for relapse means **planning ahead**.

You intentionally imagine a future situation where distress might return and write down:

- The emotions you might experience
- The negative thoughts that may arise
- The thoughts that might discourage you from using your tools

You then use the TEAM-CBT tools you've already learned (such as Externalization of Resistance, Double Standard, Devil's Advocate, Positive Reframing, or Future Projection) **ahead of time** to create strong responses.

This preparation helps ensure that when a difficult moment arrives, you are not starting from scratch.

It's also important to anticipate thoughts like:

- "The tools won't work."
- "This time is different."
- "I'll use the tools later."
- "It won't help anyway."

These thoughts are common and predictable. They can be challenged just like any other negative or tempting thought.

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## Continued practiced

People generally understand that exercising intensely for a few weeks does not result in lifelong physical fitness. Mental health works the same way.

Emotional well-being is not maintained by insight alone. It is strengthened through **continued practice**.

This means:

- Using the tools even when you feel okay
- Practicing regularly, not only during crises
- Viewing mental health skills as part of your routine rather than a temporary intervention

Ongoing practice builds confidence, increases speed of response during difficult moments, and reduces the intensity and duration of future relapses.

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## How You Can Prepare

### Step 1: Identify a Future Upsetting Event

Write down a specific situation in the future when you might experience distressing thoughts or emotions.

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## Step 2: Identify the Emotions

Write down all the emotions you might be experiencing.

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## Step 3: Prepare for Negative Thoughts

Write down all the negative thoughts you expect to have. Then, using any TEAM-CBT techniques you have learned, write strong positive thoughts to challenge them. Then rate how much you believe the positive thoughts

Negative thoughts	Positive thoughts	%Belief

#### Step 4: Prepare for Tempting Thoughts

Tempting thoughts are thoughts that pull you away from using your tools.

Examples include:

“I’ll do this later.”

“I don’t have the energy right now.”

“It won’t make a difference.”

Write down your tempting thoughts, then write Self-Control Thoughts to fight back using tools such as Devil’s Advocate, Identify and Explain Positive Distortions, or Future Projection for Habits. Then rate how much you believe the self control thoughts

Tempting thoughts	Self control thoughts	%Belief

## Step 5: Commit to Ongoing Practice

Write down a specific, measurable goal for continued practice of the tools. Be as concrete as possible:

- What tool will you practice?
- How often?
- On what days and at what time?

Example: Daily Mood Log, 30 minutes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 8:30am.

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## Important Things to Keep in Mind

- Relapse is normal and expected
- Temporary setbacks do not erase progress
- Motivation often comes after using the tools, not before
- Preparing ahead of time makes follow-through much easier
- This exercise can be repeated whenever needed

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## Final Note

Relapse Preparation is not about preventing distress. It is about trusting yourself to handle it when it comes.

When you expect difficult moments and prepare for them with compassion and skill, setbacks become shorter, less intense, and far less discouraging.

Progress is not measured by never struggling again, but by how quickly and effectively you respond when you do.