

Trigger Mapping Timeline Board

Mapping board · Recovery Timelines · The Recovery Files

Printable fill-in version: write your answers on the lines. The interactive board, its charts and your saved entries stay in the app.

Trigger Mapping Timeline Board

Identify · Map · Predict · Transform

Episodes

Domains Active

Learn

Log

Understanding Your Trigger Landscape

Triggers are the bridges between your recovery and your disease. They operate through seven distinct pathways — each activating craving through different mechanisms. Understanding which pathways are most active for you is the foundation of sustainable recovery.

This mapping tool helps you identify, document, and track your triggers over time. By logging each trigger episode with its category, context, intensity, and your response, you create a personal data set that reveals patterns invisible in the moment.

Clinical Foundation: Research shows that trigger identification and pre-planned response strategies reduce relapse risk by up to 50%. Every trigger you navigate successfully is literally rewiring your brain through extinction learning.

The 7 Trigger Domains

Environmental Triggers

Physical locations, sensory stimuli, and objects associated with past use.

Emotional Triggers

Feeling states connected to substance-seeking behavior through emotional regulation patterns.

Social Triggers

Relationships, interpersonal dynamics, and social contexts linked to substance use.

Physiological Triggers

Bodily states and physical sensations connected to substance cravings.

Psychological Triggers

Thought patterns, beliefs, and cognitive distortions that rationalize or enable use.

Temporal Triggers

Time-based associations including specific times, dates, seasons, and life transitions.

Success Triggers

The paradoxical way positive developments can increase relapse risk through overconfidence.

Document Trigger Episode

Date

Time of Day

[Select... / Early Morning (5-8am) / Morning (8-11am) / Midday (11am-1pm) / Afternoon (1-5pm) / Evening (5-8pm) / Night (8-11pm) / Late Night (11pm-5am)]

Trigger Categories Activated (select all)

☐ Environmental ☐ Emotional ☐ Social ☐ Physiological ☐ Psychological ☐ Temporal ☐ Success

Describe What Happened

What specific trigger event occurred? Describe the situation and what activated the craving...

Automatic Thought

What was the first thought that crossed your mind? Include self-talk, justifications, memories...

Emotions Present

What emotions were you experiencing?

Physical Sensations

Racing heart, tension, restlessness...

Situation / Context

Where were you? Who were you with? What were you doing?

Craving Intensity: __/10 — Mod-High

None Moderate Overwhelming

Craving Duration

[Select... / < 5 minutes / 5-15 minutes / 15-30 minutes / 30-60 minutes / 1-2 hours / 2+ hours / Ongoing/All day]

How Did You Respond? (select all)

☐ Called sponsor/support person ☐ Attended a meeting ☐ Used a coping skill ☐ Exercised/physical activity ☐ Journalled or wrote about it ☐ Meditated or prayed ☐ Talked to someone about it ☐ Used grounding technique ☐ Left the triggering situation ☐ Played the tape through ☐ Practiced urge surfing ☐ Applied HALT check-in ☐ Challenged the thought ☐ White-knuckled through it ☐ Distracted myself ☐ Slept or rested ☐ Isolated from others ☐ Romanticized past use ☐ Contacted old using friends ☐ Visited triggering location ☐ Minimized the craving ☐ Used a substance

Coping Effectiveness: __/10

Not helpful Somewhat Very effective

☐ I used my safety plan during this episode

Outcome — What Happened?

Did the craving pass? How long? Did you maintain your recovery?

Insights & Lessons

What did you learn? What worked? What would you do differently?

Advanced Pattern Analytics

Log at least 2 trigger episodes to begin seeing patterns.

Clinical Insights & Recommendations

Log 3+ trigger episodes to receive personalized, data-driven recommendations.

Common Examples:

- Specific locations (bars, certain streets, particular rooms)
- Sensory experiences (smells, sounds, tastes)
- Objects (paraphernalia, specific cups/glassware)
- Media depictions of substance use
- Weather conditions or seasonal changes

Reflection Prompts:

What specific place or physical setting triggered this?

Were there any sensory cues (smell, sound, sight) that activated the craving?

Did you encounter an object or media that reminded you of past use?

Could you have anticipated this environmental exposure? How?

- Anxiety and stress
- Sadness and depression
- Loneliness and disconnection
- Anger and frustration
- Shame and guilt
- Boredom and emptiness
- Joy and excitement (celebration)

What specific emotion were you experiencing before the trigger activated?

On a scale of 0-10, how intense was this emotion?

How did you typically manage this emotion during active use?

What healthy alternatives could address this emotional need?

- Presence of specific people you used with
- Relationship dynamics that historically led to use
- Social conflict or tension
- Feeling misunderstood or invisible in groups
- Celebrations and gatherings
- Social pressure around substance use

Who were you with or thinking about when this trigger occurred?

What social dynamic was at play (conflict, pressure, isolation)?

How did the social context connect to your past using patterns?

What boundary could you set to protect your recovery in this social situation?

- Physical pain or discomfort
- Hunger (often confused with cravings)
- Fatigue and exhaustion
- Physical tension or restlessness
- Illness or hangover-like symptoms
- Bodily sensations associated with using or withdrawal

What physical sensation were you experiencing?

Had you addressed basic needs (eaten, slept, rested) before this occurred?

Is this a sensation you previously managed with substance use?

What self-care practice could address this physical state?

- Glamorized memories of past use
- Entitlement thoughts ("I deserve this")
- Permission-giving beliefs ("Just one won't hurt")
- Catastrophizing ("I can't handle this without substances")
- All-or-nothing thinking
- Self-pity or victim mentality

What specific thought or belief preceded the craving?

Can you identify the cognitive distortion at work?

What would you tell a friend who voiced this same thought?

What is the evidence for AND against this thought?

- Specific times of day (after work, evening hours)
- Particular days of the week (weekends, paydays)
- Holidays and special occasions
- Anniversaries (positive and painful)
- Life transitions (job changes, moves, relationship shifts)

What time of day, week, or season was this trigger connected to?

Is there a recurring time-based pattern you're noticing?

What was the original routine or ritual during this time period in active use?

What alternative routine could you build for this time window?

- "I've been sober long enough to prove I can control it"
- "I'm doing so well I no longer need to worry"
- "One drink to celebrate is deserved"
- "My life has improved so much substances won't have the same hold"

What positive event or achievement preceded this trigger?

Did you notice thoughts suggesting you've "earned" the right to use?

How does your disease use your own success against your recovery?

Who in your support system can help you stay grounded during success?

Guided Reflection (based on your trigger types)

Environmental Prompts: