



Internal Triggers

"Trigger" – Understood as "a stimulus that elicits a reaction" (*APA dictionary*, [2019](#))

Listed below on this worksheet are examples of **thoughts, behaviors, and feelings** that can lead us to breaking our abstinence if we do not have a plan to manage them.

***Each trigger in these sections may require a slightly different action plan, so the plans referred to in examples may not work for certain triggers. That's why it's important to create your own.

DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN TO MANAGE INTERNAL TRIGGERS

Instructions:

1. Go through the list of internal triggers, and check any triggers you have experienced on the list, and add any that are not on the list.
2. Write out how you might manage one or two of your triggers. If OA support would help, specify that as well. If you can't think of a management strategy, ask for ideas during today's Q&A, or approach other OA members.
3. Keep this worksheet someplace where you can periodically reference and revise it as needed, and consider sharing it with your sponsor or other OA members. Write out how you would manage one or two of your triggers from each section and what coping strategies you would use.

IRRATIONAL THOUGHTS:

- I am not a compulsive overeater
- I can manage my overeating
- A little bit won't hurt
- I can skip a meal or eat off schedule without any adverse effects
- If no one sees it, it doesn't count
- I'll start tomorrow
- I deserve it
- I don't feel well so I can eat whatever is "appealing" until I feel better
- Someone made this dish especially for me. I can't say "no." I don't want to hurt their feelings
- My food plan "is not working" therefore I can rewrite it
- If I lose weight I will be happy
- I can depend on others for my happiness and security
- I should be getting what I want in a relationship
- I can get people to change if I just work at it.
- I am not good enough, it won't work, I don't deserve to get better
- OA can't help me. I'll never get better
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QUESTION: What have I learned from steps 1 and 2? What do you think higher power's will is for me regarding these irrational thoughts?

Action plan example:

"I can manage my overeating; a little bit won't hurt"

Study the Big Book on Step 1 with your sponsor or step guide, listen to podcasts on Step 1 to answer the question of whether you are powerless to manage your overeating. If you conclude you are, ask God to remove the delusional thought at once, focus on helping others by going to meetings, make outreach calls to as many OA folks as possible, and give direct service to someone. Share your thought that "a little bit won't hurt or I can manage my overeating" with your sponsor or another recovered compulsive overeater and see what they say.

FEELINGS:

Many OA speakers have said: FOOD IS NOT OUR PROBLEM, IT IS THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM!!! Then, what is the problem that causes me to eat compulsively? IT IS THE BUILD UP OF HUMAN EMOTION! When my emotions build, I turn to food because it provides the ease and comfort I so desperately need to feel better.

Recovery is the journey of getting free of the food solution and getting ease and comfort from the spiritual solution laid out in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous (the parent program of OA). This workshop is designed to help you get aware of the emotions, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that can build and grow which can lead us to relapse or avoid recovery altogether.

- Angry
- Defiant
- Frustrated
- Afraid
- Lonely
- Grief
- Sad
- Depressed
- Despair
- Guilt
- Disappointed
- Anxiety
- Shame
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Question: What action(s) can I take to change this feeling?

Action plan examples:

Lonely/depressed: Give service to others on a regular basis. Explore all creative options to take care of the loneliness – e.g. make phone calls, go to meetings, pursue new interests or hobbies. Turn the negative into a positive: How can I benefit from being at home more? In your prayers and meditation each day ask God to help you out of the bondage of your loneliness and show you ways to enrich your life so you can be of greater service to others.

Guilt: In the last 6 years of my mother's life she declined because she had dementia. I often felt guilty that I was not giving her enough care or attention. I worked full time and could not always stop in to see her as much as I would have liked (even though I saw her a lot and we did many things together — it was never enough). I asked God to help me remove the guilt because I was powerless over it. I was ready to let God take it from me. I asked God to show me what God would have me do or be. I was told that in the time we spent together to demonstrate my deep love for her, care for her as best I could, and make sure she was well taken care of. I realized I was playing God to think I could steal her problem of aging or that if I spent more time with her, she would get better and be okay. These were delusional thoughts. I gave her a lot of love and have no regrets. With prayer and meditation and right action, the guilt was removed.

LIFE EVENTS:

- Death of a loved one
- Loss of home (fire, flooding, foreclosure etc.)
- Moving
- Job interview
- Job loss
- Job hunting
- Demotion
- Divorce
- Marriage
- Having a child
- Parenting issues
- Pandemic
- Chronic pain from an illness/injury



Question: What actions can you take to navigate these life events breaking your abstinence?

Action plan example:

Job Loss: Create an action plan to clarify the job you want, do the footwork by starting a job search, network, and pray for God to show you a direction to move in at this time. Build prayer into your daily routine, asking God for the wisdom and strength to find the best situation for you now. Reframe this life event into a positive event. Maybe the job loss is truly an opportunity for a needed change. Is there something I need to learn about this job loss that could help me in my job search? Network and seek guidance from your friends in the OA fellowship

BEHAVIORS:

- Lying
- People pleasing
- Perfectionism
- Worrying
- Infidelity
- Breaking the law (or getting caught)
- Stealing
- Gossiping
- Overdoing, overworking, overcompensating
- Poor at self-care or helping others at the expense of ourselves
- Trying to control or change people without success
- Depending on people for my emotional security and happiness
- Poor time management: running late, falling behind
- Procrastinating
- Skipping a meal, missing a meal, going outside the food plan
- Overspending
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Question: How do these behaviors make me feel, what would my higher power have me do instead, and how can I take the actions necessary and not break my abstinence?

Action plan examples:

Gossiping: Watch for it at home or at work, do not participate in it, and/or leave the area where people are gossiping. In your daily prayers ask God to remove this defect of character and when gossiping is around you do the opposite behavior — say something nice about the person or kindly leave the conversation.

If you find you are drawn to gossiping, ask yourself what you get from it. Does it make you feel superior to others? Does it take your mind off getting your own house in order? What spiritual principles are violated when we gossip or criticize others? Is this God's will for me? Acknowledge the behavior to your sponsor, do step work to discover the parts of self that need work. If ready and willing, ask God to remove the behavior(s) in Step 7. Start to practice saying only kind things about people or say nothing at all. Continue in daily prayer to remove the behavior until it is gone. (This could take a while, so be patient.)

Stealing: Make direct amends to the person you stolen from. Pray for the removal of your dishonest behavior on a daily basis. Ask God for the strength, wisdom and courage to do God's will (Step 7), refrain from stealing again, do God's bidding instead and tell yourself you do not steal anymore. (Be patient. Old behaviors take time to heal and change.)

Other examples of actions you can take to work with triggers:

- ❖ Attend meetings regularly and work the steps on a daily basis.
 - ❖ Follow your food plan
 - ❖ Seek outside help to better manage emotional difficulties stemming from things such as death of a loved one, abuse, trauma, or relationship issues.
 - ❖ If finances are a problem, do a spending plan, consult a debt consolidator, and/or go to Debtor's Anonymous.
 - ❖ Manage your time by planning better. Take a class on time management.
 - ❖ Seek conscious contact with your Higher Power throughout the day, asking for God's will for you and the power to carry that out without eating compulsively
 - ❖ Say prayers each day asking God to remove dishonesty, destructive, delusional or irrational thinking, and ask what your higher power what HP would have you do instead
 - ❖ Meditate
- ❖ Attend meetings on emotional sobriety to learn how to get free of dishonest and co-dependent behaviors in relationships, attend Al-Anon or any other 12 step group that addresses relationship triggers
 - ❖ If you do not have a sponsor, get one
 - ❖ Rely on other people in OA to offer guidance