

Reading on Identifying Triggers *Individual and Group Session 2*

- Problems don't usually develop overnight, and they usually don't disappear overnight.
- For some people, it may be smooth sailing from the day they decide to change, but for others change takes time.
- Think about changing as an attempt to climb a mountain. Some people are able to climb Mt. Change quickly via Trail B. For others, this climb, as shown in the diagram below via Trail A, may take time.
- While most people make steady progress, some will hit dips in the trail that can slow them down, but that doesn't have to stop them. For example, if you are on a diet and go off it for one day, you can view this in one of two ways.
 1. As a **failure**, give up, and return to your old eating patterns. Doing this will not help you reach your goal.
 2. As a **temporary setback**. By doing this you have a better chance of achieving your goal.



UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Although we sometimes do things that are not good for us, there are usually reasons why we behave in certain ways. The first step in trying to change a behavior is to identify why it occurs.

TRIGGERS

Triggers are things that often lead to problem behaviors. Many circumstances can act as triggers, such as pleasant or unpleasant emotions or just routine situations. For example:

- **Unexpected situations:** Your plane is delayed; the job you were expecting falls through.
- **Situations you seek:** Going to a party.

(cont.)

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- **Emotional situations (positive or negative):** An argument; bumping into an old friend; being bored; celebrating.
- **Stressful personal situations:** Financial problems; a job interview; court appearance.

As you can see, trigger situations can vary greatly. Sometimes it may be a single trigger, whereas at other times it may be several triggers.

CONSEQUENCES

If people get an immediate payoff from doing something, they will tend to do it again. **Positive consequences** can include a change in mood, feeling more comfortable with others, or having a good time.

Unfortunately, some behaviors can produce **negative consequences**, such as health problems, family conflicts, or arrests. Although negative consequences are serious, they don't always occur immediately.

When you think about the consequences of your behavior, you should also consider things that could develop in the future. These are called **risks**.

In the decisional balance exercise, we asked you to weigh the costs and benefits of changing. The next step is to identify what is triggering or is associated with your behavior.

IDENTIFYING TRIGGERS

- Identify the triggers and consequences of your risky behavior.
- Develop options or realistic alternatives to engaging in the behavior.
- State your options as goals in as much detail as possible.
- Decide which options are best for you.
- Next, develop action plans to accomplish your goals. Allow a reasonable time period to achieve your goals. **Your problems didn't develop overnight, and realistically they may not disappear overnight.**
- Monitor your progress. If your plan works, take the credit you deserve. If it isn't working, find out why and look for other options.

Example: Identifying Triggers and Consequences
Briefly describe one of your most serious risky or problem situations. Going to a party when stressed.
Describe as specifically as possible the types of triggers usually associated with this situation. Unwinding after work, social pressure, having a few drinks with friends
Describe the consequences usually associated with this situation. Remember to consider negative and positive consequences. Positive: felt good, relaxed Negative: tired in the morning, missed work

(cont.)

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EXAMPLE: OPTIONS
Problem or Risky Behavior Going to a party when stressed.
Options and Consequences: Describe at least two options and their likely consequences for this problem or risky behavior.
Option 1: Avoid going to the party. Likely Consequence of Option 1: Positive: Will not drink. Negative: Will feel like I'm missing my friends.
Option 2: Going to the party, but limit my drinking to two beers. Likely Consequence of Option 2: Positive: Able to enjoy friends. Negative: May be difficult initially.

EXAMPLE: ACTION PLAN
For each option, develop an action plan that would help you achieve that option.
Best Option: Go to the party and limit my drinking. Action Plan: Have a soda between drinks. Pour your own drinks. After two drinks, only have soft drinks. Have something to eat. Make a commitment to leave at a certain time. Enlist a friend to help.
Second Best Option: Don't go to the party. Action Plan: Go somewhere that's rewarding like a movie, dinner, or a sporting event with friends.