

COPING WITH URGES

A strategy workbook



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COPING WITH URGES

STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH URGES INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:



- ◆ Distraction
- ◆ Talking about urges
- ◆ Going with the urges(Urge Surfing)
- ◆ Playing through the tape
- ◆ Using self-talk

These strategies may not stop urges completely. However, with practice, they will reduce the frequency and intensity of urges, which makes them less disturbing and frustrating when they do occur.

DISTRACTION

In many cases, an effective strategy for coping with urges is distraction. It is useful to prepare a list of reliable distracting. Such activities might include taking a walk, playing basketball and doing relaxation exercises. Leaving the situation and going somewhere safe is one of the most effective ways of dealing with urges.

Things I can do to distract myself when urges occur:

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

TALKING ABOUT URGES

Talking about urges with supportive friends, family members, in a supportive group or online community can be a very effective strategy and can help reduce the feelings of anxiety and vulnerability that often accompany urges. It can also help you to identify specific cues that trigger urges to use behaviors.

Close family members may become distressed when they hear you talk about urges, because they expect it to lead to your giving in to the urge or relapsing entirely. It is important to identify who you are comfortable talking with about your urges. Consider in advance how that person would be likely to react, and whether it makes sense to ask that person for support.

If you are isolated with few supportive friends it will be important to brainstorm ways of meeting new people, reconnecting with friends and family members. Safe online support groups and communities can be exceptionally helpful.

Ways I can meet new people or connect with others:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

PEOPLE I AM COMFORTABLE ASKING FOR SUPPORT INCLUDE:

1. _____ *Phone* _____

2. _____ *Phone* _____

3. _____ *Phone* _____

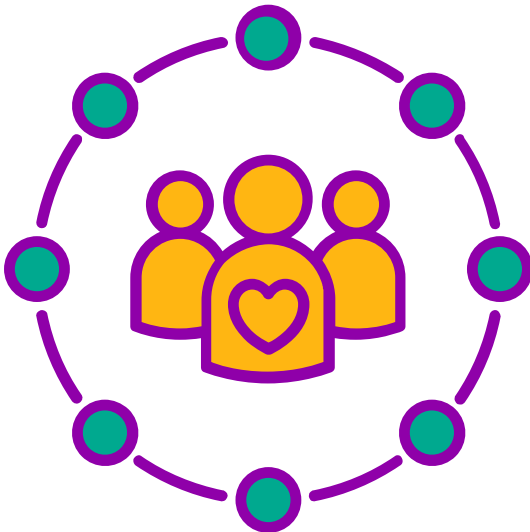
4. _____ *Phone* _____

5. _____ *Phone* _____

6. _____ *Phone* _____

7. _____ *Phone* _____

8. _____ *Phone* _____



RIDING THE WAVE OF THE URGE

The idea behind this technique is to let urges occur, peak and pass. In other words, experience them without either fighting or giving in to them. Imagine surfing a wave or walking over a hill—these are essentially along the same idea as going with your urge. It is a means of gaining control by avoiding resistance.

The purpose is not necessarily to make the urges disappear (although they frequently do), but to experience them in a different way that makes them feel less anxiety provoking and dangerous and thus easier to ride out.

Steps to successfully tolerating an urge:

1. Pay attention to the urge. First, this involves finding some place safe to let yourself experience it (e.g. a comfortable and quiet place at home).
2. Next relax and focus on the experience of the urge itself—where it occurs in the body or mind and how intense it is.
3. Focus on the area where the urge occurs. This involves paying attention to all the somatic and emotional signals and trying to put them into words. What is the feeling like? Where is it? How strong is it? Does it move or change? Where else does it occur? After concentrating in this way, many people find that the urge goes away entirely. You may find it useful to rate the intensity of your urge before and after this exercise to demonstrate the effectiveness of the technique.



PLAYING THROUGH THE TAPE

When experiencing urges, many people have a tendency to remember only the positive effects of acting on it (e.g. feeling emotional relief); they often forget the negative consequences. When experiencing an urge, it is often effective to remind yourself of the benefits of recovery and the negative consequences of using behaviors. Try playing all the way through the tape. If you act on this behavior, how do you feel? What happens next? What happens after that? How likely are you to be able to get back on track? How likely is this to trigger a full blown relapse? This way you can remind yourself that you will not really feel better if you give in to the urges.

List of reasons you want to recover:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

LIST OF BENEFITS OF RECOVERY:

1. _____

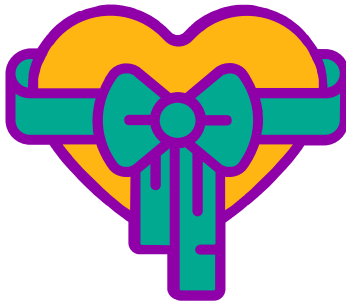
2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____



PLAY THROUGH THE TAPE:

If I use the behavior: _____

And then: _____

And next: _____

And then: _____

And next: _____

And then: _____

And next: _____

And finally: _____

LIST OF NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF ACTING ON URGES:

1. _____

2. _____

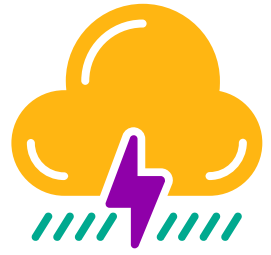
3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

DESCRIBE IN VIVID DETAIL HOW YOU FELT WHEN YOUR EATING DISORDER WAS AT ITS WORST:



DESCRIBE IN VIVID DETAIL YOUR BEST DAY IN RECOVERY SO FAR:



Compare the two, which would you rather have?

*You may wish to transfer these to a 3x5 index card to keep in your wallet or another accessible place. A glimpse of the card when confronted by an urge or high-risk situation can help you tolerate the urge!

USING SELF-TALK

For many people, a variety of automatic thoughts accompany urges, but they are so deeply established that you may not even be aware of them. Automatic thoughts associated with urges often have a sense of urgency and exaggerated dire consequences attached (e.g. “I can’t I eat this!” You can, you are just afraid. What can you do to soothe yourself? “I can’t get through this night without behaviors” You can, it’s just hard, but you can do hard things. “It’s the **only** thing that lets me feel okay” It might be familiar, but there are other things that, with practice, will help you feel okay.)

In coping with urges, it is important to both recognize the automatic thoughts and counter them effectively. Another strategy is to “slow down the tape” to recognize cognitions. Try to “freeze frame” the moment to really recognize what it is that you are thinking. Some people find it helpful to go back later on and try to remember what it was like, sort of play it back like a movie in slow motion. Often they can find a couple of examples of things they said to themselves, maybe without even realizing it, that led to acting on the urges.



USING SELF-TALK



Once automatic thoughts are identified, it becomes much easier to counter or confront them using positive rather than negative self-talk. This includes challenging the thought (e.g. “I really can get through this night without it. I may be a little uncomfortable at times, but I can deal with it.”) and normalizing the urge (e.g. “Urges are uncomfortable, but a lot of people have them and I can get through it without acting on it.”)

Things I can say to challenge my cognitions:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

USING SELF-TALK

Things I can say to normalize my urges:

1. _____

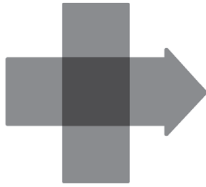
2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____



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