Gorski’s Ten Phases of Relapse

Participant Workbook | Recognize patterns, choose supports

Relapse can be understood as a process involving thoughts, feelings, circumstances, and behavior. These ten phases are a reflection tool, not a required path or prediction. You may skip any question or use a fictional example.

Ten phases: personal reflection checklist

☐ 1. Return of Denial — Difficulty acknowledging worry, vulnerability, or feelings about recovery.

☐ 2. Avoidance and Defensive Behavior — Avoiding honest check-ins; defensiveness, overactivity, impulsivity, or withdrawal.

☐ 3. Crisis Building — Problems accumulate; narrow focus, low mood, or plans begin to unravel.

☐ 4. Immobilization — Feeling stuck, hopeless, distracted, or unable to begin needed tasks.

☐ 5. Confusion and Overreaction — Irritability, strained relationships, or difficulty thinking clearly.

☐ 6. Depression — Persistent low mood, sleep/appetite changes, or reduced daily functioning.

☐ 7. Behavioral Loss of Control — Disrupted routines, missed supports, withdrawing, or giving up on recovery activities.

☐ 8. Recognition of Loss of Control — Feeling overwhelmed and noticing serious consequences or urges.

☐ 9. Option Reduction — Feeling trapped, hopeless, or believing substance use is the only escape.

☐ 10. Acute Relapse Period — Substance use may occur, or an urgent emotional/physical crisis may emerge.

Activity 1 — Choose five warning signs

Select five signs or patterns that you would like to recognize earlier. You can use your own words and need not select one from each phase.

Warning sign 1: _____

How might I notice it? _____

One helpful response: _____

Warning sign 2: _____

How might I notice it? _____

One helpful response: _____

Warning sign 3: _____

How might I notice it? _____

One helpful response: _____

Warning sign 4: _____

How might I notice it? _____

One helpful response: _____

Warning sign 5: _____

How might I notice it? _____

One helpful response: _____

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Notice–Name–Respond

Practice using a real or fictional situation. You do not need to share your answers.

1. What happened? What can I observe without guessing motives?

2. What thoughts, feelings, body sensations, or urges did I notice?

3. What else could explain these changes (stress, illness, grief, disrupted routine)?

4. What do I need right now?

5. What is one safe, specific action I can take within 24 hours?

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My Recovery Support Plan

Early warning signs I want to notice:

Actions that help me regulate, reconnect, or solve a problem:

People, groups, clinicians, or services I can contact:

If I return to use, my first safe step will be:

If I feel unsafe or consider suicide, I will seek immediate help. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for immediate danger. For possible overdose or severe withdrawal, seek emergency medical care.

One small action I will take this week:

Reminder: Support can include professional care, mutual-help groups, trusted friends, recovery coaches, and other resources that fit your values.

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