Whenever my thoughts start racing, I know a relapse is coming on. I usually start drinking heavily when I am having manic symptoms. I think it’s because my cravings come back when I am keyed up. If I can get ahead of the symptoms, I can keep a relapse from happening.

— CARMEN V., mother, business owner, person in recovery from alcohol use disorder and bipolar disorder
The Stress-Vulnerability Model of Mental Illnesses and Substance Use Disorders
Questions to get us started:

What things do you do to stay well?

Have your mental illness symptoms ever improved, then come back or gotten worse? What might have contributed to this relapse?

Have you ever stopped drinking or using drugs, and relapsed into using again? What might have contributed to this relapse?

How could developing a plan for staying well and avoiding relapses help you?

We will cover 4 topics in this Module:

**Topic 1:** Reducing Relapses to Help You Stay Well

**Topic 2:** Building Your Mental Health Wellness Plan

**Topic 3:** Building Your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan

**Topic 4:** Putting Your Wellness Plan Into Practice

Reminder, set an Agenda:

Here is the format of each Enhanced IMR session:

1. Review the last session
2. Check in on
   - home practice
   - goals
   - substance use
   - symptoms
3. Learn information about a new topic
4. Summarize session and decide on home practice
Topic 1
Reducing Relapses to Help You Stay Well

Throughout E-IMR you have learned ways to stay well and achieve your goals. In this module, you will learn ways to reduce the chances of having relapses of mental illness symptoms and substance use. Preventing relapses and maintaining your wellness can help you get the most out of life, and achieve your goals.

This session will introduce four important subjects to help you reduce your risk of having a relapse of mental illness or substance use:

💡 What is a relapse?

💡 What is a “Wellness Plan?”

💡 Mental Health Wellness Plan

💡 Alcohol and Drugs Wellness Plan

Each of these subjects will be described in more detail throughout this session.

What is a relapse?

There are two different types of relapses of mental illness. The first type happens when mental illness symptoms return and interfere with people’s ability to function, such as in taking care of themselves, doing their job, or having social relationships. The second type of relapse happens when persistent mental illness symptoms become worse and get in the way of people’s functioning.

**KEY POINT**

A relapse of mental illness happens when a person’s functioning is affected by their symptoms coming back or becoming more severe.
A relapse of substance use disorder refers to when a person who has stopped using alcohol or drugs begins using again. The term “slip” is sometimes used to refer to an abstinent person drinking or using drugs once or twice, but then returning to abstinence before they experience negative effects.

Relapses of mental illness symptoms can contribute to relapses in substance use, and vice versa. Therefore, it’s important to learn how to prevent both kinds of relapses.

What is a “Wellness Plan?”

A Wellness Plan is a personalized plan that you create with the help of others that contains important information and strategies to help you stay well and avoid relapses. Learning to recognize your own signs of a possible impending relapse, and identifying and practicing strategies to respond to those signs, can reduce your relapse risk. There are four goals of completing a Wellness Plan:

- Understand common causes of relapse in mental illness symptoms and substance use.
- Develop strategies to prevent or respond to the common causes of relapse.
- Learn how to recognize warning signs that you are at risk of having a relapse of your mental illness or substance use disorder.
- Develop strategies you can use to respond to those warning signs.

Let’s Talk About It

Have you ever had a relapse of your mental illness symptoms? What happened?

Have you ever stopped using alcohol or drugs, and then relapsed into using again? What was that like?
There are two types of Wellness Plans. You can discuss your recovery with your E-IMR practitioner to determine which type of plan fits your current needs—a Plan for Staying Well to prevent relapses in mental illness symptoms, a Plan to prevent relapses of substance use, or both. If you are not experiencing symptoms of your mental illness, or they are stable and under control, you can complete a Plan for Staying Well to reduce the chances of your symptoms returning or getting worse. Similarly, if you are not using substances, you can complete a Plan for Staying Well to prevent going back to using alcohol or drugs. You can create one plan at a time, or do both at once. Plans for Staying Well can help you stay on track in pursuing your goals by preventing relapses and hospitalizations.

There are two Plans for Staying Well included in this Module—Mental Health Wellness Plan and the Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan. Each plan has three parts:

**Mental Health Wellness Plan**

**PART 1:** Preventing the common causes of relapse

**PART 2:** Being aware of warning signs of mental illness relapse

**PART 3:** Responding to warning signs of mental illness relapse

**Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan**

**PART 1:** Preventing the common causes of relapse

**PART 2:** Being aware of warning signs of alcohol or drug relapse

**PART 3:** Responding to warning signs of alcohol or drug relapse

**KEY POINT**
A Wellness Plan is one of the best ways to prevent relapses of mental illness or substance use.
In this module, you can use everything you’ve learned so far in E-IMR to make a Plan for Staying Well. Having this Plan in place will allow you to devote more time to working on your goals. Today, you will start working with your E-IMR practitioner to begin your own Plans for Staying Well. As you read this module, you can fill out one part of your Plan at a time. By the end of the module, you will have at least one completed Plan (a Mental Health Wellness Plan, or an Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan), or both.

Let’s Talk About It

Thinking about your own recovery from mental illness, how could completing a Mental Health Wellness Plan help you make progress towards your goals?

Thinking about your own recovery from alcohol or drugs, how could completing an Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan help you make progress towards your goals?

Talk to your E-IMR practitioner about which plans you want to work on in this module.

Example plans

Before working on your Plan, it may be helpful to see some examples. Karl has completed a Mental Health Wellness Plan and an Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan.

Karl started smoking a lot of pot when he was in college. He became disoriented and paranoid during two episodes of smoking heavily and was hospitalized. He continued to use heavily. He also developed PTSD after experiencing an attempted robbery three years ago and continues to have symptoms such as flashbacks. He is receiving treatment for both his mental illness and his marijuana use. He now wants to get a job at a hardware store and needs to be “clean” to accomplish this goal. He has been abstinent for the last month.

Karl completed a Mental Health Wellness Plan and an Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan. You will find his plans on the next two pages.

After you review Karl’s plans, you can discuss your reactions with your E-IMR practitioner. You will be able to complete your own Plans in Topic 2 and Topic 3 of this module.
### EXAMPLE:
Karl’s Mental Health Wellness Plan

#### PART 1. Preventing Common Causes of Mental Illness Relapse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Cause</th>
<th>What I can do to prevent this common cause:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Difficulty coping with high levels of stress | Practice relaxed breathing when I leave my apartment.  
Walk my dog every day.  
Call my sister Angela when I am under extra stress. |
| Not taking medication regularly       | Keep a Post-it Note on my bathroom mirror as a reminder.                                                   |
| Using alcohol or drugs                | See my Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan                                                                      |

#### PART 2. Being Aware of Warning Signs of Mental Illness Relapse

My most important Warning Signs are:

A. Spending time alone in my bedroom  
B. Having strong memories of being robbed  
C. Being extra conscious of people standing behind me when I have to wait in a line

#### PART 3. Plan for Responding to Warning Signs of Mental Illness Relapse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Details for taking the Action Step:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Contact the doctor or other treatment team member. | Dr. Lake phone: 333-444-5555  
Crisis phone: 666-777-8888 |
| 2. Get more social support.          | Go to my PTSD support group.  
Call my sister and suggest going out for coffee.                                                   |
| 3. Use coping strategies.            | When I have memories of the robbery, remind myself that this is normal.  
Listen to my relaxation music and the breathing app on my phone. |
| 4. If I am using substances, stop or cut down. | Don’t hang around with friends who smoke pot.  
Get rid of any pot in my house.                                                                  |
### EXAMPLE:
**Karl’s Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan**

#### PART 1. Preventing Common Causes of Relapses of Alcohol or Drug Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Cause</th>
<th>What I can do to prevent this common cause:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty coping with high levels of stress</td>
<td>Ask my friend Johnny to come over for dinner. Go to the gym more often when I am feeling stressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations involving alcohol or drugs</td>
<td>Don’t spend time with friends whom I often used alcohol or drugs with (John, Theresa, and Phil); spend more time with friends who don’t use substances (Karen and Bob).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health symptoms (such as anxiety, depression, or hearing voices, flashbacks)</td>
<td>When I have intrusive thoughts about being robbed or someone following me, I will use mindfulness and listen to quiet music.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### PART 2. Being Aware of Warning Signs of Alcohol or Drug Relapse

My most important Warning Signs are:

A. Starting to think “one toke of pot couldn’t hurt me”
B. Thinking back about “the good old days” when I was drinking and using drugs
C. Skipping Dual Recovery groups

#### PART 3. Plan for Responding to Warning Signs of Relapse of Alcohol or Drug Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Details for taking the Action Step:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Get social support from someone who supports you not using alcohol or drugs.</td>
<td>Call my sponsor Jessie if I am thinking about drinking. Ask Jessie or another support person to come to a Dual Recovery meeting with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Use coping strategies.</td>
<td>When I get cravings, tell myself “I can get through this; these thoughts will pass.” Use mindfulness strategies to let urges to use come and go without paying too much attention to them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3. Contact the doctor or other treatment team member. | Dr. Lake phone: 333-444-5555  
Crisis phone: 666-777-8888                                                                 |
| 4. Additional action step                        | Keep a copy of my recovery goals on my refrigerator and review my goals when I am feeling stressed or have a craving. |
TOPIC 1 Reducing Relapses to Help You Stay Well

Let's Talk About It

What do you like about Karl's Plans?

How do you think his Plans for Staying Well could be helpful to his recovery?

In the past, have you ever had a Plan for Staying Well?

If so, how did you use it?
TOPIC 1 Reducing Relapses to Help You Stay Well

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make a plan for home practice this week:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What I will do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OPTION 1:**
Talk to a supportive person about your last relapse of mental illness symptoms or drug or alcohol use. Tell them you are creating a Plan for Staying Well.

**OPTION 2:**
Show Karl’s plans to a supportive person. Discuss which parts each of you like best and which ones might work for you.

**Goal Tracking**
Looking at your goal tracking sheet, which step will you work on this week?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The step I will work on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With whom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“You have to practice something to make it your own!”
Key Points • Topic 1
Reducing Relapses to Help You Stay Well

A relapse of mental illness happens when a person’s functioning is affected by their symptoms coming back or becoming more severe.

A relapse of substance use disorder happens when a person who has stopped using alcohol or drugs begins using again.

A Plan for Staying Well is one of the best ways to prevent relapses of mental illness or substance use.
Topic 2
Building Your Mental Health Wellness Plan

In this topic, you will learn about the common causes of relapses of mental illness. You will also learn how to recognize and respond to the warning signs that a relapse might be starting. By the end of this topic, you will be able to complete your Mental Health Wellness Plan.

This session will introduce five important subjects to help you create a Mental Health Wellness Plan:

💡 My Mental Health Wellness Plan
💡 What are the common causes of a relapse of mental illness?
💡 Preventing common causes of relapse
💡 Warning signs of a mental illness relapse
💡 Responding to warning signs that you might be at risk for relapse

Each of these subjects will be described in more detail throughout this topic.

My Mental Health Wellness Plan

In the last topic, you reviewed a completed copy of Karl’s Mental Health Wellness Plan. Now it’s your turn. You will learn how to prevent a relapse of mental illness, and use that knowledge to complete your own Plan for Staying Well. You will find a blank copy of a Mental Health Wellness Plan on the next page. Keep this form handy and fill it out as you read through this topic. You will be instructed to complete one section of the Plan at a time.
**My Mental Health Wellness Plan**

Name: ________________________________ Date: ____________________

**PART 1. Preventing Common Causes of Mental Illness Relapse**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Cause</th>
<th>What I can do to prevent this common cause:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty coping with high levels of stress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not taking medication regularly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using alcohol or drugs</td>
<td>See My Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PART 2. Being Aware of Warning Signs of Mental Illness Relapse**

My most important Warning Signs are:

A. __________________________________________

B. __________________________________________

C. __________________________________________

**PART 3. Plan for Responding to Warning Signs of Mental Illness Relapse**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Details for taking the Action Step:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Contact the doctor or other treatment team member.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Get more social support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use coping strategies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If I am using substances, stop or cut down.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My Signature ___________________________ Date: ____________________

Practitioner Signature ___________________________ Date: ____________________
What are the common causes of a relapse of mental illness

It is important to know about the common causes of relapses, so you can take steps to prevent them. Research has shown that there are 3 common causes of relapse in mental illness:

- Difficulty coping with high levels of stress
- Not taking medications regularly
- Using alcohol or drugs

The examples below show experiences that people have had with the common causes of relapse:

_Tuan noticed he feels a lot of stress when he has to do inventory at his job. In the past, he has gotten depressed during inventory time, especially if he doesn’t keep up with regular exercise—which is one of the best ways for him to cope with stress._

_Summer noticed she stopped taking her medication when she was feeling better, and didn’t think she needed it anymore. When she stopped taking her medicine, her symptoms would come back._

_Leo noticed that his voices came back when starts smoking pot again._

**KEY POINT**

Three common causes of a relapse of mental illness include: difficulty coping with high levels of stress, not taking medication regularly, and using alcohol or drugs.
Once you have identified situations that may have led to relapses in the past, it is helpful to think about how you might handle these situations differently in the future. For example, if you noticed that going out nights and drinking with your friends led to a relapse of mania or depression, you could avoid meeting with those same friends, find some new friends to spend time with that don’t use, or plan some other activities that don’t involve drinking.

Preventing common causes of relapse

**Difficulty coping with high levels of stress**

The first common cause of mental illness symptoms relapse is having trouble coping with high levels of stress. In Module 5, Coping with Stress, you identified strategies for avoiding some stressful situations and learned strategies for coping with stress that can’t be avoided. Most people find it helpful to use a variety of ways to cope with stress, such as the following:

- Exercising
- Practicing mindfulness
- Listening to music
- Talking to a supportive person
- Using relaxation techniques like relaxed breathing, muscle relaxation, and imagining a peaceful scene
- Using positive self-talk

**Let’s Talk About It**

Have you had any relapses of mental illness in the past? If so, have you experienced any of the common causes of relapse of mental illness?

Have you noticed any other causes of relapse in the past?
Let’s add to Part 1 of your Mental Health Wellness Plan:
Which strategies could you include in your Plan to help you prevent or cope with stress?

Turn to Part 1 of your Mental Health Wellness Plan, and write down the strategies you plan to use to prevent or cope with stress.

Not taking medication regularly
In Module 7, Medications, we talked about the role of medication in staying well. For most people, regularly taking their medications makes symptoms go away, and prevents relapses of symptoms. Preventing relapses and staying out of the hospital can help people stay on track with their goals. It is important to remember people should not stop taking their medications when they start to feel better, since this can increase the chances of their symptoms coming back and having a relapse.

Consider these suggestions for taking medication regularly:

- Take medications at the same time every day.
- Use cues and reminders (such as calendars, cell phone alarms, and pill organizers).
- Ask someone in your life to remind you in a friendly way.
- Keep your medications next to an item that you use daily (like the coffee pot, or your cell phone charger).
- If your medication regimen is complicated, talk to your doctor or nurse about simplifying it.
- If you find it challenging to remember to take antipsychotic medication daily, talk to your doctor or nurse about taking an injectable version of the medication, which can be given less frequently, like once a month.

Let’s add to Part 1 of your Mental Health Wellness Plan:
What are one or two strategies you could include in your Plan to help you take medications regularly?

Turn to Part 1 of your Mental Health Wellness Plan. Complete the second line in Part 1 by listing the strategies you plan to use to stay on track with taking your medication.
**Avoiding substance use**

The third common cause of mental illness symptoms relapse is using alcohol or drugs. Even using small amounts of alcohol or drugs can cause symptoms to return or worsen. Not drinking or using drugs is the safest way to prevent relapses of mental illness due to substance use.

If you have made the choice to not use substances, you can complete the Plan for Staying Well – Alcohol or Drugs. You can list the specific strategies that help you prevent a relapse or help you maintain abstinence.

**Warning signs of a mental illness relapse**

The “warning signs” of a mental illness relapse are small changes in a person’s behavior, feelings, or thinking that begin to occur several days or weeks before a full relapse of symptoms happens, in which the person’s functioning is also affected. Some examples of warning signs include: feeling mildly depressed, spending more time alone, having more trouble concentrating, or sleeping more. The warning signs of a relapse can also include having a mild return of some symptoms, such as: beginning to hear voices again, feeling paranoid, or having a decreased need for sleep.

Experiencing warning signs means that a person is at increased risk for having a relapse of symptoms. However, if steps are taken to respond to the warning signs, a full relapse can be prevented. Therefore, knowing one’s own warning signs of relapse, and having a plan to deal with them, can help people prevent relapses and hospitalizations.

**Being aware of warning signs**

Knowing your own warning signs of symptoms returning can help you get help quickly and prevent a full relapse from happening.

**KEY POINT**

Warning signs are the subtle changes in a person’s behavior, feelings, or thinking that signal a relapse may be starting.

Warning signs can also include having a mild return of some symptoms.
### Make It Your Own

#### Warning Signs

Below are some examples of warning signs. Review the list and mark off any warning signs that you have noticed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes in Behavior</th>
<th>Warning signs I have noticed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawing from others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting impulsively (for example, spending lots of money)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating less or eating more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping too much or too little</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stopping medication or stopping going to appointments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using drugs or alcohol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Changes in Thinking or Senses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems concentrating</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hearing voices or sounds that other people don’t hear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling paranoid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems following a conversation or focusing on a topic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Changes in Feelings or Mood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling irritable or extra-sensitive</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling tense or nervous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling sad or depressed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling unsafe or worrying that people are against you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling angry a lot of the time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Let’s Talk About It

If you have had previous relapses of mental illness symptoms, which warning signs in the chart above did you notice? Place an “I” next to the warning signs you have noticed. The “I” stands for “I noticed this.”

Did your friends or family tell you about any warning signs that you were not aware of? Place an F next to the warning signs on the chart above that your friends or family have noticed. The “F” stands for “my family or friends noticed this.”
Unique warning signs

Some people have warning signs that are unique to them. For example, one person’s warning sign was wearing all black clothing when he usually wore bright colors. Another person’s unique warning sign was not returning phone calls or texts from friends or family members.

Let’s Talk About It

If you have had relapses of mental illness symptoms in the past, did you notice any unique warning signs? If so, what were they?

Did your family members or friends notice any unique warning signs?

Make It Your Own

Your Unique Warning Signs

Write down examples of the unique warning signs you and your family or friends noticed:

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
The following examples show how people have identified warning signs and included strategies to address them in their Plans for Staying Well:

Tuan identified his unique warning signs of not calling his family members every week, being late for work, and spending more time in bed. To help monitor his warning signs, he posted a list of them on the refrigerator. He is able to check the list regularly so he can notice whether he has been experiencing any of the warning signs.

Summer identified her unique warning signs as missing more than one day of medication, feeling paranoid about her roommate, and spending a lot of money. She gave a copy of her warning signs to her parents and her case manager. When she reviewed her Plan for Staying Well with them, they shared warning signs they had noticed. For instance, she becomes very irritable with other people in the weeks before she has a relapse of symptoms.

Leo identified his unique warning signs as feeling anxious and having difficulty leaving his house, spending more time alone, and trouble concentrating. To monitor his warning signs, he added a list of them to the notes on his smart phone so he can briefly review it every day. Doing this has helped him increase his awareness of when a relapse is going to happen.

You can ask your family members, friends, and practitioners about warning signs they may have noticed in you. Once you develop your list of warning signs, you can ask these supportive people to be your “extra eyes and ears.” You can also include them in your Plan for Staying Well and enlist them to help you take action to prevent warning signs from becoming relapses.

Let’s add to Part 2 of your Mental Health Wellness Plan:

What are your most important warning signs that mental illness symptoms may be relapsing?

Turn to your Mental Health Wellness Plan. In Part 2, you can write down your warning signs of a relapse of mental illness symptoms.
Try it Out:

Talking to a Supportive Person about Warning Signs

Practicing can make you feel more confident, and it can help you be more effective in your life.

STEP 1
Review the steps of the skill:

▷ Identify a person who was involved during your last relapse.

▷ Have a copy of your Plan for Staying Well when you talk to the person.

▷ Discuss the purpose of the Plan such as, “I am working on things I can do to stay out of the hospital, and I am putting together a plan to help me stay well.”

▷ Show the person your Plan.

▷ Ask if the person has ever noticed any warning signs. You can say, “Have you ever noticed any signs before I had a relapse, like changes in my mood or behavior?”

▷ Add additional signs to your Plan for Staying Well.

STEP 2
Watch a demonstration of the skill: Your E-IMR practitioner will show how to use the steps of this skill.

STEP 3
Review the demonstration: Your E-IMR practitioner will ask for feedback about the demonstration. The practitioner will ask questions like: Did I follow the steps? How effective do you think I was?

STEP 4
Try it out: Now is your chance to try out the skill. Describe with whom, when, and where you would use the skill. Your E-IMR practitioner will play the part of the other person.

STEP 5
Get feedback: After you try it out, your E-IMR practitioner will guide a discussion about: what you did well, how effective your performance was, and (possibly) how you could do it even better.

STEP 6
Continue practice and feedback: Your E-IMR practitioner will help set up more situations to try it out if needed. After each practice, your practitioner will guide a review.

STEP 7
Try it out on your own: Plan with whom, when, and where you could practice this skill on your own.
Responding to warning signs that you might be at risk for relapse

When you spot a warning sign and take quick action, you have a very good chance of preventing a relapse of your mental illness symptoms. And even if you can’t avoid a full relapse, taking action usually makes a relapse shorter and much less severe. Such a relapse might be managed without going to the hospital.

Below are the action steps that you can use to respond to warning signs.

Action steps for responding to warning signs

1. Contact the doctor, nurse, or other member of your treatment team.

2. Get more social support.

3. Use coping strategies for any symptoms.

4. Additional action step: ____________________________
   ____________________________
   ____________________________

**KEY POINT**

Action Steps are strategies you can use to respond to warning signs in order to prevent a relapse, or keep a relapse from becoming full-blown.
### Make It Your Own

**Action Steps for Responding to Warning Signs**

Work with your E-IMR practitioner to complete the following table. Include details about how you would take each action step, and details that are specific to your mental illness and your substance use problems. (You may record this information directly in Part 3 of your **Mental Health Wellness Plan**.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Contact the doctor, nurse, or other member of your treatment team | Doctor or nurse’s phone #:  
What you would like to say to them if you notice a warning sign: |
| 2. Get more social support | Individual(s) you would like to talk to and how to contact them:  
Names:  
Contact Information:  
What you would like them to do to provide support, such as talking with you, doing an activity together, taking a walk, or contacting the treatment team together: |
| 3. Use coping strategies | Coping strategies you will use, such as relaxation techniques, talking about your feelings to a family member or other supportive person, getting enough sleep, increasing your physical activity, or engaging in recreational activities: |
| 4. Additional action step: if you are using substances, stop or cut down. | If you are using substances, what additional action step could you take to respond to a warning sign?  
What additional skill or strategy, like getting support from family or friends, going to a group like AA, or talking to a counselor, could be helpful to your staying well. |
Let’s Talk About It

Who could practice your action steps with you?

Let’s add to Part 3 of your Mental Health Wellness Plan:

What are your most important action steps for addressing warning signs that mental illness symptoms may be returning?

Turn to your Mental Health Wellness Plan. In Part 3, you can write down your action steps.
Home Practice

Building Your Mental Health Wellness Plan

Choose one of the following options to practice or make one up.

**OPTION 1:** Talk to a supportive person or family member about warning signs of mental illness symptoms relapse. Use the Try It Out steps you practiced in today’s session.

**OPTION 2:** Find someone else in recovery from mental illness. Talk to them about their warning signs and action steps they use to prevent a relapse.

Make a plan for home practice this week:

- **What I will do**
- **When**
- **Where**
- **With whom**

Goal Tracking

Looking at your goal tracking sheet, which step will you work on this week?

To complete this step, I will use the following plan:

- **When**
- **Where**
- **With whom**
Key Points • Topic 2
Building Your Mental Health Wellness Plan

Three common causes of a relapse of mental illness include: difficulty coping with high levels of stress, not taking medication regularly, and using alcohol or drugs.

Identifying situations and events that led to a relapse in the past can help you reduce the risk of future relapses.

Warning signs are the subtle changes in a person’s behavior, feelings, or thinking that signal a relapse may be starting.

Warning signs can also include having a mild return of some symptoms.

Action Steps are strategies you can use to respond to warning signs in order to prevent a relapse, or keep a relapse from becoming full-blown.
Topic 3
Building Your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan

In this topic, you will learn about the common causes of a relapse of drugs and alcohol use. You will also learn how to recognize and respond to warning signs that you may be at risk of returning to using alcohol or drugs. By the end of this topic, you will be able to complete your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan. You should complete the Plan to Stay Well— Alcohol or Drugs if you have stopped using substances and you want to prevent a relapse or return to substance use.

This session will introduce five important subjects to help you create a Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan:

- My Plan for Staying Well— Alcohol or Drugs
- Common causes of relapse of drug and alcohol use
- Preventing common causes of relapse
- Warning signs for relapse risk in alcohol or drug use
- Responding to warning signs that you might be at risk for relapse

Each of these ideas will be described in more detail during this session.

My Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan

In Topic 1 of this module, you reviewed a completed copy of Karl’s Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan. Now it is your turn. You will learn how to prevent a relapse of alcohol or drug use and use that knowledge to complete your own Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan. You will find a blank copy of an Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan on the next page. Keep this form handy and fill it out as you read through this topic. You will be instructed to complete one section of the Plan at a time.
My Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan

Name: ____________________________ Date: _________________

PART 1. Preventing Common Causes of Relapse of Alcohol or Drugs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Cause</th>
<th>What I can do to prevent this common cause:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty coping with high levels of stress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations involving alcohol or drugs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health symptoms (such as anxiety, depression, or hearing voices)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PART 2. Being Aware of Warning Signs of Alcohol or Drug Relapse

My most important Warning Signs are:

A. _______________________________________________________________________

B. _______________________________________________________________________

C. _______________________________________________________________________

PART 3. Plan for Responding to Warning Signs of Alcohol or Drug Relapse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Details for taking the Action Step:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Get social support from someone who supports you not using alcohol or drugs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 2. Use coping strategies. | |

| 3. Contact the doctor or other treatment team member. | |

| 4. Additional action step | |

My Signature Date  Practitioner Signature Date
Common causes of relapse of drug and alcohol use

It is important to know about the common causes of relapses, so you can take steps to prevent them. Research has shown that there are 3 common causes that increase the risk of people returning to drinking or using drugs:

- Difficulty dealing with high levels of stress
- Situations involving alcohol or drugs
- Distressing mental health symptoms (such as anxiety, mania, intrusive thoughts, depression or hearing voices)

The examples below show experiences that people have had with the common causes of relapse of alcohol or drug use:

The last time Tuan relapsed, he was under a lot of stress at work and he also began having anxiety.

Summer’s friend Sylvia smokes pot regularly. Summer noticed that when she spends time with Sylvia she sometimes wants to get high too. This has led to relapses in the past.

Leo has stopped drinking and smoking pot before. However, when his voices got really negative he would sometimes start drinking or smoking again.

**KEY POINT**
The common causes of relapse of drug and alcohol use are stress, situations that involve alcohol or drugs, and symptoms of mental illness.

**Let’s Talk About It**
Have you experienced a relapse of drugs or alcohol use?

If you have, did you notice any of the common causes of relapse of drugs or alcohol use? What happened?
Preventing common causes of relapse

**Difficulty dealing with high levels of stress**

The first common cause of a substance use relapse is having trouble coping with high levels of stress. That means it’s very important to be aware of when you are under stress and to have effective strategies for coping with it. Some examples of common sources of stress include positive changes such as getting married, starting a new job, or moving into a new apartment. Stress can also be caused by things such as difficulties at work, conflicts with family members or loved ones, and daily hassles such as doing chores, laundry, or cooking.

In Module 5, Coping with Stress, you identified strategies for avoiding some stressful situations, and learned strategies for coping with stress that can’t be avoided. You may want to use some similar strategies on your plan. Here are some suggestions:

- Exercising
- Practicing mindfulness
- Taking care of your health
- Talking to a supportive person
- Attending a self-help or support group
- Using relaxation techniques like relaxed breathing, muscle relaxation, and imagining a peaceful scene
- Participating in religion or some other form of spirituality

Let’s add to Part 1 of your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan:

Which strategies could you include in your Plan to help you prevent or cope with stress?

Turn to your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan. In Part 1, you can write down the strategies you plan to use to prevent or cope with stress.

Let’s Talk About It

What are some stressful things that you have noticed in the past or more recently?

Are there any stressors specifically related to using alcohol or drugs?
Situations involving alcohol or drugs

The second common cause of substance use relapses is being in situations that involve alcohol or drugs—or people, places, or things you have associated with substance use in the past.

There are many different situations where people might be using alcohol or drugs. Celebrations, holiday gatherings, parties, or get-togethers with friends are all examples of situations where people may use substances. There may also be places where you have used alcohol or drugs in the past, or people with whom you used, that could trigger your desire to use again.

In Module 3, Practical Facts about Substance Use, you discussed some helpful strategies you can use when dealing with social situations involving alcohol or drugs. Here are some examples of these strategies:

- Avoid situations where people may be using substances, and hang out with people who don’t use.
- Avoid walking past places where you used to use substances.
- If you have to be around people who use substances, tell them about your decision to not use and ask them to respect it.
- If people don’t respect your decision and continue to ask you to use, leave the situation.
- Figure out which refusal skills work best for you:
  - Simple refusal, and then walking away if they persist asking.
  - Broken record: just keep saying “no” again and again and again.
  - If the person is a friend, suggest doing an alternative activity instead of using.

Let’s Talk About It

What are some situations where you could be around drugs or alcohol, or people using drugs or alcohol?

What are some situations that might remind you of your past alcohol or drug use?
Let’s Add to Part 1 of Your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan:

Which strategies could you include in your Plan to help you cope with situations involving alcohol or drugs?

Turn to your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan. On the second line of Part 1, you can write down the strategies you will use to avoid situations and people who use alcohol or drugs, or to cope with situations you can’t avoid.

Distressing mental health symptoms

The third common cause of relapse into using drugs or alcohol is having distressing symptoms of mental illness, such as anxiety, intrusive thoughts, depression, hallucinations, or flashbacks. Sometimes when people have an increase in distressing symptoms they resort to using substances, either in an attempt to cope with the symptoms or to escape them temporarily. However, using substances usually makes the symptoms even worse in the long run.

Let’s Talk About It

Have you ever begun using substances again due to an increase in distressing mental health symptoms?

Did you try to use alcohol or drugs to cope with your symptoms or escape them? What happened?
In Module 8, Coping with Problems and Symptoms, you learned a variety of strategies to help you cope with symptoms. Here are some examples of coping strategies you could use if you experience symptoms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Coping Strategies You Could Try</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Relaxation techniques&lt;br&gt;Set aside a worry time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Plan and follow-through on using enjoyable activities (behavioral activation)&lt;br&gt;Use positive self-talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delusions (false beliefs or worrisome thoughts)</td>
<td>Check out your belief&lt;br&gt;Examine evidence for and against your belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinations</td>
<td>Positive self-talk&lt;br&gt;Distraction&lt;br&gt;Acceptance/mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low energy</td>
<td>Develop a daily schedule&lt;br&gt;Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration problems</td>
<td>Cut down on distractions&lt;br&gt;Ask someone to join you in activity that requires concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>Develop good sleep hygiene&lt;br&gt;Create more structure in your day&lt;br&gt;Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Talk to a supportive person about your feelings&lt;br&gt;Identify situations that make you angry and look for ways to handle these situations better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flashbacks and intrusive memories</td>
<td>Use grounding techniques&lt;br&gt;Positive self-talk&lt;br&gt;Practice acceptance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
People who stop using alcohol or drugs sometimes have relapses back into using again. Before a relapse of substance use occurs, there are usually some warning signs that come in the hours, days, or weeks before the person starts using again. For example, the person might start thinking about the “good old days” when they were using substances, or thinking “just one drink couldn’t hurt.” Warning signs are the small changes that may occur in people’s thinking, feeling, or behaviors that indicate that they are at increased risk for having a relapse of their substance use.

Warning signs for relapsing back into using alcohol or drugs may develop gradually over time, or they may be strong and come on quickly. Regardless of how quickly warning signs have preceded relapses in the past, knowing your own warning signs and having a plan for dealing with them can enable you to prevent actual relapses into using substances.

**KEY POINT**
Warning signs are the small changes that may occur in people’s thinking, feeling, or behaviors that indicate they are at increased risk for having a relapse of their substance use.

**KEY POINT**
Knowing your warning signs and having a plan to deal with them can help you decrease your risk of relapse.
# Make It Your Own

## Examples of Common Warning Signs

Below are some examples of three types of common warning signs: behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. Review the list and mark off any warning signs that you have noticed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Seeking out people who used to use drugs or alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Stopping going to support meetings, such as AA or NA or Dual Recovery Anonymous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other behaviors:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thoughts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Remembering the “good days” when you used to use substances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Thinking just one toke of pot or line of cocaine or beer couldn’t hurt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Thinking that you really can control your drinking or drug use (when you can’t).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other thoughts:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings and images</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Having cravings to use (images of using, thoughts about how good it would feel to use, an intense desire or yearning to use)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other feelings or images:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Let’s Talk About It

If you have had previous relapses of substance use, which of the warning signs on the chart above did you notice? Place an “I” next to the warning signs you have noticed. The “I” stands for “I noticed this.”

Did your friends or family tell you about any warning signs that you were not aware of? Place an F next to the warning signs on the chart above that friends or family have noticed. The “F” stands for “my family or friends noticed this.”
Here are some examples of warning signs other people have identified:

Tuan identified a warning sign of having thoughts that just smoking one bowl of pot won’t hurt. He talked to his case manager about his warning signs. Together at the beginning of every session, they review his list of warning signs and talk about any changes that he has noticed.

Summer identified her warning signs of stopping attending her dual recovery group regularly and remembering the good old days of using. She made a copy of her warning signs on her smart phone, and regularly checks to see if she has experienced any of them.

Leo identified his warning signs as having cravings of smoking pot and remembering how good it felt to smoke with his friends. He has shared his warning signs with the self-help group he attends regularly. He checks in with the group to see if they have noticed any changes, so he can quickly respond to the warning signs and use his coping skills.

Ask your family members, friends, and practitioners about warning signs they noticed. Once you develop your list of signs, you can ask these supportive people to be your “extra eyes and ears.” You can also include them in your Plan for Staying Well and enlist them to help you take action to keep warning signs from becoming relapses.

**Try it Out**

**Talking to a Supportive Person About the Warning Signs of Relapse**

Practicing can make you feel more confident, and it can help you be more effective in your life.

**STEP 1**

Review the steps of the skill:

- Identify a person who was involved in your life during your last relapse.
- Have a copy of your Plan for Staying Well when you talk to the person.
- Discuss the purpose of the plan such as, “I am working on things I can do to avoid a relapse of alcohol or drug use and I am putting together a plan to help me stay well.”
- Show the person your Plan.

**Let’s add to Part 2 of your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan:**

What are your most important warning signs for relapse of alcohol or drugs?

Turn to your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan. In Part 2, you can write down your warning signs for substance use relapse.
TOPIC 3  Building Your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan

▷ Ask if the person has ever noticed any warning signs. You can say, “Have you ever noticed any warning signs before I had a relapse, like hanging out with people I used to use with?”

▷ Add additional signs to your Plan for Staying Well.

STEP 2
Watch a demonstration of the skill: Your E-IMR practitioner will demonstrate how to use the steps of this skill.

STEP 3
Review the demonstration: Your E-IMR practitioner will ask for feedback about the demonstration. The practitioner will ask questions like: Did I follow the steps? How effective do you think I was?

STEP 4
Try it out: Now is your chance to try out the skill. Describe with whom, when, and where you would use the skill. Your E-IMR practitioner will play the part of the other person.

STEP 5
Get feedback: After you try it out, your E-IMR practitioner will guide a discussion about: what you did well, how effective your performance was, and (possibly) how you could do it even better.

STEP 6
Continue practice and feedback: Your E-IMR practitioner will help set up more situations to try it out if needed. After each practice, your practitioner will guide a review.

STEP 7
Try it out on your own: Plan with whom, when, and where you could practice this skill on your own.

Responding to warning signs that you might be at risk for relapse

When you spot a warning sign and take quick action, you have an opportunity to prevent a relapse of alcohol or drug use. Now that you have identified your warning signs, you will learn how to develop a series of action steps for responding to your warning signs.

Action steps for responding to warning signs

1. Get help from someone who supports you not using alcohol or drugs (for example, sponsor, friend, or family member).

2. Use coping strategies.

3. Contact the doctor, nurse, or other member of your treatment team.

4. Additional action step:
   
   ---------------------------------
   
   ---------------------------------
# Make It Your Own

## Action Steps for Responding to Warning Signs

Work with your E-IMR practitioner to complete the following table. Include details about how you would take each action step. These action steps focus on warning signs and not the common causes of relapse. Coping strategies for the common causes of relapse for alcohol or drugs should be included in Part 1 of your Plan for Staying Well.

You may record this information directly in Part 3 of your **Plan for Staying Well**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Get social support from someone who supports you not using alcohol or drugs</strong></td>
<td>Which individual (or individuals) are the strongest supports of you not using alcohol or drugs? Consider your sponsor, family members, or friends: Names: Contact Information: How could this person (or people) most effectively help you avoid relapsing back into using substances again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Use coping strategies</strong></td>
<td>Coping strategies you will use to respond to a warning sign, such as using relaxation techniques, waiting for the thought or craving to pass, distraction, going to a support group meeting, or getting some physical exercise:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Contact the doctor, nurse, or other member of your treatment team</strong></td>
<td>Doctor, nurse, or treatment team member’s phone #: What you would like to say to them if you notice a warning sign:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Additional action step:</strong></td>
<td>What is an additional action step that you could take to respond to a warning sign such as getting rid of any drugs or alcohol in your house?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let's add to Part 3 of your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan:

What are your most important action steps for addressing warning signs that you may be at risk for relapse of alcohol or drug use?

Turn to your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan. In Part 3, you can write down the action steps you completed in the Make It Your Own exercise above.
Home Practice

Building Your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan

Choose one of the following options to practice or make one up.

**OPTION 1:** Talk to a supportive person or family member about warning signs of substance use relapse. Use the Try It Out steps you practiced in today’s session.

**OPTION 2:** Find someone else in recovery, perhaps at a support group, and talk to them about their warning signs and action steps they use to prevent a relapse.

Make a plan for home practice this week:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I will do</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>With whom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Goal Tracking

Looking at your goal tracking sheet, which step will you work on this week?

To complete this step, I will use the following plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>With whom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

"You have to practice something to make it your own!"
The common causes of relapse of drug and alcohol use are stress, situations that involve alcohol or drugs, and distressing symptoms of mental illness.

Warning signs are the small changes that may occur in people’s thinking, feeling, or behaviors that indicate they are at increased risk for having a relapse of their substance use.

Knowing your warning signs and having a plan to deal with them can help you decrease your risk of relapse.
Topic 4
Putting Your Plan for Staying Well into Practice

Congratulations! You have completed your Mental Health Wellness Plan, your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan, or both. Now it is time to put your Plan(s) into action. One of the best ways to start putting your Plans into action is to practice them. Practicing helps ensure that your Plan works and gives you time to fix any problems. Practicing also gives you confidence that you can use the Plan in the future.

You can practice your Plan(s) in this session with your E-IMR practitioner or with another group member. You can also practice with family members, friends, your prescriber, and other members of your treatment team. The more you practice your Plan, the more likely you are to use it to stay well, achieve your goals, and prevent a relapse.

This session will introduce six important subjects to help you put your Plan(s) for Staying Well into practice:

- Practicing Your Mental Health Wellness Plan
- Responding to a warning sign for mental illness
- Responding to a warning sign for alcohol or drug use relapse
- Keeping a copy of your Plan and sharing it with others
- Modifying your Plan for Staying Well in the future

Each of these ideas will be described in more detail throughout this topic. We encourage you to try them with your E-IMR practitioner, or with other group members. Practicing skills during sessions can increase your confidence for using them on your own.
Practicing Your Mental Health Wellness Plan

Here is an example of how Tuan practiced parts of his Plan for Staying Well. With his counselor, Tuan role-played how he would use a relaxation exercise to cope when he felt stressed. He and his brother practiced how they could talk about any warning signs his brother noticed, along with how Tuan could talk to his care providers if he noticed warning signs himself. To practice carrying out a coping strategy for preventing a relapse, Tuan began exercising by riding his bike two to three times a week.

Let’s Talk About It

What would you like to practice from your Plan for Staying Well?

Who could help you practice a skill or strategy from your Plan for Staying Well?

Responding to a warning sign for mental illness

Make sure you have a copy of your Mental Health Wellness Plan and start by reviewing Part 3 of your plan: Responding to Warning Signs for Mental Illness.
The exercise below will give you an opportunity to practice contacting a member of your treatment team.

**Try it Out**

Practicing Your Mental Health Wellness Plan.

Practicing can make you feel more confident, and it can help you be more effective in your life.

**STEP 1**
Review the steps of the skill:

- Identify a treatment team member you could contact if you notice warning sign of mental illness.
- Have a copy of your Plan for Staying Well and your list of warning signs ready when you talk to them.
- Show them your Plan and your warning signs.
- Tell the person which warning signs you’ve noticed.
- Ask if they have noticed any signs. You could say, “Have you noticed any of these signs recently?”
- Ask about any changes the person would recommend or other helpful things you could do to respond to your warning signs.
- Thank the person for helping you work on Your Plan for Staying Well.

**STEP 2**
Watch a demonstration of the skill: Your E-IMR practitioner will demonstrate how to use the steps of this skill.

**STEP 3**
Review the demonstration: Your E-IMR practitioner will ask for feedback about the demonstration. The practitioner will ask questions like: Did I follow the steps? How effective do you think I was?

**STEP 4**
Try it out: Now is your chance to try out the skill. Describe with whom, when, and where you would use the skill. Your E-IMR practitioner will play the part of the other person.

**STEP 5**
Get feedback: After you try it out, your E-IMR practitioner will guide a discussion about: what you did well, how effective your performance was, and (possibly) how you could do it even better.
TOPIC 4  Putting Your Plan for Staying Well into Practice

STEP 6
Continue practice and feedback: Your E-IMR practitioner will help set up more situations to try it out if needed. After each practice, your practitioner will guide a review.

STEP 7
Try it out on your own: Plan with whom, when, and where you could practice this skill on your own.

Try it Out
Practicing Your Plan for Staying Well: Responding to a Warning Sign for Alcohol or Drug Use Relapse

Practicing can make you feel more confident, and it can help you be more effective in your life.

STEP 1
Review the steps of the skill

- Identify a person who supports your sobriety that you could contact if you notice your warning sign of substance use relapse.
- Have a copy of your Plan for Staying Well and your list of warning signs ready when you talk to them.
- Show them your Plan and your warning signs.
- Tell the person which warning signs you’ve noticed.
- Ask the person for their support in not using alcohol or drugs.

Responding to a warning sign for alcohol or drug use relapse

Make sure you have a copy of your Alcohol and Drug Wellness Plan and start by reviewing Part 3 of your Plan: Responding to Warning Signs for Alcohol or Drugs. The first step listed in Part 3 is to contact a person who supports your abstinence.

The exercise below will give you an opportunity to practice contacting a person who supports your abstinence when you notice a warning sign.
TOPIC 4  Putting Your Plan for Staying Well into Practice

➤ Together, problem solve ideas to prevent you from using alcohol or drugs.

➤ Ask the person if they will help you practice a coping skill from your Plan, such as going to a self-help meeting or finding a distraction together.

➤ Thank them for helping you work on Your Plan for Staying Well.

STEP 2
Watch a demonstration of the skill: Your E-IMR practitioner will demonstrate how to use the steps of this skill.

STEP 3
Review the demonstration: Your E-IMR practitioner will ask for feedback about the demonstration. The practitioner will ask questions like: Did I follow the steps? How effective do you think I was?

STEP 4
Try it out: Now is your chance to try out the skill. Describe with whom, when, and where you would use the skill. Your E-IMR practitioner will play the part of the other person.

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Get feedback: After you try it out, your E-IMR practitioner will guide a discussion about: what you did well, how effective your performance was, and (possibly) how you could do it even better.

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Continue practice and feedback: Your E-IMR practitioner will help set up more situations to try it out if needed. After each practice, your practitioner will guide a review.

STEP 7
Try it out on your own: Plan with whom, when, and where you could practice this skill on your own.

Let’s Talk About It
What was helpful about practicing how to respond to a warning sign?
Is there any feedback from practicing that you want to incorporate into your Plan for Staying Well?
Keeping a copy of your Plan and sharing it with others

It is helpful to keep a copy of your Plan where you can easily find it or post it where you will see it regularly. For example, some people carry a copy of their Plan in their wallet and also post it in their room. Some people keep a scanned copy on their smart phone. Most people give copies to everyone involved in the Plan.

For example, Tuan keeps one copy of his Plan for Staying Well in his wallet and one in the desk drawer where he also keeps his pillbox. Whenever he refills his pillbox, he makes a point of looking over his Plan. He gave copies of his Plan to his brother, his counselor, and his doctor.

Modifying your Plan for Staying Well in the future

A Plan for Staying Well is not written in stone. It should be considered a “living document” that is revised and changed over time as needed. A person’s Plan for Staying Well is intended to reflect the most current information they have for staying well and preventing relapses.

There are several reasons someone might want to modify their Plan. For example, the person might move or meet new supportive people to include in the Plan. Or, the person might learn a new strategy for coping with stress and want to include it in the Plan.

Another reason to modify a Plan for Staying Well is to incorporate new information learned from a recent relapse. Sometimes people have a relapse despite having developed a Plan for Staying Well. After the relapse has been dealt with, the person can sit down with supportive people and evaluate what went well, and what did not go well with the Plan. It can be helpful to examine what happened before a relapse, the warning signs that were identified, and any signs that were missed and that should be added to the list.

Let’s Talk About It

Where would you like to keep copies of your Plan for Staying Well?

Who would you like to give copies to?

When and where could you do this?
It is also helpful to review how the Plan got carried out. For example, which parts of the Plan were used and how effective were they? Which parts of the Plan were not used, or did not help? Finally, it is important to discuss what would make the Plan for Staying Well more effective in the future and to write up a new Plan that includes those changes. This new Plan should be shared with the supportive people in the person’s life.

Here are two examples of how people have used their Plan for Staying Well to reduce or avoid a relapse:

Summer’s warning sign of a relapse of mental illness is when she starts to feel down on herself. She describes not feeling anything good and dwelling on the past. In her Plan for Staying Well, she also wrote that feeling down is a warning sign for smoking pot, too. Summer said talking to her sister about what she is feeling instead of keeping it inside helps her when she’s feeling down. She also included scheduling an activity every day that gets her out of the house as a coping skill. Lastly, her Plan for Staying Well included attending a weekly support group as an action she could take to respond to feeling down. She finds the support group helpful because they understand what she is going through.

Leo’s strongest warning signs for drinking alcohol are not being able to sleep and just thinking one drink won’t hurt. When this happens, he uses his coping strategy of relaxed breathing and practices yoga. He also includes taking daily walks with his dog and listening to music. Listening to music also helps Leo cope when the voices get loud. Leo included his doctor in his Plan for Staying Well, and he checks in with his doctor regularly about warning signs of relapse. These are the things that have helped Leo stay well.
I WAS ARRESTED FOR FORGING my doctor’s name on a prescription for pain medication. At the time, I had a good job and no other legal issues so the judge allowed me to go to substance abuse treatment instead of going to jail. In the treatment program, the counselors helped me see that being physically abused as a child and being in a bad car accident had led to developing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The car accident also left me with a back injury that resulted in a lot of pain. The counselors helped me see that I was using opioids to try to cope with the symptoms of PTSD, along with the back pain. Pretty soon I was addicted to opioids, and that’s what led to my forging my doctor’s name on a prescription for Oxycontin.

During treatment, I worked on identifying things that triggered my PTSD symptoms. Things like physical pain, and TV programs about child abuse were triggers for my PTSD and I would react by feeling angry and isolating myself. These reactions were the early warning signs of my PTSD symptoms coming back. I also worked on identifying triggers for wanting to use opioids, and how to cope with cravings to avoid going back to using. I found a number of coping strategies that worked. Some of the coping strategies that were most helpful were talking to other people, mindfulness meditation, and walking.

I put all these things into two wellness plans: one for mental health and one for alcohol and drug use. I identified my sister and my new sponsor as people that could support me. When I left treatment with my plans, I felt prepared to manage my PTSD symptoms and cravings for opioids. Using my plan and reaching out to my social supports helps me feel confident that I can move forward in my recovery.

— Alice
Home Practice

Putting Your Plan for Staying Well into Practice

Choose one of the following options to practice or make one up.

**OPTION 1:** Carry or post copies of your most up-to-date Plan for Staying Well in locations that will remind you of the steps of the Plan.

**OPTION 2:** Parts of your Plan may still benefit from practice. Ask someone to practice a part of your Plan with you.

Make a plan for home practice this week:

- What I will do
- When
- Where
- With whom

Goal Tracking

Looking at your goal tracking sheet, which step will you work on this week?

To complete this step, I will use the following plan:

- When
- Where
- With whom
Key Points • Topic 4
Putting Your Plan for Staying Well into Practice

Practicing your Plan for Staying Well helps ensure that it works and gives you time to fix any problems.

A Plan for Staying Well is a “living document” that can be changed over time as needed.