

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE
FOR
COUNTDOWN TO FREEDOM FOR MEN VIDEO SERIES

RELEASE AND BEYOND: RELAPSE TRIGGERS

VIDEO 5 OF 6

“They can give you all the tools...but if you’re not going to put them to work, then they’re useless.”

Overview

This program is about the most common trigger points that may lead you into old bad habits once you are released. It provides practical ideas on how to cope with familiar situations that may cause you to fall back into criminal or abusive behaviors.

Every year the prison system releases more than 600,000 inmates back into society. Ninety percent of people released from prison return to same neighborhood or situation they left, and in many cases that environment is worse than it was when they left.

Surveys in U.S. state and federal prisons indicate that 51 percent of all inmates were under the influence of drugs or alcohol when they committed the crime that sent them to prison. Only about one-third of these people report getting any kind of treatment during their sentences. If you were a drug offender and haven’t received any treatment inside, you are likely to pick up where you left off and abuse drugs again.

Addictions are illnesses that a person can’t control. An addiction doesn’t need to be drug or alcohol related: we can have addictions to sex or to hanging around with people who are a bad influence. Also, addictions don’t necessarily happen to only one kind of person. Many people may exhibit some kind of negative behavior over and over again and not know why. The answer to overcoming addictive behavior is not only to learn to say no, but to find something to which you can say yes.

Some common triggers for relapse include:

- Stress from relationships or the inability to get employment.
- Being with the wrong people.
- Success that provides money to buy drugs or lulls you into thinking you are ‘cured’ and can indulge in the addictive behavior but not be ensnared by it.

Solutions include:

- Counseling and therapy.
- Reassessing the types of people that you’re spending time with.
- Building up your self-esteem.

Remember that in most cases when somebody finally admits that he is tempted to give into a craving, he has already been struggling with it. The only help may be an in-patient treatment situation. Don't wait to seek help.

Don't be afraid to seek out mental health evaluation and counseling. Seeking counseling doesn't mean that you're crazy. It is often the case that something that happened a long time ago is the root of a current problem. If you don't deal with the root problem, the bad behavior will be triggered again and again.

Remember:

- Triggers can be physical: drugs, alcohol, sex.
- Triggers can be environmental: people, places, activities.
- Triggers can be mind-driven: criminal thinking, mental health.
- The key to overcoming any trigger is to be self-aware and ask for help when you need it.

Presentation Suggestions

Use the board or overhead to write this sentence: *What is an addiction?* Ask students what things people can be addicted to. The list may include drugs, alcohol, a particular relationship, spending money, gambling, or sex. Ask them to discuss what it feels like to have a craving for anything. Have they ever felt that they wanted something so badly that they had to have it?

Give them the **Anticipation Quiz** to complete prior to viewing the video.

Show the program. Encourage students to make changes to the answers they put down for the Anticipation Quiz while watching the program.

At the conclusion of the program, ask students to discuss any changes they made to the answers on the Anticipation Quiz as a result of watching the program. Follow up the discussion with the **Activities**.

Use the **Discussion Questions** to request oral or written responses from the students.

Give the **Quick Quiz** at the conclusion of class and review the quiz questions as a group.

Assign a **Take Away Activity**, if desired.

Anticipation Quiz

Directions: Answer these questions as completely as possible. You will revise your answers as you watch the program.

1. What should you do if you experience an addictive craving?
2. What triggers may set off a relapse into bad old behavior?

3. Are people who seek psychiatric counseling all crazy?
4. What can you do if you experience the urge to fall back into bad behavior?

Answer Key

1. Seek counseling or support.
2. Stress, the wrong people, success.
3. No, they just need help dealing with a difficult aspect of their lives.
4. Seek counseling, reassess the types of people you hang out with, find a way to build up your own self-esteem.

Activities

Activity #1

Title: Identifying Triggers

Format: Individuals

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Paper and pens

1. Ask students to draw a simple map of the neighborhood or town they will be returning to upon release, including familiar locations such as family home, neighborhood restaurants, bars, pool halls, schools, church, and so on. If the person has no place to return to, ask him to draw the locations in a typical town or city that he associates with his former life.
2. Ask each student to mark locations on the map that could provide triggers for relapse, such as their parent's home if they have emotional issues or a local bar where they used to drink or get high with friends.
3. Have each person choose one location that he has marked, and then write a paragraph about why the associations with that place or those people are difficult.
4. Note that all students in the class have associations that they feel could trigger them. Ask them to draw one more location on the map: a friend's house or a community or faith-based organization that will provide them with support.

Activity #2

Title: Saying Yes

Format: Entire group

Time: 25 minutes

Materials: None

1. Write this statement on the board: *Beyond saying no, find ways to say yes.*
2. Explain this statement by saying that to avoid relapse, it's important to say no to bad behaviors, but it's also very helpful to have something to say yes to as well.
3. Ask students to discuss what types of things they can say yes to when they are released. Some ideas might include finding and succeeding in a job, developing positive relationships, exploring faith-related activities, and so on.
4. Have students pick one positive thing they want to put their energies toward upon release and ask them to share it with the group.

Discussion Questions

1. In this program one man mentions that you have to have a counselor or support person you trust to discuss the root of your problems. What makes you trust somebody in authority or in the outside world? What turns you off about people in authority?
2. Alcohol and drugs are not the only types of addictions. People are addicted to spending money, sex, and power, for example. Discuss what kinds of addictions you think exist out there, and how one addiction is similar to another.
3. One person in the program says that there are lots of programs to help, but if you're not willing to take advantage of them, they are useless. What part does your attitude play in your success outside of prison?

Quick Quiz

Note: You may read these questions out loud, allowing time for students to respond, or copy and hand this out as a written exercise. If you read the quiz, write responses on the board/overhead.

Directions: Indicate whether each statement is true or false, according to the program.

1. 90 percent of people released go back to their old environment.
2. Most people who come into prison with an addiction problem get treatment.
3. People who repeat bad behavior are always aware of their motivations.
4. 51 percent of inmates were under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they committed the crime that sent them to prison.
5. Addictions are illnesses that people can't control.

Answer Key

1. T

2. F
3. F
4. T
5. T

Take Away Activity

Imagine you are feeling a craving for something that contributed to being put in prison in the first place, whether it was drugs, sex, violence, money, or whatever. Make a list of the things you would do and the people you might contact for help. If you can't think of any group or person who can help, research possible sources of help and keep that list with you as you get ready to leave prison.