



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

Relapse Prevention Groups

Relapse prevention (RP) is a structured, skills-based approach to maintaining recovery from substance use, developed by Marlatt and Gordon. It rests on a simple idea: relapse is not a random event but a process that can be anticipated, interrupted, and learned from. RP groups teach you to spot your personal high-risk situations, catch the early warning signs, build coping strategies for them, and shift the thinking and lifestyle patterns that raise the risk. The group is the main way RP is delivered in outpatient, IOP, and aftercare settings.

WHO IT'S FOR, AND WHO IT'S NOT

- Best with stable housing, some social support, and no acute withdrawal.
- Not a substitute for medication-assisted treatment when that's indicated.
- Severe active use needs a higher level of care first. In crisis? Call or text 988.

What it's for

People who've reached initial abstinence or big reductions and want to hold the gains.

Across substances: alcohol, opioids, stimulants, cannabis, polysubstance use.

Often in aftercare following inpatient, residential, or intensive outpatient care.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- 1 Sessions run 60 to 90 minutes in a structured, skills-focused format.
- 2 A high-risk situation gets mapped, coping strategies practiced, a plan set for the week.
- 3 Homework: tracking triggers and rehearsing skills between sessions.

CBT, with relapse prevention as a core application, is well established for substance use.

- A 2019 meta-analysis of 30 trials found CBT **beats minimal treatment** and matches other active treatments across substances.¹
- A 2023 review judged CBT a **well-established treatment**, strongest for alcohol, cocaine, and cannabis use.²

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

A lapse isn't a relapse. One slip doesn't undo the work. Bring it back.

Name your high-risk spots. The people, places, and things you can plan around.

Practice before you need it. Rehearsed skills hold up under pressure.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1 Is it a fixed series or ongoing aftercare with rolling membership?
- 2 Does it include Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP)?
- 3 What does it cost, and is medication-assisted treatment supported?

Ready to find a group?

Browse 2,000+ therapy and support groups in all 50 states.

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If you're in crisis, call or text 988.

The Group Guide is a directory, not a clinic. This handout is general education, not medical or mental health advice. Listings are written by group leaders and are not endorsements. Confirm details, cost, and fit with any group you contact. Sources on page 2.



Sources

Relapse Prevention Groups · references keyed to the numbers on page 1.

- 1 Magill, M., Ray, L., Kiluk, B., et al. A meta-analysis of cognitive-behavioral therapy for alcohol or other drug use disorders: treatment efficacy by contrast condition. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* (2019), 87(12), 1093–1105.
- 2 Boness, C. L., Votaw, V. R., Schwebel, F. J., et al. An evaluation of cognitive behavioral therapy for substance use disorders: a systematic review and application of the Society of Clinical Psychology criteria. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* (2023), 30(2), 129–142.

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