

LivingIntegrated®

FIFTEEN PRACTICES FOR LIVING THE LIFE YOU WANT

9

IDENTIFY TRIGGERS AND MAINTENANCE BEHAVIORS

IN THIS PRACTICE:

- What are Triggers?
- Maintenance Behaviors and How They Work
- Review and Update Often
- Practice Nine Assignment

Go to <https://youtu.be/ZSK69DS4oi4> now and watch the introductory video for this Practice.

More than likely, you are a creature of habit. Or better, a creature of habits. In seeking recovery from sex addiction, you're wanting to break bad habits that you've developed.

These habits are self-reinforcing in a way that roots them in your soul. They have a hold on you, meaning they become your sub-conscious go-to response when you're in certain situations.

That's why *will power* alone is not enough to free you from this compulsion. Learning about what prompts you to addictive habits, however, will help you find your way to the recovery you're seeking.

Identifying your triggers and maintenance behaviors is a helpful strategy for coping with the prompts that lead you towards addictive behavior.

WHAT ARE TRIGGERS?

Triggers are situations, people, places, events, memories or any other prompt that lead you—consciously, but more often unconsciously—to seek escape or relief by engaging in your unwanted sexual behaviors.

In earlier stages of the classic recovery movement there were *four primary feelings* that were recognized as triggers for most addicts: **hungry, angry, lonely, and tired**. That's how the acronym **HALT** became so useful to so many as a quick inventory device for recognizing basic triggers.

You will discover you have more, of course, but those four are quite common. For me, two other significantly troublesome triggers are being bored and being overstressed.

In the last few years a number of us have added those two plus two more as the basic, common triggers: **boredom, anxiety, stress and shame**.

When my group was discussing these additional four, we came up with our new acronym, **BASSHALT**. Looks funny, but it works. It works even better if you like to fish for bass.

MAINTENANCE BEHAVIORS AND HOW THEY WORK

Maintenance behaviors are activities, settings and behaviors which are not specific triggers, but set a mood, mindset or emotional climate in which you are much more susceptible to being triggered.

Maintenance behaviors tend to take more work to identify than triggers. But there is reward in identifying what for you are the maintenance behaviors that set you on the road to addictive behaviors.

For me, maintenance behaviors include eating late at night, staying up past 10:30 or so, engaging in flippancy or sarcastic chatter and letting my mind just run back and forth over future events.

Another few of my maintenance behaviors are letting my mind run in circuitous thinking, obsessive thinking, procrastinating on projects and ruminating over whatever I'm working on and the possible outcomes.

And another maintenance behavior is particularly tricky for me because I can slip into this mindset without realizing it: wanting the approval of others and speculating about what others think of me.

These are just some examples from my long list of maintenance behaviors.

For many of us, just being up late at night on the computer is a maintenance behavior. It creates an unfocused time, an emotionally restless situation that results in a reactive, what-can-entertain-me mindset.

Remember back in Practice Seven (Healthy Boundaries) when we discussed surfing websites late at night? For you that might be a maintenance behavior.

It can lead you into a reactive, looking-for-stimuli mindset. The next thing you know, you have an impulse to go looking for something stimulating (look at porn, masturbate, meet someone). A maintenance behavior turned into a trigger and you're off to the races.

REVIEW AND UPDATE OFTEN

Identifying and then reshaping your habits to avoid triggers and maintenance behaviors is an essential life-skill. It adds to the previous Practices of safeguards and boundaries as well as the next Practice we'll look at, self-care.

Think of driving on a highway. As an addict you've been driving on the shoulder. Oh sure, more or less you're moving on down the road, but it's a bumpy, rough sort of drive, and every now and then you just veer right off the road. Depending on the circumstances, you've done a fair amount of damage to your car (your life).

Identifying and avoiding triggers and maintenance behaviors is staying off the shoulder, driving on the smooth pavement. You can still run your car (life) into the ditch, but it's less likely. And your drive is calmer, less chaotic. You'll get to liking it!

Do the assignment for this Practice in several settings. It'll be important to work on it, take some time away while thinking about it, and come back to it. Ask the Spirit to help you see clearly and be honest with yourself.

This is a Practice you'll really want to come back and carefully review and update deep into your recovery. Really, it's life giving.

ASSIGNMENT FOR ENGAGING THE NINTH PRACTICE— IDENTIFY TRIGGERS AND MAINTENANCE BEHAVIORS

1. Review your compulsive sexual acting out behaviors. Ask yourself these questions and write down your responses.
 - What time of day do you tend to engage in sexual behaviors?
 - What days of the week do you tend to engage in sexual behaviors?
 - Are there places (specific rooms, locations, parts of town, cities, etc.) where you tend to engage in sexual behaviors more than others?
 - Are there seasons in the year that you have seen yourself more sexually active or more tempted to be sexual?
 - Are there certain types of clothing (worn by others or worn by yourself) that arouse you sexually?
 - Are there certain scenarios that run through your mind, more often than other scenarios, that make you feel sexual and lead you to behave sexually, either with yourself alone or with others?
 - Are you more likely to feel sexual or use sexual behavior when lonely? Angry or emotionally destabilized? Physically tired? When you're either hungry or have eaten certain foods?
 - Are there certain people (other than your spouse if you have one) who cause you to feel sexually aroused, who capture your imagination and desire?
2. After having thought through these questions, take some additional time to sort through any and all thoughts and insights that have come up for you; note any other factors involved in the lead up to your compulsive behaviors as well
3. Now make two lists:
 - List all situations, elements or specific factors which lead you into feeling the compulsive urge to misuse your sexuality; these are your *triggers*.
 - List all activities and situations that create a mood or mindset where you become restless, reactive and more easily triggered; these are your *maintenance behaviors*.
4. Put these lists where you will see them; review them regularly and often
5. Make all necessary changes to your schedule and routines to avoid triggers and maintenance behaviors.
6. Share with someone (sponsor, therapist, recovery group or friend) what you've learned about your triggers and your maintenance behaviors and the changes you're making.

7. Periodically come back and review, edit and add to these two lists; you'll want to cultivate this Practice for quite some time, deep into your recovery.

TWO BIBLE TEXTS FOR IDENTIFYING TRIGGERS & MAINTENANCE BEHAVIORS

“So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

2 Timothy 2:22

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

James 3:13-18

PRAYER*

O My Creator, I'm now willing that You should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to You and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.

**Note: this is actually the “Step Steven Prayer” from AA*

IN THE NEXT PRACTICE,

we will explore living a life of self-care.

