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What Am I Using for Relief?

What am I reaching for and why?

We all look for relief when something feels difficult. Relief itself is not the problem. The problem begins when immediate relief becomes the main way I make decisions. The goal is to understand what I am reaching for, what I am trying to change inside myself, and what the pattern gives me in the short term.

Relief asks: "How can I feel better right now?"
Recovery asks: "What choice moves me toward the life I want to build, and the person I want to be?"

What Am I Reaching For?

- ☐ Alcohol or drugs
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Sex or pornography
- ☐ Relationships
- ☐ Attention or validation
- ☐ Social media or screens
- ☐ Shopping or spending
- ☐ Work
- ☐ Exercise
- ☐ Control
- ☐ Anger
- ☐ Isolation
- ☐ Gambling or gaming
- ☐ Sleep
- ☐ Fantasy or daydreaming
- ☐ Reassurance seeking
- ☐ Constant busyness
- ☐ Other: _____

The Relief Pattern

1. **What am I feeling or experiencing rightnow?**
2. **What do I want relief from?**
3. **What do I usually reach for when I feel this way?**
4. **What does this give me in the short term?**
5. **What does it cost me afterward?**

Same function, different behavior: I stopped using _____. What, if anything, have I started using to accomplish the same thing?

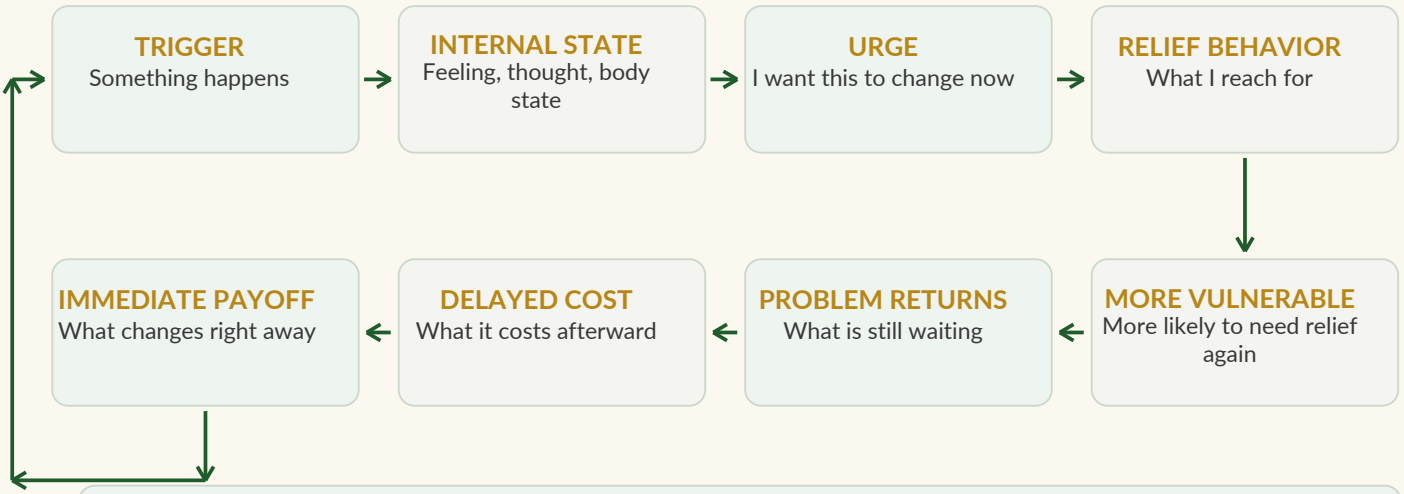
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What Am I Using for Relief?

The relief loop

A relief pattern can become self-reinforcing. Something happens, discomfort rises, I reach for the fastest available change, and the immediate payoff teaches my brain to reach for the same response again. Seeing the whole loop makes it easier to interrupt it.

The Relief Loop



The behavior is only one part of the pattern. The loop is maintained by what happens before it and what the relief teaches me afterward.

Run One Pattern Through the Loop

1. What triggered me?
2. What happened inside me?
3. What urge showed up?
4. What did I reach for?
5. What changed immediately?
6. What did it cost me afterward?
7. What problem was still there?
8. How did this leave me more vulnerable next time?

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What Am I Using for Relief?

Relief, restoration, avoidance, and compulsion

Not every form of relief is unhealthy. The more useful question is what function the behavior serves, how often I rely on it, how flexible I am about choosing it, and what it costs me. The same behavior can restore me in one situation and become avoidant or compulsive in another.

What Kind of Relief Is This?

RELIEF
Changes how I feel for a while. It may be neutral or useful, depending on what happens next.

RESTORATION
Helps me recover enough to return to life with more capacity, clarity, or steadiness.

AVOIDANCE
Helps me postpone, numb, distract from, or escape something that still needs my attention.

COMPULSION
Feels increasingly hard to choose not to do, despite consequences or conflict with my values.

How Do I Tell Where Mine Falls?

FUNCTION
What is it doing for me?

FREQUENCY
How often do I rely on it?

RIGIDITY
How hard is it to choose something else?

COST
What does it cost me afterward?

1. **What relief in my life genuinely restores me?**
2. **What do I use mostly to avoid something I need to face?**
3. **What feels harder to choose not to do than I want to admit?**
4. **What cost tells me a behavior may be moving toward compulsion?**

The goal is not to eliminate relief. The goal is to notice when relief is helping me recover and when it is helping me disappear.

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What Am I Using for Relief?

What is underneath the urge?

Fear can sit underneath relief-seeking, but it is not the only possibility. An urge may be an attempt to get distance from shame, grief, loneliness, boredom, resentment, exhaustion, emptiness, rejection, inadequacy, overwhelm, or simply the wish for a break from myself.

What May Be Underneath It?

- ☐ Fear
- ☐ Shame
- ☐ Grief
- ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ Boredom
- ☐ Resentment
- ☐ Exhaustion
- ☐ Emptiness
- ☐ Rejection
- ☐ Inadequacy
- ☐ Overwhelm
- ☐ Need for excitement
- ☐ Need for a break from myself
- ☐ Uncertainty
- ☐ Anger
- ☐ Other: _____

What does this allow me NOT to feel, know, say, accept, or do?

Look Under the Urge

1. **What was happening just before the urge showed up?**
2. **Which feeling or internal state is hardest for me to stay with?**
3. **What am I afraid will happen if I do not reach for relief?**
4. **What might this behavior be protecting me from knowing, saying, accepting, or doing?**

Same function, different behavior: I stopped using _____. What have I started using, or considered using, to create the same escape, comfort, control, excitement, or numbness?

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What Am I Using for Relief?

What do I actually need?

Instead of asking only, "How do I stop doing this?" it can help to ask what I am unsuccessfully trying to get. What I want in the moment, what I am trying to feel, and what I actually need are not always the same thing.

Want, Feeling, Need

WHAT I WANT	WHAT I AM TRYING TO FEEL	WHAT I MAY ACTUALLY NEED
Reassurance	Safe or certain	To tolerate uncertainty and stay grounded in what I know
To isolate	Space or relief from demands	Rest, a boundary, or a direct request for space
Control	Certain or protected	To accept what I cannot control and choose the next right action

What Need May Be Asking for Attention?

- ☐ Connection
- ☐ Reassurance
- ☐ Meaning
- ☐ A boundary
- ☐ Rest
- ☐ Belonging
- ☐ Structure
- ☐ To tell the truth
- ☐ Safety
- ☐ Fun
- ☐ Space to grieve
- ☐ Toask for help
- ☐ To tolerate disappointment
- ☐ To accept what I cannot change
- ☐ To make a decision
- ☐ Other: _____

My Pattern

1. **What do I want right now?**

2. **What am I hoping that will make me feel?**

3. **What do I actually need, even if the answer is less immediate or less comfortable?**

Sometimes the need is not for a different feeling. Sometimes the need is to face, tolerate, grieve, accept, ask, tell the truth, or act.

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What Am I Using for Relief?

Building a different response / Before I Act

A different response is not simply replacing a "bad" coping behavior with a "good" one. Sometimes the work is to stop, stay with the feeling, tell the truth, grieve, accept a limit, have a difficult conversation, ask for help, or allow an urge to pass without obeying it.

- ☐ Pause and do nothing for a moment
- ☐ Tolerate the feeling
- ☐ Tell the truth
- ☐ Grieve
- ☐ Accept a limit
- ☐ Have the difficult conversation
- ☐ Ask for help
- ☐ Let the urge pass

Build My Response

When I notice: _____

I am usually feeling: _____

My automatic relief behavior is: _____

What I am really hoping to get is: _____

What I may actually need is: _____

A deliberate response I can choose is: _____

Someone I can tell is: _____

Before I Act

- ☐ Am I trying to solve a problem, or only change how I feel for a moment?
- ☐ What feeling am I unwilling to have right now?
- ☐ Which of my values belongs in this decision?
- ☐ Can I tolerate some discomfort long enough to choose deliberately?
- ☐ What would the person I want to become do here?
- ☐ If I do this, what will I be left with afterward?
- ☐ Can I give myself ten minutes before I decide?

Wanting relief is human. The goal is not to eliminate every uncomfortable feeling. Some feelings need to be felt, understood, tolerated, or responded to rather than immediately escaped.

Growth begins when discomfort stops getting the final vote.