



## Before and After: Planning for and Coping with Special Events

VIDEO INTRODUCTION: <https://youtu.be/GIZF2V-TIT4>

This is a multi-part exercise to first plan for then effectively cope during a future event or special day where it may be challenging to manage substance use, mental health, or other issues. This exercise can be useful for holidays, anniversaries, and other special occasions where unordinary or unexpected challenges may surface. Preparation is key in such situations, so thinking about things beforehand makes it much more effective than going into situations blindly and hoping things work out for the best on their own. The probability of preventing setbacks in our progress is much greater when we take the time to identify risks and challenges and then develop the right set of coping skills and supports that we may need to thrive and survive whatever may come our way. Being prepared can be a lifesaver.

### Complete and Discuss the Following:

**What is the event?** (Is it a holiday, an anniversary, a day where something important may happen (for example the day to go to court or the day you have to speak in public) – This can be anything where there may be internal setback factors (like difficult emotions) and external setback factors (like seeing a person you have not seen in a while who is difficult to face)

EVENT:

**What's your basic PLAN for this special event?** – What are you going to do that day of the event (For example, visit family, stay home alone and binge watch shows, etc.) – Share some detail:

PLAN:

**PROPER PREPARATION PREVENTS POOR PERFORMANCE**



**Part 1 - What are some potential CHALLENGES?** What may make it hard for you to manage substance use and/or mental health issues effectively? Answer and discuss each type of challenge below (Some may be not applicable but be open minded to every possibility):

PEOPLE – Who might you run into that may stumble your progress if you are not careful? (*For example: “If I see \_\_\_\_\_ things could get ugly”*)

PLACES – Where might you find yourself on this day that could be difficult for you? (*Example: If we end up at my aunt’s house, there’s always a ton of people overdrinking by the end of the night*)

THINGS – What else might you come across that could trigger you or present a challenge? (*For example, specific conversations, political arguments, reminders from childhood that bring bad memories*)

THOUGHTS – What negative or hurtful thoughts may come up at this event/situation? Think of things that may run through your mind: *Examples “No one cares about me” “I need to get high to get through this” “These people are getting on my nerves I am about to lose control”*

FEELINGS- What feelings may come up that may be difficult? (*Sadness, loneliness, frustration, jealousy, embarrassment, shyness, anger, resentment, shame, other?*)

TRAUMA/HURT/PAIN – Are there any sensitive situations from the past that may come up? How might that impact you?

BEHAVIORS – What negative behaviors might you be tempted to engage in? (Substance related, fighting, arguing, lying, insulting, running away, self harm)



**Part 2 - Coping, surviving and thriving** – It is always best to match your coping skills and supports specific to your personal situation. In other words, what works in one situation for one person may be different from person to person. Some coping skills are better for emotions, and some are better for behaviors.

*For example*, if in the FEELINGS section above a person identified “Loneliness” as a challenge: A specific coping skill may be having a friend available to text during lonely moments at the event.

**One way to write it out is in a “if- then” format:**

*For example*, “*If I remember some of the TRAUMA/HURT/PAIN from my past, I will step outside, take some slow deep breaths to calm myself and if that doesn’t work, I will call my best friend to help me calm down*”

**GO BACK and PREPARE:** With this in mind, go back through the list above and identify at least one coping skill or strategy you will use for each CHALLENGE you identified for Part 1. Discuss as a group

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**Part 3 – After: (OPTIONAL)** – For more advanced groups, have everyone write down their answers and when the event is over when the group re-convenes in the future, go back AFTER and review how the event went.

**Some discussion questions for discussion days AFTER the event is over:**

**How did it go overall?**

**What (if any) challenges actually came up during the event?**

**What worked for you and what helped you?**

**Was it helpful to be prepared ahead of time? If so, what did you learn for next time?**