

Recovery Loop Map

Understand your behavioral cycle to break it before it begins

This reference card provides a quick visual overview of the compulsive behavior cycle. The goal isn't to memorize the stages, but to recognize the cycle while you're inside it — so you know which stage you're in and how to break the loop before it completes.

- 1 Print it and hang it:** Place it somewhere you see daily (bedside, desk, or as your phone lock screen).
- 2 Identify your stage:** When you feel a sudden urge, pause and pinpoint which stage you are currently experiencing.
- 3 Apply the break action:** Instantly execute the specific recommendation listed for that stage.
- 4 Use as a quick guide:** Refer to it as an immediate tool without needing to read everything at once.

Recommendations for the printed version:

- Print it in A4 size and hang it in a prominent, easily visible space.
- Keep a digital copy or image on your phone lock screen for constant, rapid reminders.
- Mark the specific stage that currently represents your biggest challenge with a colored marker.
- Review the map weekly to check if your primary challenge area or pattern has shifted.

Every compulsive behavior follows this five-stage cycle. Learning to spot it is the first step to breaking it.



Stage 1: Trigger

START

An external or internal event that activates the urge.

Examples: Stress, loneliness, physical exhaustion, specific locations, or times of day.

Break Action: **Leave the triggering place or change your activity immediately.**



Stage 2: Urge

WARNING

A strong, rising physical or emotional feeling of needing to execute the behavior.

Examples: Physical tension, intrusive repetitive thoughts, or intense mental preoccupation.

Break Action: **Breathe 4-7-8 for two minutes — remind yourself the urge is a wave that will pass.**



Stage 3: Response

ACTION

The actual behavioral choice — either giving in or executing a preventative action.

Examples: Carrying out the pattern, delaying the impulse, or shifting to a healthy substitute.

Break Action: **Call a trusted supportive person or execute your structured Emergency Plan.**



Stage 4: Relief

ILLUSION

A false, temporary feeling of emotional comfort or stress-reduction immediately after the action.

Examples: Fleeting tension relief, temporary distraction, or forgetting the issue briefly.

Break Action: **Remember: this relief is short-lived and false — profound regret always follows.**



Stage 5: Repeat

LOOP

The cycle resets itself because the behavioral loop was not consciously disrupted.

Examples: Returning to Stage 1 triggers within hours, days, or weeks of the response.

Break Action: **Document the experience in your trigger journal — gather data to adapt.**

✦ The Strategic Break Point

The absolute most powerful point to break this cycle is at **Stage 2 (Urge)**. This is the precise moment where your conscious attention can intervene, helping you choose a healthy response and protect your recovery path.

"Seeing the cycle is the beginning of breaking it."

Every single time you pause, observe, and successfully disrupt the loop at any stage, you are actively weakening the neural pathway of the compulsive behavior.

Progress is built in those small, silent moments of choice.

Do not demand absolute perfection from yourself — focus your dedication on consistency.

Access more visual evaluations and recovery maps:

tamkinly.com/recovery

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Return to who you already are