



Preventing Relapse

Good treatment helps people with psychosis get better.

A *relapse* is when psychosis comes back after you've recovered.

Getting good treatment helps prevent psychosis from coming back.

We presented the formula for good treatment earlier in this toolkit. Here it is again:

Good treatment = medication + support + skills

You can reduce your risk of relapse by taking antipsychotic medication, using the skills in this toolkit, and having helpful support.

Even if you are getting good treatment and doing everything right, there is still a risk that psychosis may come back.

Use the skills in this section to:

- Control the triggers for psychosis (page 67)
- Recognize the early-warning signs of psychosis (page 69)
- Prevent psychosis from coming back (page 71)

These skills can help you stay well.



Understanding

Using a “Relapse Prevention Plan” Worksheet

Here’s an example of a completed relapse prevention plan. Use this step-by-step plan to create your own relapse prevention plan.

SAM’S RELAPSE PREVENTION PLAN

NAME:

- Sam Packard

TRIGGERS I AM TRYING TO CONTROL:

1. Making sure I go to bed regularly at 11pm and sleep well
2. Preparing in advance for a job interview I have coming up

MY EARLY-WARNING SIGNS ARE:

1. Sleeping only 5 hours a night for 3 nights in a row
2. Not wanting to see my friends for 3 days in a row
3. Not showering or washing up for 3 days in a row

NOTE: Any other unusual changes should also be noted.

WHEN I HAVE ANY OF THESE EARLY-WARNING SIGNS, I WILL DO THE FOLLOWING:

1. Inform my case manager (555-4441) and my mother (555-9822) immediately
2. Increase my dose of antipsychotic medication by 0.5mg as pre-arranged by my psychiatrist
3. Arrange a problem-solving session with my case manager and/or mother as soon as possible
4. Use relaxation methods to keep myself as calm as possible

PHONE NUMBERS OF MY HEALTH PROFESSIONAL(S):

- Daniel Wong (case manager) 555-4441
- Dr. Pamela Sun (psychiatrist) 555-9980

PHONE NUMBERS OF MY SUPPORT PERSON(S):

- Julia Packard (mother) 555-9822
- Gordon Singh (neighbour) 555-8156

IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY, I WILL DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Contact my case manager (555-4441) and my mother (555-9822) immediately
- If unable to reach my case manager or mother, then I will go to the hospital emergency room



Understanding

1. Controlling Triggers For Psychosis

Many different factors contribute to psychosis. Some of these factors, such as your genes, can't be changed. Other factors *can* be changed. These are **triggers** for psychosis. For example, a stressful situation can trigger a psychotic experience. However, you can deactivate this trigger by using problem-solving and stress-management skills. Recreational drug use can trigger psychosis, but you can deactivate this trigger by limiting the use of drugs.

Some of the more common triggers for psychosis include:

- Break-up of a relationship
- Family arguments
- Problems with friends
- Problems at work or school
- Death of a loved one
- Drug or alcohol use
- Poor sleep

Look back at the last time you experienced psychosis. What was happening at the time? Did you experience life changes? Was something making you stressed? Had your lifestyle changed?



Your Turn!

Your Turn!

Are any triggers currently increasing your risk of psychosis? Are you experiencing or anticipating any stressful situations? Might your drug use or sleep habits increase your risk?

In the space below write down anything that might be one of your triggers. You can use the skills in this toolkit to start to control them. *Note: Please realize that following through on a plan to control triggers may be hard to accomplish during a bad flare-up of psychosis.*



Write Down

MY TRIGGERS FOR PSYCHOSIS

MY PLAN TO CONTROL THESE TRIGGERS



Understanding

2. Recognizing the Early-warning Signs of Psychosis

Many people experience changes in behaviour, thoughts, or feelings before any more obvious symptoms of psychosis appear. **These are often called “early-warning signs”, signals that something is not right.** These are the experiences that may have occurred before you started to hear voices or became preoccupied with unrealistic thoughts.

Common early-warning signs:

- Sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling anxious or tense
- Finding it difficult to concentrate
- Feeling more sensitive to sounds, lights, or colours
- Feeling down or sad
- Missing work or school
- Feeling “high” or excited
- Talking more or less than usual
- Not enjoying hobbies or other usual fun activities
- Not taking care of personal hygiene
- Not wanting to go out or spend time with family or friends
- Becoming easily annoyed at others
- Feeling suspicious of other people
- Avoiding things you need to do

Think back to the time before you developed psychosis, when you first noticed that you weren’t doing as well as usual. What were the first changes you noticed?

Knowing what early-warning signs you had before developing psychosis will help you recognize what to look for. The same changes may signal a future relapse.



Understanding

Early-warning signs may be a normal response to stress. You might start to experience these changes in a stressful situation. Responding to early-warning signs and lowering your stress both help reduce the risk of a relapse.

Examining early-warning signs is most helpful when you can be specific about them. Stating that you had “problems sleeping” before psychosis is not specific. It is better to state that you “slept only five hours a night for one solid week.” Ask your Support Person to help you write your early-warning signs so that they are specific.

You want to catch these signs as early as possible. Stay on the cautious side at first and accept that you may have some “false alarms.” You can change your list of early-warning signs when you have more experience.

Your Turn!

What were your early-warning signs before you experienced symptoms of psychosis? If you have experienced psychosis more than once, is there a pattern to the type of early-warning signs that you have experienced?

Ask other people who were around you if they noticed any early-warning signs. Try to write down any early-warning signs in a way that allows other people to observe them (for example, *crying every day for three days in a row* instead of *feeling sad for three days*). Be specific in writing down your early-warning signs. Try to think of the earliest warning signs that you experienced.

Write down the three most obvious early-warning signs you have experienced.



Your Turn!



Write Down

MY EARLY-WARNING SIGNS FOR PSYCHOSIS

1	_____
2	_____
3	_____



Understanding

3. Preventing Psychosis from Coming Back

Use your list of early-warning signs to watch for any of these changes in the future. Early-warning signs indicate that psychosis might be coming back.

It's good to be alert to any other unusual changes. Early-warning signs might change over time. Check with your health professionals and Support Person if you notice any unusual changes.

You need a plan for when you experience early-warning signs. The purpose of this plan is to help prevent the psychosis from coming back. This is your **Relapse Prevention Plan**. With a good relapse prevention plan you can take specific steps to prevent a relapse from happening.



Your Turn!

Your Turn!

Work with your Support Person and health professionals to come up with your own plan. Talk with the health professional who is prescribing your medication to see if any pre-arranged medication strategies are right for you.

You should also come up with an emergency plan in case things suddenly get really bad. You can use this plan if you have thoughts of suicide, or if you can't cope with your symptoms.



Write Down

MY RELAPSE PREVENTION PLAN

Name:

Triggers I am trying to control:

My early-warning signs are:

When I have any of these early-warning signs, I will do the following:

NOTE: Any other unusual changes should also be acted on.

Phone numbers of my health professional(s):

Phone numbers of my Support Person(s):

In case of an emergency, I will do the following:





Understanding

Using Your Relapse Prevention Plan...

After you have filled in this relapse prevention plan, you should print it and **keep it someplace handy, such as your wallet.**

It's important that your **health professionals, Support Person, and family or very close friends also have a copy.** You will be more likely to catch early-warnings signs if you have a number of people watching for them.

Your relapse prevention plan needs to be **checked regularly** in order to:

- Update your triggers. Triggers may change over time.
- Update your early-warning signs, being very cautious at first.
- Update your plan as needed (e.g., phone numbers).