Identifying High Risk Situations

One of the first steps in recovery is identifying high risk situations and triggers that could lead you back to using. By identifying high risk situations and triggers, you are gaining control of your urges. A great analogy of the control you’ll gain comes from boxing. When preparing for a fight, it’s important that you study the opponent; learn how he moves in the ring and what his weaknesses are. Preparation and strategy help you know when to bob and when to weave; when to kick and when to punch. The same preparation and strategy can help you learn how to avoid high risk situations and triggers and how to approach them when you are unable to avoid them.

Categories of High Risk Situations
Pull out your worksheet titled Categories of High Risk Situations. You’ll notice the worksheet includes very specific categories of risky situations and asks you to categorize them as low, moderate, or high risk.

Why is it important to distinguish between low, moderate, and high risk situations?
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How does identifying low to high risk situations fit in with relapse prevention?
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Let’s get started! First, let’s consider what makes a risky situation low risk. Low risk is considered a situation where you are not likely to use alcohol or drugs or have had minimal or no experience using under this circumstance. You’re confident you can use effective coping skills to avoid using alcohol or other drugs.

What are some low risk situations for you?
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The next degree of risk is moderate. Moderate risk is considered a situation where you could be triggered to use alcohol or drugs or have had some experience using under this circumstance. You are somewhat confident that you can use effective coping skills to avoid using alcohol or other drugs in this situation, but need more practice or skills training.
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What are some moderate risk situations for you?

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The final degree of risk is the high risk situation. High risk is considered a situation where you are likely to use alcohol or drugs or have had extensive experience using under this circumstance. It also may be the case that drugs or alcohol are easily accessible. You may find it difficult to use effective coping skills to avoid using.

What are some of your high risk situations?

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You’ve done a great job identifying examples of low, moderate, and high risk situations! We are going to work to develop a more thorough list of your low, moderate, and high risk situations by completing the worksheet. The first section of a special type of risky situation that you might not have thought of before as being risky: the way you feel inside. For example, you might be tempted to use drugs or alcohol when you are feeling angry or depressed, or even when you are feeling in pain. Go through each of the risky situations and evaluate them as low, moderate, or high risk situations.

Were any of your answers surprising to you? Why or why not?

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The second section of risky situations focuses on situations that involve other people. This includes things such as feeling tempted to use when you are arguing with a loved one, or simply being in the same room as others who are using. Go through each of the risky situations and evaluate them as low, moderate, or high risk situations.

Were any of your answers from this group surprising to you? Why or why not?

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The final section of risky situations focuses on **common triggers and environmental cues**. Examples include being triggered by seeing a billboard for alcohol or recalling that you always used on holidays and special occasions and feeling the urge to use on those days. Go through each of the risky situations and evaluate them as low, moderate, or high risk situations.

Were any of your answers from this group surprising to you? Why or why not?

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The next set of handouts asks you to write down your own specific high risk situations within each of the categories you just went through. For example, if you checked that Temporal Cues were high risk, a specific high risk temporal cue could be the 90 day anniversary of a sober date. It’s okay if you don’t have a high risk situation in all the categories; just select the categories that seem to be your strongest trigger or cue for drinking or drug use.

Why is it important to identify specific high risk situations?

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Were there any high risk situations you hadn’t realized were high risk?

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Are there high risk situations you are more likely to encounter? Which ones?

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Now that you have identified your specific high risk situations, what is the next step in your recovery?

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