Understanding my triggers

Notice the pattern and plan a different response

A trigger is information

A person, place, thought, feeling or situation may bring up an urge to drink. Noticing this gives you something to plan for. A trigger does not mean drinking is inevitable, or that you have done something wrong.

Look at what happened before the urge

Consider where you were, who was there, what you were thinking and what you needed. Keep it specific. Example: "I was alone after work, had not eaten and felt hurt by a message."

Match the response to the need

In that example, food and a call with someone supportive may be useful first steps. You might also step away from an alcohol-focused setting, postpone a difficult conversation or attend a meeting.

Plan before the next difficult moment

Write a simple if-then plan: "If I feel lonely on Friday evening, I will call Sam and use my backup support if Sam is unavailable." Review it with your counsellor or recovery contact. This exercise supports planning; it is not a test.

Before you change your drinking

If you drink heavily or regularly, need alcohol to feel steady, or have had withdrawal before, speak with a doctor before stopping or sharply reducing. Alcohol withdrawal can be life-threatening. Shaking, sweating or feeling unwell after cutting down needs prompt medical advice. Call 000 for seizures, severe confusion or hallucinations.

Australia: Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline 1800 250 015 (free, confidential advice). Lifeline 13 11 14 (24/7 crisis support). Call 000 if there is immediate danger or a medical emergency.

Make it personal

Write a few words. You can leave questions blank or talk them through with someone.

My situation, person, place or feeling linked with drinking...

What I was thinking and what I needed...

My early signs that an urge is building...

If this happens again, my first action will be...

My support person, backup and review date...

You do not have to do this alone.

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Safety and support sources: healthdirect.gov.au/alcoholism; adf.org.au/insights/safely-withdrawing-alcohol/; lifeline.org.au/131114; medicarementalhealth.gov.au/provider/national-alcohol-and-other-drug-hotline-16469. Checked 1 October 2026.