

When it comes to making changes we will often have urges to stop, cravings to go back to bad habits and slips along the road to success. **Perseverance** is the continuing toward a goal in spite of discouragement or opposition. It is about determination, resilience and tenacity. We know that these qualities can be learned, practiced and strengthened within all of us.

Practically everyone trying to realize a goal will experience at least one **slip** or lapse. Most research about making changes suggest that somewhere between 58 and 71 % of people will slip at least once in the first month of trying to change. The average number of slips is 6. The number of slips does not predict whether or not you will eventually reach your goal.

A slip is usually preceded by a **trigger**, a high risk situation that increases the likelihood that you'll return to your old thinking or behavior. Triggers can be practically anything that has historically been associated with the problem--from moods and behaviors; to places, people and physical cravings.

Knowing your triggers can allow you to avoid or minimize your time around your biggest triggers. Building your confidence so resisting temptations is easier. This may allow you to be around some of these places, people and cravings more safely.

Your imagination and memory can be a good way to practice for **high-risk situations**. You can imagine or remember situations where your temptations were strong and how you might handle them differently, in keeping with your current goals. Rehearse the scene in your head, and think of the best ways to react to the situation. Eventually you can practice with someone you can trust. This kind of practice can prepare you for when triggers come around. It will help you be better prepared and not caught off guard.

Pay attention to your feelings when you **practice**. Do you feel embarrassed? Fearful that you will lose friends or make someone angry? Weak? These thoughts and feelings will provide clues to some underlying psychological vulnerabilities. Identifying and challenging this negative self-talk and countering old behavior is important in reaching your goals.

Something else to practice is the **"if-then"** situations. That is practice scenes with "If this happens, I will do that". If someone offers me a drink, then I will ask for a diet soda. If they ask why I am not drinking then I will say I am driving."

You can try **"urge surfing"**. This comes from a Buddhist understanding of cravings as an inevitable part of life. Since some unpleasant urges will occur, we have to learn to accept the suffering they cause and develop a more mindful perspective. Then we can ride them out; we can let them go without giving in. Imagine the urge as a wave that you

see slowly building and then cresting and then washing on shore. All urges are temporary, they go away with time.

Responding constructively after a slip and prevent it from becoming a fall is important. A high-risk situation arises, and at that point you have two choices. One would be to respond by using the techniques just outlined; and feel more confident about your ability to maintain your goal or resolution. The second leads to danger. If you respond to the trigger ineffectively, then feel weak, less confident, embarrassed and/or guilty; you are back in a pattern that leads to a fall. How you respond to the slip--not the slip itself--is a sign of what has been learned in your process of change. Slips can be very informative and even necessary. They can help you create a solid plan for future challenges. Identify the triggers--people, places, thoughts or emotions. What is the healthy opposite of the behavior when you slipped. Write the triggers and opposite behavior or thought on a card and keep it with you for the next time.

Identifying people to have on your team can make you reaching your goal more likely. Look for people who can be supportive and hold you accountable without being critical. We do not need people who will fuss or yell. We need encouraging people who will have reasonable expectations without making excuses for you.