

Understanding Instant Relief Traps

What to Know

Instant relief traps are actions or behaviors that offer a quick but temporary escape from emotional distress. While they may seem helpful now, they often lead to bigger problems and can negatively impact your mental health and wellbeing in the long run. Imagine eating an entire tray of cookies when you are really hungry. You might feel better now but overeating sweets can make you feel sick later. For that reason, it's best to avoid instant relief traps.

Another example of an instant relief trap is when someone turns to alcohol or drugs when they are feeling down. Though using substances might make them feel better for a while, using alcohol or drugs to cope has negative long-term effects, including potential legal problems, addiction, or getting into trouble at home or school. Some traps, like cutting yourself or engaging in destructive behaviors like hitting or breaking things, can be harmful and create additional problems.

What to Do

Create a list of activities or behaviors you engage in when stressed, upset, or overwhelmed. Be honest and include everything that comes to mind, whether it's something you've tried or considered trying.

Review your list and distinguish between activities that provide instant relief but may lead to more problems and those that are healthier ways of coping. For

instance, playing a game, drawing, or taking a walk might offer relief without causing harm. Put a * next to healthy ways to cope.

Highlight or circle the activities on your list that fall into the category of instant relief traps—actions that might provide immediate relief but could potentially lead to negative consequences or harm.

Think about the potential consequences of engaging in these instant relief traps. Write down how these actions might affect your mental health, relationships, and overall wellbeing in the future.

Challenge the instant relief traps on your list. Ask yourself the following questions. What emotions or situations trigger the urge to engage in these behaviors?

Are there healthier alternatives or coping strategies you can use instead of these traps?

How can you replace these harmful behaviors with positive, constructive actions? Be specific.

Take action! Commit to avoiding instant relief traps when faced with distressing emotions or situations. Instead, focus on practicing healthier coping strategies that offer relief without causing harm. Consider activities like journaling, deep breathing exercises, talking to a trusted person, engaging in hobbies, or seeking help from a loved one. What will you do?

Formulate a plan for dealing with challenging emotions or situations without choosing instant relief traps. Write down a step-by-step plan and keep it somewhere accessible for future reference. For example, you might take a picture and save it on your phone.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Need some help formulating your plan? Here's Miguel's plan:

1. *When I'm upset, I'll leave the room and take some deep breaths.*
2. *I'll talk to my mom and come up with solutions.*
3. *I'll shoot some hoops to release tension and feel less stressed out.*
4. *I'll watch a funny video on my phone for 10 minutes until I cool down.*
5. *I'll write in my journal for 15 minutes to vent and get my anger out on paper.*

Remember, while instant relief traps might provide a temporary escape, they often lead to bigger problems. By identifying these traps, challenging their influence, and replacing them with healthier coping strategies, you can take control of your well-being and build resilience while managing difficult emotions.

Believe you can't overcome these traps on your own? Write down 2-3 names of people that can help you.

Reflections on This Exercise

What was challenging about this exercise? Be specific.

What was surprising about this exercise? Be specific.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
