Relapse Review

Turning a relapse into research.

A relapse that goes unexamined tends to repeat. Work these through in a journal within twenty-four to seventy-two hours — not in the first hour, when shame is doing the talking, and not two weeks later, when the details have gone. Two rules make the difference: write about what you did, not about what you are, and when it is written, read it out loud to someone.

01 The facts

The record first. Meaning comes later.

- When it started, when it ended, how long it ran.
- Where I was, and what gave me access — device, app, room, route.
- One incident, or a run of days? How it compares with last time.

02 Rewind the tape

Not one decision. A chain of small ones that each looked harmless.

- What was off in the last seventy-two hours — sleep, workload, conflict, money, isolation, disciplines, time with my wife.
- Five steps back from the act, one decision at a time, until one of them feels completely ordinary.
- Which of those never felt like recovery decisions when I made them.
- The earliest point I knew, even faintly. The red flags I passed up.

03 What I was carrying

- The feeling underneath, named specifically — past "stressed" and past "tired."
- Who it was about, or what it was about.
- The conversation I did not have.

04 What it did for me

A behavior cannot be replaced until its job is known.

- What it gave me in the moment — escape, comfort, revenge, proof I still matter, permission to stop feeling.
- The real need underneath. What the actual thing would have been.
- What it promised and did not deliver, and what it cost in time, money, sleep, presence.

05 The permission I gave myself

- The exact sentence in my head that made it acceptable — word for word, not cleaned up.
- The moment I decided I would be fine.
- The tool that was right there, and the reason I gave for not using it.
- Which daily discipline slipped first, and when.

06 What worked

Do not skip this one. Confidence for the next high-risk moment is built out of evidence.

- What I did right, even partially — stopped earlier, left the room, told someone sooner.
- The warning sign I did catch, even if I overrode it.
- What is genuinely better than it was a year ago.

07 Afterward

- How long before I told someone, and what made it take that long.
- What I said to myself about myself. Sort it: about what I did, or about who I am? Only one of the two moves anything forward.
- Where "I have already blown it" showed up, and what it cost.

08 What changes

"I will be more careful" is not a plan. This needs a trigger, an action, and a name or a number.

- The highest-risk window I now know about — day, time, situation, mood.
- One plan, written in one form only: *if this happens, then I will do that.*
- What physically changes — access, device, password, room. Who does it, and by when.
- What my support person now has permission to ask me about.
- One thing I am adding this week, not only removing.
- What I am asking God for specifically rather than generally.

09 Shared

A review nobody hears is a journal entry.

- Who I read it to, and the date.
- What they saw in it that I did not.
- The date I will read it again — thirty days out.

Adapted from Exercise 46, "Relapse and Research," in 101 Freedom Exercises by Dr. Douglas Weiss.