

ESCAPE PLAN FOR TEENS

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:13 (NASB)

God has given you everything you need to respond well to the temptation you face: the temptation that moves you toward relapse. He has given you His Word, the Holy Spirit, and a small group to walk with you. In addition, as part of your Pure Desire group, you are learning to live in honesty through your weekly check-in, walk in freedom through the Three Circles Tool, and rehearse the personal promises given to you through God's Word.

However, at times, these tools fade from our view as the limbic system begins to take over, attempting to drag us down the same painful path of self-medication. In order to avoid this, we must have a predetermined plan of action, or an Escape Plan. This plan defines, ahead of time, the specific, clear, and realistic steps we can take to extricate ourselves from the downward spiral of addiction.

AN EFFECTIVE ESCAPE PLAN HAS THREE VITAL ELEMENTS:

- 01. A clear understanding of the “alarms” in your life.** What are the red flags or warning signals that go off in your brain, trying to tell you that a relapse may be imminent? What thoughts, feelings, actions, locations, or scenarios have been a problem for you? These exercises might help you identify some of your alarms:
 - Think back through any relapse in the last six months to a year—what commonalities do you observe?
 - When do you hear yourself starting to justify or minimize your actions?
 - What situations make you start to isolate or hide from loved ones?
- 02. Facing the reality of your addiction.** In the past, what are the actions that moved you closer to relapse? If you have already completed it, take some time and review your Three Circles Tool. It is essential that you connect the feelings of alarm to your typical pattern, otherwise you will ignore this reality and slide further toward relapse. Ahead of time, if you can begin to identify what the typical “next step” is for you that takes you in the wrong direction, you will gain the self-awareness you need to choose differently!

03. Concrete, specific steps you must take to escape the downward spiral. As you consider what these steps might be, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Pick actions that require very little time or planning. For example, *go for a walk, change of scenery, journal, call a friend, parent, leader, etc.* Create steps you can take immediately.
- When dealing with sexual temptation, the most repeated command in Scripture is to FLEE. What does “fleeing” look like in this situation? *Turning off the tempting device? Getting out of bed or going to a different room? Grabbing a glass of water? Leaving a party? Standing up and getting active?*
- Look for action steps that move you out of isolation and into community. If you are home alone, how can you be around other people? *Who could you call for support, even if it means leaving a message?* Most wait too long before asking for help. Victory comes from connection with others, not willpower.
- Pay attention to what the Holy Spirit is saying; 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us that God always provides a way out. What are the methods of escape that the Spirit regularly puts in front of you? Examples: Be honest with a parent/guardian, leader, or friend that I am struggling with _____; don't turn on a device when I am alone; go and get some exercise.
- Temptation often appears stronger when we are Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired (HALT).¹ If you are feeling any of these physical symptoms, what steps could you take to alleviate the condition?

On the following chart, fill in as many scenarios as you can. Use additional paper if needed.

THE ALARM: Signs of Trouble	PAST ACTIONS: Leading Toward Relapse	ACTION STEPS: To Prevent Relapse
<i>Examples: Procrastinating with school work; spending extra time on social media</i>	<i>Examples: Tip-toeing around provocative sites/material; visiting inappropriate chat rooms</i>	<i>Examples: Take a 10-minute walk; call a group member, leader, parent, or guardian; shut down computer and/or phone for at least one hour</i>

¹ Alcoholics Anonymous (2001). *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Big Book* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

As you look back and review this chart, what common responses or ideas do you have for escaping relapse? The ultimate goal is not to have four or five different ideas for every scenario, because that becomes difficult to remember! Instead, create a concise, reliable plan of four or five ideas that can work in most situations.

Write down the steps you will take in any situation where an internal alarm is going off. Then, determine who else needs to know about your plan. Ideally, it should be more than one person.

EXAMPLE ESCAPE PLAN:

01. "Flee" whatever room I am in—physically change my environment.
02. Call _____ from my group; I can leave a message 24 hours a day.
03. Reflect on my personal promises.
04. Quote 1 Corinthians 10:13 three times.
05. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom.

Who I will tell about my plan: _____
(e.g., parents/guardians, youth leader, group member, my Pure Desire group.)

MY ESCAPE PLAN:

01. _____
02. _____
03. _____
04. _____
05. _____

Who I will tell about my plan: _____

Developing Your Survival Kit: Once you have the basic elements of your Escape Plan in place, write them down and keep them in a place where you will see them often throughout the day. Many people choose to write their Escape Plan strategies on a 3x5" card and keep it on their night stand, on their bathroom mirror, or in their wallet or purse. You can also add it to a note in your phone and create a phone background with it. The goal is to keep it in your sight so it can be an easy go-to and reminder.

IN ADDITION TO THE ESCAPE PLAN, YOUR SURVIVAL KIT SHOULD INCLUDE THREE MORE ELEMENTS:

A Letter to Yourself: Writing a letter to yourself is one of the most powerful instruments you can place in your arsenal to keep from going back to your old addictive cycle. While you are in a healthy place, write a letter that identifies how you want your life to be and the kind of person you want to become. Describe the type of relationship you want to have with God, your parents/guardians, other family members, your friends, and current or future intimate relationship. Remind yourself of the futility and shame of acting out, and the negative consequences that occur because of it.

Mementos of Change: Collect a few objects that represent the motive for your change. Some examples include:

- a picture of your family or the important people in your life;
- objects, coins, or medallions that remind you of significant moments of healing;
- letters or cards of encouragement you have received from others; and
- favorite Scripture verses or song lyrics God has used to speak to you.

Recovery Action Plan: This is a covenant you have made with your parents/guardians, group leader, or group members. It spells out exactly what you will do if you relapse during your healing process. It includes the natural consequences you developed, on your own or in your group work, and logical consequences you have chosen to follow in order to encourage brain change. (The Recovery Action Plan can be found within the Youth Leader Library.)

Together, these four items—an Escape Plan, A Letter to Yourself, Mementos of Change, and a Recovery Action Plan—provide a powerful deterrent from acting out and relapsing. Walk through these four tools often, so that you will remember the steps to your plan and will be able to implement your plan when you need it most!