

Behavioral Regressions

Regression exists on a continuum with multiple factors determining intensity of regret afterward. Framing of regression after the fact is an influence on bounce back.

Abstinent Mode

Craving

A passing urge or fantasy about drinking.

You notice the thought, but no action or preparation occurs.

Intrusion

The idea of drinking begins to recur or occupy attention.

You mentally negotiate, justify, romanticize, or rehearse drinking scenarios.

Glitch

You seriously contemplate drinking and may emotionally lean toward it, but consciously interrupt the process before taking any external step.

Drift

You begin moving toward drinking indirectly — lingering near alcohol, browsing liquor online, texting drinking friends, driving toward a store, or abandoning protective routines.

The behavior shifts from abstract thought toward behavioral momentum.

Blip

You actively prepare to drink — pouring a drink, opening a bottle, ordering at a bar, carrying alcohol, etc. — but stop yourself before consuming any meaningful amount.

Taste

You consume a very small amount — a sip, mouthful, or partial drink — then consciously disengage before continuing further.

Slip

You drink enough to cross from symbolic action into actual use, but retain strong awareness and stop early.

The episode is brief, contained, and interrupted before intoxication or loss of control meaningfully develops.

Wobble

You continue beyond an initial slip and begin feeling the psychological shift that weakens restraint.

You may notice rationalization, secrecy, resignation, or the “well, I already started” mindset emerging.

Lapse

You consume one or several drinks and temporarily abandon sobriety goals, but the event remains time-limited and self-terminated before becoming an extended pattern.

Bender

A concentrated period of sustained drinking extending across many hours or several days. Normal routines, responsibilities, sleep, nutrition, or judgment begin deteriorating.

Relapse

A broader return to active addictive behavior after a period of recovery or abstinence. The drinking is no longer an isolated event but becomes a resumed pattern or lifestyle state.

Regression

The addictive mindset, routines, relationships, and coping patterns substantially re-establish themselves.

Recovery structures weaken or collapse, and sobriety may no longer be the active organizing principle.

Moderation Mode

Urge

A desire or impulse to drink arises.

You remain fully within your intended boundaries and no behavioral shift occurs.

Drift

Your thinking starts leaning toward relaxing your intended limits.

You may begin rationalizing exceptions, extending plans, or emotionally orienting toward heavier consumption.

Flex

You consciously modify your original plan before drinking begins.

For example: deciding on three drinks instead of two, drinking earlier than intended, or choosing stronger alcohol.

Glitch

You momentarily exceed your intended moderation framework mentally or behaviorally, but self-correct before meaningful consumption occurs.

Blip

You begin drinking in a way that departs from your original intention, but quickly recognize it and recalibrate.

Slip

You exceed one or more intended limits — quantity, pace, timing, context, or purpose — but regain control relatively early in the process.

Sway

Alcohol begins noticeably affecting judgment, inhibition, emotional regulation, or decision-making.

You are still somewhat self-aware, but control is becoming effortful rather than natural.

Lapse

You substantially depart from your intended moderation standards for a single occasion or short period.

The drinking episode becomes more impulsive, emotionally driven, or less deliberate than intended.

Overrun

The drinking session continues well beyond planned limits and begins impairing functioning, responsibilities, relationships, or next-day recovery.

Spiral

A pattern begins developing across multiple occasions where moderation repeatedly weakens.

The issue is no longer a single night but erosion of consistency and self-regulation.

Regression

Your prior moderation structure substantially collapses.

Alcohol increasingly dictates behavior, routines, emotional coping, or lifestyle organization.

Reframing as Control State

Another way to organize the above is by control-state rather than morality:

State	Description
Controlled	Urge → Drift → Flex
Boundary Testing	Glitch → Blip
Partial Loss of Control	Slip → Sway
Significant Overconsumption	Lapse → Overrun
Pattern Deterioration	Spiral → Regression

This framework tends to reduce the “all-or-nothing” psychology that can sometimes worsen behavior after minor deviations. Instead of viewing every overstep as catastrophic failure, it treats self-regulation as a dynamic continuum of stability, correction, destabilization, and recovery.

People relapse or “break sobriety” across a surprisingly wide emotional spectrum — not just from despair, but also from celebration, nostalgia, relief, social pressure, identity conflict, or sudden changes in routine. In addiction psychology, this is sometimes framed as both *negative affect relapse* (escaping pain) and *positive affect relapse* (lowered guard during good feelings).

Here’s a broad gradient from very grim to very happy or socially charged situations where someone might unexpectedly drink again:

Very Grim / Traumatic

- Death of a spouse, parent, child, or close friend
- Funeral or wake
- Receiving a serious medical diagnosis
- Divorce finalization or separation
- Arrest, lawsuit, or public humiliation
- Losing custody of children
- Job loss or business collapse
- Financial ruin or foreclosure

- Domestic conflict or abuse allegations
- Isolation after being rejected by family/community
- Relapse of another addict close to them
- Anniversary of a traumatic event
- War, disaster, or community tragedy
- Suicide of someone they knew
- Extreme loneliness during holidays

These are often driven by:

- emotional overwhelm
 - desire for anesthesia/numbing
 - “nothing matters now” cognition
 - collapse of future orientation
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Dark but More Subtle

- Chronic stress without obvious crisis
- Caregiver exhaustion
- Burnout after prolonged responsibility
- Boredom and emptiness after structure disappears
- Shame spirals after minor failures
- Feeling trapped in routine
- Insomnia and exhaustion
- Being alone in a hotel while traveling
- Moving to a new city
- Returning to a hometown associated with drinking
- Seeing an ex-partner move on
- Conflict with adult children
- Retirement and loss of identity
- Quiet evenings with “too much thinking”
- Feeling emotionally flat after months sober

A common pattern here is:

“I’m not even upset enough to justify this. I just want relief, comfort, or familiarity.”

Ambiguous / Triggering Situations

These are especially dangerous because they *don't feel dangerous* at first.

- Running into old drinking friends
- Visiting a favorite old bar “just to say hi”
- Concerts, sporting events, casinos
- Airports and business travel
- Vacations or cruises
- Camping trips or fishing trips
- Dating again after divorce
- Celebrating a legal victory or settlement
- Completing a huge work project
- Receiving praise or success after hardship
- Sudden freedom after a controlling environment
- Empty house after children move out
- Hearing “you seem fine now” from others
- Finding old bottles, glasses, songs, or rituals
- Warm weather / first summer weekend
- “Just one because I’ve proven I can control it now”

These often involve:

- conditioned associations
- overconfidence
- nostalgia
- reward-seeking
- lowered vigilance

Social Pressure Situations

- Weddings
- Bachelor/bachelorette parties
- Reunions
- Office parties
- Holiday dinners
- Networking events
- Family celebrations
- Birthdays
- New Year’s Eve
- Tailgates and sports gatherings
- Cultural or religious ceremonies involving alcohol
- Toasts where refusing feels conspicuous
- Being around heavy drinkers who normalize it

Sometimes the trigger is less:

“I want alcohol”

and more:

“I want to belong.”

Positive Emotional Highs

Many people underestimate these.

- Falling in love
- Engagements
- Weddings
- Birth of a child
- Promotion or career breakthrough
- Financial success
- Winning a case or resolving a conflict
- Completing rehab or a major life goal
- Buying a house
- Reunion with estranged family
- Feeling “normal again”
- Experiencing genuine joy after depression

Why these matter:

- vigilance drops
- the brain wants to “enhance” pleasure
- the person feels “cured”
- celebration rituals are culturally tied to alcohol

A very common internal script is:

“If there was ever a justified time for one drink, it’s now.”

Existential / Identity-Based Triggers

These can be especially powerful in long-term sobriety.

- Questioning whether sobriety has become too central to identity
- Feeling alienated from drinking culture forever
- Mourning the “old self”

- Feeling emotionally mature but socially disconnected
- Midlife crisis
- Wondering whether prior drinking “was really that bad”
- Romanticizing youth or past adventures
- Feeling resentment that others can drink casually
- Thinking:

“Maybe I was never truly alcoholic/addicted.”

Situations That Combine Multiple Risks

These are particularly high-risk because they blend emotion, ritual, fatigue, and opportunity.

- Weddings after divorce
 - Funerals with estranged family
 - Business conferences with alcohol-heavy networking
 - Vacations alone
 - Holidays after a breakup
 - Court outcomes (good or bad)
 - Moving out after separation
 - Military reunions
 - Retirement parties
 - Concerts tied to nostalgia/youth identity
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One important observation from relapse literature and recovery communities:

Relapse is often less about craving itself and more about permission.

The “permission structure” may come from:

- grief
- celebration
- exhaustion
- social belonging
- nostalgia
- rationalization
- perceived control
- hopelessness
- or even peace and happiness

That's one reason many recovery strategies focus not only on avoiding pain, but also on preparing for success, celebration, loneliness, transitions, and identity shifts.

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