Breakout 16 — Trigger & Warning Sign Mapping — Map Your Own Triggers and Warning Signs

One sentence for the board: This group maps the personal triggers and warning signs each client already knows from their own life — what comes before use, and what shows up first — so the map can be written down and used.

Purpose	Teach clients to map their own triggers and warning signs — the people, places, feelings, times, and situations that come before use, and the early signs that trouble is starting — as a personal, written map they keep and use. This is mapping only: it is not crisis planning, which WRAP teaches on Thursday, and not a full prevention plan, which Relapse Prevention teaches.
Who chooses this group	Curriculum groups meet separately for men and for women. Breakout groups are coed unless otherwise specified. Placement for participants who do not fit a men/women split follows the participant's stated preference, confirmed with staff for safety and privacy. Nothing about a participant's placement is disclosed to the group. Any participant who wants a clear, written picture of what comes before use for them. No participant is asked to share anything from their map aloud. The stated preference stands unless a stated safety reason requires a private conversation. Safety and privacy are the only criteria.
Length	60 minutes
Materials	Paper and pens for every client, whiteboard or flip chart and markers, and the topic resources named in this outline

Time	Segment	What happens
0–5 min	Welcome	Ground rules, confidentiality limits, right to pass. State plainly at the start: maps stay with their owners — nothing is collected or read aloud.
5–30 min	Teaching	The teaching points below, in order, on the board: triggers, warning signs, the map as yours, mapping before planning, order, and using the map.
30–45 min	Discussion	Prompts below. General answers are always complete answers — no one is asked to share anything from their map aloud.
45–55 min	Practice — my trigger and warning-sign map	Clients map their own triggers and warning signs in order, and choose where the map will live. Writing stays with the client.
55–60 min	Close	Takeaways, the WRAP Thursday and Relapse Prevention next steps named, and one map step each client will actually do this week.

Teaching points

- **A trigger is what comes before.** A trigger is a person, place, feeling, time, or situation that has come before use in your own life — not a theory about triggers in general. This group maps only what the client recognizes from their own experience.
- **Warning signs are what shows up first.** Warning signs are the early changes — in thoughts, feelings, sleep, appetite, routine, or contact with support — that show up before a high-risk situation turns into a decision point. Naming them early is the point of the map.
- **Your map is yours, not a copy.** Two people in the same room can have different triggers and different warning signs. Borrowing someone else's map does not work; the map has to match the life it will be used in.
- **Mapping is not planning — yet.** This group draws the map: what the triggers are, what the warning signs are, and in what order they usually appear. The plan for what to do about each

one is built in Relapse Prevention and in the WRAP Thursday sitting, not here. Do not turn this hour into a crisis plan.

- **Order matters.** Triggers and warning signs usually arrive in a sequence — one thing, then the next. Writing them in the order they usually appear makes the map usable: the first sign is the place to act.
- **A map is used, not memorized.** A map kept in a drawer helps no one. Clients leave with the map on paper they keep, and with one named place they will keep it where they can see it.

Discussion prompts

- "What is one trigger you already know from your own life — not one you were told about, one you have lived?"
- "What is the earliest warning sign you notice in yourself — the first small change, before things get loud?"
- "In what order do your triggers and warning signs usually arrive? What comes first, and what comes next?"
- "Where will your map live so you can actually use it — and who, if anyone, will you show it to?"

Practice — my trigger and warning-sign map (10 minutes, your page stays with you)

1. List your triggers in three columns: people and places; feelings and times of day; situations and anniversaries. Write only what you recognize from your own life.
2. List your warning signs in the order they usually appear, from the earliest small change to the last sign before a high-risk situation.
3. Draw one line from the trigger that comes first to the warning sign that follows it. That line is the sequence your map is built on.
4. Write where this map will live — pocket, notebook, wall — and the first date you will look at it again.
5. Keep your page. It is yours. Nothing written in this practice is collected, copied, or kept by the facilitator or the program.

Facilitator boundaries — Trigger & Warning Sign Mapping

- **Mapping only — no crisis planning in this room.** This group maps triggers and warning signs. It does not write crisis plans, safety plans, or prevention plans; those belong in WRAP Thursday and Relapse Prevention. A client in crisis now is connected to staff the same day — the group does not plan around them.
- **No one shares their map aloud.** Maps are personal. No participant is asked to read their map, name a trigger in front of the room, or describe a high-risk situation in detail. General answers are complete answers.
- **No diagnosing, no treatment planning.** Facilitators teach mapping as education. They do not assess any participant's risk, do not score danger, and do not complete a plan for anyone in the room.

- **Warrior close:** Close with the map kept: “You cannot watch for what you have never named. Name it, write it down, keep it where you can see it — that is how warriors hold ground: by knowing the ground.”

Sources & Evidence

Clinical evidence: Marlatt, G. A., and Gordon, J. R. (Eds.). Relapse Prevention: Maintenance Strategies in the Treatment of Addictive Behaviors (1985) — the foundational relapse-prevention model: high-risk situations, warning signs, and coping planning. This outline teaches the mapping part of that model only — triggers and warning signs as the client recognizes them — and does not teach a full prevention plan.

Recovery-support evidence: Written personal prevention plans and peer practice — standard recovery-support practices reflected in SAMHSA recovery-support guidance. The written map in this outline is kept by the participant and is never collected. No outcome is promised for this group.

Note: No outcome is promised for any group in this packet.