Session 30: After a Slip: Return, Don't Run — the First 24 Hours

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Appendix C (Warning-Sign Chain and Return Card) — Return Cards; phones (for saving card photos); the Session 30 handout (My Warning-Sign Chain & Return Plan, shared with Session 28)

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- State the first-24-hours protocol in order: safety, tell, return, review
- Explain why the hours after a slip are the highest-leverage moment in the entire relapse process
- Write their personal Return Card with names and numbers

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 4 — Living Free. The one idea today is that after a slip, return the same day — get safe, tell, return, and review the chain within 24 hours. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. This session is not permission and it is not a prediction. It is a fire drill. Houses drill for fires they intend never to have — because in the smoke, nobody invents a good plan. Today everyone writes their Return Card: safety, tell, return, review — in that order, with names and numbers.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: “What did you do in the first day after past slips — and which part of that day did the most damage: the use itself, or what you did next?” Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

Relapse-prevention science is clear on the critical fact: a lapse (a single return to use) becomes a full relapse largely through what happens in the response — the abstinence violation effect, where shame and 'I've blown it all' thinking license continued use. The protocol interrupts that sequence. Hour one: get safe — stop, leave the situation, do not drive, call for a ride; medical danger means 911 and naloxone where relevant, always. Hours one to three: tell — coach, accountability person, house staff, sponsor: one honest call before the story gets edited (Week 1's honesty, at emergency speed). Same day: return — to the house, the program, the meeting; walk back in before shame finishes its argument, and expect this community to receive returners quickly, and without contempt. Next day: review — with the care team, examine the chain (Session 28), find the earliest missed link, repair the plan, and address any program consequences factually and without theater. A slip is serious data. It is not a new identity, and it never erases the days before it.

- **Run toward, not away** Every instinct after a slip says hide, finish the run, start again Monday. The protocol reverses each one: the call, the return, and the review all happen while shame is still arguing. Speed is mercy here.
- **The community's side of the protocol** This program receives returners without contempt and without pretending nothing happened — consequences and compassion in the same conversation, the no-condemnation discipline from Session 13 practiced from the receiving side.
- **Review the chain, not the person's worth** The debrief asks where the chain started and which interruption failed — mechanical, fixable questions — and never 'what is wrong with you.'
- **Some returns need a higher level of care** A slip can reveal that more support is needed — medical evaluation, detox, a different setting. Recommending it is the care team's job, and accepting it is recovery, not exile.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Return after a slip is taught in this session through the Return Card (Appendix C): get safe, tell, return the same day, and review the chain within 24 hours, with 988 and 911 named (Stanley & Brown, 2012; Gorski & Miller, 1986; SAMHSA, 2022). Key sources for this session: Stanley & Brown (2012); Gorski & Miller (1986); SAMHSA (2022), 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Evidence strength: Moderate to strong. Spiritual practice: Confession and return after a slip — correlates with safety planning and rapid support activation; evidence: Moderate (Stanley & Brown, 2012; Gorski & Miller, 1986). Full citations: Appendix H. The session's Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, "What part of that sounds most like your life right now?" Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. Why does shame argue so convincingly in the first hours — and whose voice from your life does it borrow?
2. Walk the protocol: which step would be hardest for you — safety, tell, return, or review — and what support makes it doable?
3. What do you need this community to actually do when someone returns, so that returning is possible?
4. What lie will your mind tell at hour two, and what is your pre-written answer on your Return Card?

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Return Card completion (Appendix C reverse or workbook card): in their own handwriting — 'If I slip: 1) I will get safe by ____. 2) I will call ____, then ____, then the program at ____. 3) I will return to ____ the same day. 4) I will review my chain with ____ within 24 hours.' Cards are photographed into participants' phones in the room. The facilitator then leads a two-minute visualization of walking back through the program's door and being received — rehearsing the return while calm.

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

Give your Return Card details to your two named people this week and confirm they understand their role. Read the card once aloud to your accountability partner — saying the words in peacetime makes them sayable in war. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

Facilitator tone in this session decides whether it ever gets used: zero horror stories, zero 'some people just don't want it,' zero tolerance for group members moralizing about hypothetical returners. If a current, undisclosed slip surfaces in the room, receive it exactly per protocol — thank them for telling in this room, connect them to the care team today, and do not process the event publicly beyond that. Also state plainly: program, housing, and legal consequences that apply to use still apply; the protocol governs how we respond, it does not erase accountability.

Closing (2 minutes)

A slip is serious data; it is not a new identity, and it never erases the days before it. Give your card details to your two people this week and read it aloud once in peacetime. Next week: identity and purpose — who you are now, and what you give back.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐

Week 7 — New Identity and Purpose