

Urge Surfing

A practical guide to noticing urges, allowing discomfort, and choosing safer actions.

NOTICE THE WAVE. MAKE ROOM. CHOOSE YOUR NEXT STEP.

A practical skill, not a test

You may complete one activity, use the quick practice, or work with a counselor. An urge can be difficult without needing to dictate your next action.

Three questions to begin

What am I noticing? What would help me stay safe? What small action fits my values?

Use at your own pace. You may skip body awareness or breathing exercises if they increase distress.

Safety & Support Come First

You do not need to complete an exercise when you need immediate help.

This workbook is educational

It supports coping-skill practice and does not replace therapy, assessment, medication advice, crisis care, or emergency treatment.

When to get help now

If you may hurt yourself or another person, cannot stay safe, are at risk of overdose, or experience dangerous withdrawal symptoms, tell clinic staff immediately or seek urgent help. Do not wait for an urge to pass.

United States crisis resources

Call or text 988 for emotional or suicidal crisis support. Call 911 for immediate danger or a life-threatening emergency. If you are at a clinic, ask a staff member for assistance.

You can pause, stop, use a gentler exercise, or seek support at any point. Skills are not a substitute for a safety plan.

Understanding Urge Surfing

Urge surfing is a mindfulness-based skill: notice an urge, observe how it changes, and decide what to do rather than reacting automatically. Urges can rise, fall, return, or last longer than expected. There is no required time limit.

1. Pause

Identify an urge without judging yourself.

2. Name

Describe the action you feel pulled toward.

3. Rate

Notice its intensity from 0 to 10.

4. Locate

Notice body sensations, or focus on a safe object instead.

5. Make room

Breathe comfortably or ground with sight and sound.

6. Observe

Notice any shifts without demanding that it disappear.

7. Choose

Take one safe, values-consistent action or ask for support.

Remember

An urge is an experience, not an instruction. If an urge involves serious or imminent harm, get live help rather than waiting it out.

Recognize Your Urge Patterns

Signals I sometimes notice

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Tight jaw | ☐ Restlessness |
| ☐ Racing thoughts | ☐ Tension in chest |
| ☐ Shaking | ☐ Feeling numb |
| ☐ Stomach discomfort | ☐ Other sensations |

A situation where an urge commonly shows up

What my mind says when the urge arrives

One safer response I would like to practice

A Guided Urge Surfing Practice

Try one minute or a duration that feels workable. You can pause at any stage.

01 NOTICE

I am noticing an urge.

02 NAME

The urge is pushing me toward ____.

03 RATE

Its current intensity is ____ out of 10.

04 ANCHOR

I can notice my feet, a safe object, or a sound.

05 ALLOW

I can let this feeling be present without acting.

06 RECHECK

What has shifted or stayed the same?

07 CHOOSE

What is one safe thing I can do next?

Quick Check-In

What triggered the urge?

What is the urge asking me to do?

How strong is the urge right now? (0-10)

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Safety check

☐ I can stay safe right now

☐ I need support immediately

☐ I am not sure I can stay safe

My first safe step or person I can tell

Name the Wave

The urge says...

The emotion or need underneath may be...

What matters to me in this moment?

A nonjudgmental reminder

Having an urge does not mean you have failed. You can acknowledge it and still choose a different action.

Find an Attention Anchor

Choose a comfortable anchor

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Feet on the floor | ☐ A safe object in the room |
| ☐ Sounds nearby | ☐ A neutral visual detail |
| ☐ Gentle breathing | ☐ A supportive voice |
| ☐ Holding a familiar object | ☐ Another safe anchor |

What do I notice when I use this anchor?

If body awareness makes things harder, I can focus on...

What tells me I should stop and ask for support?

Track the Wave — Minutes 0-5

Use any interval that feels useful. Do not wait through danger or unsafe urges.

Minute 0**Urge 0-10****What I notice / safe response****Minute 1****Urge 0-10****What I notice / safe response****Minute 2****Urge 0-10****What I notice / safe response****Minute 3****Urge 0-10****What I notice / safe response****Minute 4****Urge 0-10****What I notice / safe response****Minute 5****Urge 0-10****What I notice / safe response**

Track the Wave — Minutes 6-10

You can stop early. Urges do not need to become weaker for practice to be meaningful.

Minute 6

Urge 0-10

What I notice / safe response

Minute 7

Urge 0-10

What I notice / safe response

Minute 8

Urge 0-10

What I notice / safe response

Minute 9

Urge 0-10

What I notice / safe response

Minute 10

Urge 0-10

What I notice / safe response

What Changed After the Practice?

What changed in the urge, if anything?

What did I notice in my body or environment?

What helped me make a safer choice?

My next safe action

Thoughts Are Not Commands

Example 1

Urge thought

Balanced or values-based response

Example 2

Urge thought

Balanced or values-based response

Example 3

Urge thought

Balanced or values-based response

Try this

“I notice the thought that I must act right now. I can choose what protects my safety and values.”

Choose the Next Healthy Action

Options that may help

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Drink water or eat a snack | ☐ Message a supportive person |
| ☐ Ground using the room | ☐ Return to one small task |
| ☐ Ask clinic staff for help | ☐ Take a safe short walk |
| ☐ Rest or reduce stimulation | ☐ Use my existing safety plan |

The safer action I choose is...

What might get in the way, and what is my backup?

Who can support me if the urge returns?

After-Action Reflection

What was happening before the urge?

What helped or did not help?

What did I learn about my pattern?

What could I try earlier next time?

Weekly Practice Log — Mon to Wed

Monday

Trigger or urge

What helped / next step

Tuesday

Trigger or urge

What helped / next step

Wednesday

Trigger or urge

What helped / next step

Weekly Practice Log — Thu to Sun

Thursday

Trigger or urge

What helped / next step

Friday

Trigger or urge

What helped / next step

Saturday

Trigger or urge

What helped / next step

Sunday

Trigger or urge

What helped / next step

Personal Plan for High-Risk Urges

If staying safe is uncertain, seek immediate human support instead of using this page alone.

Warning signs that mean I need live help

People or services I can contact

A safe location or supervised setting

What I will say to ask for immediate help

One-Page Urge Surfing Reset

NOTICE

I am experiencing an urge.

NAME

The urge is pulling me toward ____.

ANCHOR

I can notice one safe sight, sound, or sensation.

OBSERVE

This may rise, fall, return, or stay strong.

CHOOSE

One safe next step is ____.

GET HELP

If I might not stay safe, I will tell staff, call 988, or call 911 for immediate danger.

Credits & Additional Resources

Author: Bobby Perrine

Original publication: Bodhi Life Balance

Edition: 2026 | Educational workbook

Additional mental health workbooks:

<https://bodhilifebalance.com/mental-health-workbooks>

Scope of the resource

This is a coping-skills workbook for mental health and crisis-support settings. It is an educational aid and does not replace individualized assessment or treatment.

Helpful public resources

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: <https://988lifeline.org>

SAMHSA: <https://www.samhsa.gov>

NIMH: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov>