

Making a Plan: How to Pause Before Reacting

ASPIRE Impact Network Resource Worksheet

INTRODUCTION

Learning to pause before reacting is a powerful skill that can transform your relationships, choices, and life outcomes. This worksheet will help you develop a personalized plan to create that crucial space between trigger and response, giving you back control over your actions.

MY REACTION HOTSPOTS

Instructions: Identify specific situations where you tend to react without thinking.

I'm most likely to react without pausing when:

Situation	Typical Reaction	Impact on Me	Impact on Others
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My top three high-risk scenarios:

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
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MY BODY'S WARNING SIGNALS

Instructions: Your body often gives you signals before you react. Identifying these early warning signs gives you a chance to pause.

Physical signals I notice when I'm about to react: (Check all that apply)

- Increased heart rate
- Tense muscles (especially in jaw, shoulders, hands)
- Feeling hot or flushed
- Shallow breathing
- Stomach discomfort
- Clenched fists
- Feeling of pressure in chest or head
- Restlessness or fidgeting
- Other: _____

Thoughts that signal I'm about to react:

- "I can't believe they just..."
- "I'll show them..."
- "This always happens to me"
- "I can't take this anymore"
- "They're doing this on purpose"
- "I need to (act) right now"
- "It's not fair"
- Other: _____

My earliest warning signs are:

MY PAUSE TOOLKIT

Instructions: Different situations call for different pause strategies. Build your personal toolkit.

Quick Pause Techniques (1-10 seconds)

- Take three deep breaths
- Count to 10
- Squeeze and release your hands
- Touch your thumb to each finger
- Silently name 5 things you can see
- Other: _____

Verbal Pause Phrases

- "I need to think about that."
- "Let me get back to you on that."
- "I want to make sure I understand before I respond."
- "I need a moment."
- "That's important. Let me consider it carefully."
- Other: _____

Physical Pause Strategies

- Step away briefly (bathroom, water break)

- Change your body position
- Stretch or move your body
- Drink a glass of water slowly
- Write down your thoughts
- Other: _____

Digital/Social Media Pause Strategies

- Set a timer before posting/responding
 - Draft response but don't send immediately
 - Ask someone else to review before sending
 - Close the app and return later
 - Other: _____
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MATCHING STRATEGIES TO SITUATIONS

Instructions: For each high-risk scenario you identified, select specific pause strategies.

Situation 1: _____

Warning signs to watch for:

Pause strategies I'll use:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Situation 2: _____

Warning signs to watch for:

Pause strategies I'll use:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Situation 3: _____

Warning signs to watch for:

Pause strategies I'll use:

1.

2.

3.

WHAT TO DO DURING THE PAUSE

Instructions: Once you've created a pause, use this time effectively with these questions.

During my pause, I will ask myself:

- What am I feeling right now? _____
- What do I need in this moment? _____
- What's most important to me long-term? _____
- How would I advise someone else in this situation? _____
- What would happen if I reacted without thinking? _____
- What's a better response that aligns with my values? _____

My personal pause question: (Create one that works for you)

ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORTS

Instructions: Set up your environment to support your pause plan.

Physical environment adjustments:

- Remove or secure triggers (substances, phones, etc.)
- Create visual reminders (notes, bracelet, phone background)
- Designate a "cool down" space
- Keep grounding objects accessible
- Other: _____

Social environment adjustments:

- Share your pause goal with supportive people
- Develop a code word with trusted individuals
- Ask for specific support: _____

- Schedule regular check-ins about your progress
- Plan ahead for challenging social situations
- Other: _____

Digital environment adjustments:

- Set time limits on triggering apps
 - Create message templates for common situations
 - Use "scheduled send" features
 - Set up reminders or notifications
 - Other: _____
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PRACTICE PLAN

Instructions: Create a specific plan to practice pausing in lower-risk situations.

Three low-risk situations to practice pausing:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How I'll track my practice:

How often I'll practice:

How I'll celebrate successful pauses:

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

Instructions: Even with the best intentions, sometimes we still react without pausing. Plan for those moments.

If I react without pausing, I will:

- Take responsibility for my actions
- Avoid making excuses
- Apologize specifically if needed

- Learn from what happened
- Be kind to myself rather than critical
- Get back on track with my pause practice
- Other: _____

My personal reset statement:

MY PAUSE PLAN COMMITMENT

I, _____, commit to practicing my pause plan for the next _____ days.

The biggest benefit I hope to gain from pausing before reacting is:

I'll know my plan is working when:

My plan for reviewing my progress: (with whom, how often)

Date: _____ **Signature:** _____

DAILY PAUSE PRACTICE LOG

Date	Situation	Warning Signs Noticed	Pause Strategy Used	Outcome	What I Learned
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REMEMBER

- Pausing is a skill that gets stronger with practice
- Even a 1-second pause can make a difference
- The goal isn't to never react, but to react less often and less intensely

- Each successful pause builds confidence for the next one
 - Self-compassion helps you learn from moments when you don't pause
 - Your brain can build new habits with consistent practice
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