

Urge Surfing for Adults

Guiding clients through the following 'urge surfing' steps will help them develop the skills to manage their urges more effectively.

For the client

This exercise fosters self-awareness, non-reactivity, and acceptance, supporting healthier responses and breaking the automatic links between emotions, cues, and addictive behaviors.

1. Be mindful of urges

Begin by becoming aware of your urges as they arise. Simply noticing them is the first step towards managing them.

2. Focus on bodily sensations

When you feel an urge, concentrate on where it manifests in your body. You might notice a dry mouth, salivation, abdominal sensations, chest tightness, or heaviness. Pay attention to how intense these sensations are.

3. Observe with nonjudgmental awareness

Stay present for the urge. Observe it without judging it as good or bad. Just notice it and remember that it will pass.

4. Focus on your breath

Bring your attention to your breath. Focus on breathing naturally without changing its flow, speed, or length.

5. Ride the urge

Think of your breath as a surfboard. Use it to ride the urge as it flows through you—rising, gaining strength, peaking in intensity, and then dissolving. Try to surf the urge for a minute or two.

6. Observe transformation

Shift your attention back to the areas where you initially felt the urge. Notice any changes in those sensations and how they are decreasing.

7. Return to your breath

Keep observing the urge until it fully dissolves while focusing on your breath.

8. Show gratitude

Finally, show gratitude and compassion to yourself for being present with the urge without giving in to it. Appreciate that you responded according to your intentions and did not revert to old habits.

By practicing these steps, you'll develop the skills to manage your urges effectively, fostering self-awareness, non-reactivity, and acceptance.

Ultimately, the aim is to support healthier responses and break the automatic links between emotions, cues, and addictive behaviors.

Dr. Jeremy Sutton