

Safe Coping Skills

☞ **Ask for help**

Reach out to someone safe

☞ **Inspire yourself**

Carry something positive (e.g., poem), or negative (e.g., photo of friend who overdosed)

☞ **Leave a bad scene**

When things go wrong, get out

☞ **Persist**

Never, never, never, never, never, never, never, *never* give up

☞ **Honesty**

Secrets and lying are at the core of PTSD and substance abuse; honesty heals them

☞ **Cry**

Let yourself cry; it will not last forever

☞ **Choose self-respect**

Choose whatever will make you like yourself tomorrow

☞ **Take good care of your body**

Healthy eating, exercise, safe sex

☞ **List your options**

In any situation, you have choices

☞ **Create meaning**

Remind yourself what you are living for: your children? love? truth? justice? God?

☞ **Do the best you can with what you have**

Make the most of available opportunities

☞ **Set a boundary**

Say "no" to protect yourself

☞ **Compassion**

Listen to yourself with respect and care

☞ **When in doubt, do what's hardest**

The most difficult path is invariably the right one

(cont.)

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 **Talk yourself through it**

Self-talk helps in difficult times

 **Imagine**

Create a mental picture that helps you to feel different (e.g., remember a safe place)

 **Notice the choice point**

In slow motion, notice the exact moment when you chose a substance

 **Pace yourself**

If overwhelmed, go slower; if stagnant, go faster

 **Stay safe**

Do whatever you need to do to put your safety above all

 **Seek understanding, not blame**

Listen to your behavior; blaming prevents growth

 **If one way doesn't work, try another**

As if in a maze, turn a corner and try a new path

 **Link PTSD and substance abuse**

Recognize substances as an attempt to *self-medicate*

 **Alone is better than a bad relationship**

If only treaters are safe for now, that's okay

 **Create a new story**

You are the author of your life: be the hero who overcomes adversity

 **Avoid avoidable suffering**

Prevent bad situations in advance

 **Ask others**

Ask others if your belief is accurate

 **Get organized**

You'll feel more in control with "to-do" lists and a clean house

 **Watch for danger signs**

Face a problem before it becomes huge; notice *red flags*

 **Healing above all**

Focus on what matters

(cont.)

☞ Try something, anything A good plan today is better than a perfect one tomorrow

☞ Discovery Find out whether your assumption is true, rather than staying "in your head"

☞ Attend treatment AA, self-help, therapy, medications, groups—anything that keeps you going

☞ Create a buffer Put something between you and danger (e.g., time, distance)

☞ Say what you really think You'll feel closer to others (but only do this with safe people)

☞ Listen to your needs No more neglect—really hear what you need

☞ Move toward your opposite For example, if you are too dependent, try being more independent

☞ Replay the scene Review a negative event: What can you do differently next time?

☞ Notice the cost What is the price of substance abuse in your life?

☞ Structure your day A productive schedule keeps you on track and connected to the world

☞ Set an *action plan* Be specific, set a deadline, and let others know about it

☞ Protect yourself Put up a shield against destructive people, bad environments, and substances

☞ Soothing talk Talk to yourself very gently (as if to a friend or small child)

☞ Think of the consequences *Really* see the impact for tomorrow, next week, next year

☞ Trust the process Just keep moving forward; the only way out is through

(cont.)

☞ Work the material

The more you practice and participate, the quicker the healing

☞ Integrate the split self

Accept all sides of yourself; they are there for a reason

☞ Expect growth to feel uncomfortable

If it feels awkward or difficult, you're doing it right

☞ Replace destructive activities

Eat candy instead of getting high

☞ Pretend you like yourself

See how different the day feels

☞ Focus on now

Do what you can to make today better; don't get overwhelmed by the past or future

☞ Praise yourself

Notice what you did right; this is the most powerful method of growth

☞ Observe repeating patterns

Try to notice and understand your reenactments

☞ Self-nurture

Do something that you enjoy (e.g., take a walk, see a movie)

☞ Practice delay

If you can't totally prevent a self-destructive act, at least delay it as long as possible

☞ Let go of destructive relationships

If it can't be fixed, detach

☞ Take responsibility

Take an active, not a passive approach

☞ Set a deadline

Make it happen by setting a date

☞ Make a commitment

Promise yourself to do what's right to help your recovery


☞ Rethink

Think in a way that helps you feel better

(cont.)

 **Detach from emotional pain (grounding)** Distract, walk away, change the channel

 **Learn from experience** Seek wisdom that can help you next time

 **Solve the problem** Don't take it personally when things go wrong—try just to seek a solution


 **Use kinder language** Make your language less harsh

 **Examine the evidence** Evaluate both sides of the picture

 **Plan it out** Take the time to think ahead—it's the opposite of impulsivity

 **Identify the belief** Examples: *shoulds*, *deprivation reasoning*

 **Reward yourself** Find a healthy way to celebrate anything you do right

 **Create new "tapes"** Literally! Take a tape recorder and record a new way of thinking to play back

 **Find rules to live by** Remember a phrase that works for you (e.g., "Stay real")

 **Setbacks are not failures** A setback is just a setback, nothing more

 **Tolerate the feeling** "No feeling is final"; just get through it safely

 **Actions first, and feelings will follow** Don't wait until you feel motivated; just start now

 **Create positive addictions** Examples: sports, hobbies, AA . . .

 **When in doubt, don't** If you suspect danger, stay away

(cont.)

👉 Fight the triggerTake an *active* approach to protect yourself**👉 Notice the source**

Before you accept criticism or advice, notice who's telling it to you

👉 Make a decision

If you're stuck, try choosing the best solution you can right now; don't wait

👉 Do the right thing

Do what you know will help you, even if you don't feel like it

👉 Go to a meeting

Feet first; just get there and let the rest happen

👉 Protect your body from HIVThis is *truly* a life-or-death issue**👉 Prioritize healing**

Make healing your most urgent and important goal, above all else

👉 Reach for community resources

Lean on them! They can be a source of great support

👉 Get others to support your recovery

Tell people what you need

👉 Notice what you *can* controlList the aspects of your life you *do* control (e.g., job, friends . . .)

Acknowledgments: The "signs of recovery" in Handout 1 are based in part on Harvey (1990). Some of the safe coping skills in Handout 2 are from Marlatt and Gordon (1985) (e.g., "Setbacks are not failures" and "Create positive addictions"); some are related to AA (e.g., "Work the material" and "Go to a meeting"); "No feeling is final" is from Rilke (1996); and many are drawn from professional books and articles on cognitive-behavioral therapy and relapse prevention. Ask your therapist for guidance if you would like to locate any of these sources.