

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
117 ☀️ 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 <i>action plan</i>	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	<i>Really see</i> 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: <i>shoulds</i> , <i>deprivation reasoning</i>
☀ 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 trigger

Take 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 HIV

This 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* control

List 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.