Safety Is the Most Important Priority Right Now!

This entire treatment revolves around one central idea: *You need to stay safe.* The good news is that you can learn to cope safely, no matter what negative life events come your way. Nothing has to make you use substances or engage in any other high-risk behavior.

EXAMPLES

Life situation. You lose your job; your mother criticizes you; you wake up depressed; someone offers you cocaine; your dog dies; you dissociate; your partner gives you a hard time; you have no money; you find out you have a tumor; you have a flashback; you can't sleep.

Your coping. This is everything! *No matter what happens* in your life, you can cope *safely.*

Unsafe Coping	versus	Safe Coping
Use substances	versus	Ask for help
Hurt yourself (e.g., cutting, burning)	versus	Take good care of your body
Let someone harm you	versus	Set a boundary in a relationship
Act on impulse	versus	Rethink the situation

The goal of this treatment is to help you become more aware of how you are coping and to teach you how to cope more safely. That's it!

STAGES OF HEALING FROM PTSD AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

For both PTSD and substance abuse, *safety* is the first stage in healing, according to a great deal of research and clinical wisdom. The stages are as follows:

> 1. **Safety.** This is the phase you are in now. The goals are to free yourself from substance abuse, stay alive, build healthy relationships, gain control over your feelings, learn to cope with day-to-day problems, protect yourself from destructive people and situations, not hurt yourself or others, increase your functioning, and attain stability.

2. **Mourning.** Once you are more safe, you may need to grieve about the past—about what your trauma and substance abuse did to you. You may need to cry deeply to get over the losses and pain you experienced: loss of innocence, loss of trust, loss of time.

3. **Reconnection.** After letting yourself experience mourning, you will find yourself more willing and able to reconnect with the world in joyful ways: thriving, enjoying life, able to work and relate well to others. You *will* get to this stage if you can establish safety now!

(cont.)

It is important to know that *you can heal from PTSD and substance abuse*; many people do. It does not mean that you forget about the past. Rather, it means that it no longer holds such destructive power over your life. (Note that some people use the term "recovery"; others do not like to use it for PTSD, substance abuse, or both. Whatever wording you prefer is okay.)

SIGNS OF RECOVERY

"Recovery" means that you . . .

* Can talk about the trauma without feeling either very upset or numb.
* Can function well in daily life (such as holding a job).
* Are safe (e.g., not suicidal or abusing substances).
* Are able to be in healthy relationships without feeling completely vulnerable or isolated.
* Are able to take pleasure in life.
* Take good care of your body (e.g., eating, sleeping, exercising).
* Can rely on yourself and others.
* Can control your most overwhelming symptoms.
* Believe that you deserve to take good care of yourself.
* Have confidence that you can protect yourself.

WHAT IS *SAFETY* TO YOU?

Describe what safety means to you. Write out *who* you feel safe with, *what* activities you feel safe doing, and *where* you feel safe. You might also want to describe in detail a safe place that helps you feel calm and connected, such as a room, the beach, your therapist's office, or another place that brings you back to a feeling of inner peace. You can add drawings, quotations, or anything else that you like, to better express what safety is for you. Continue on the back of this page if you need more space.

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