

## Safe Coping Skills

 <b>Ask for help</b>	Reach out to someone safe
 <b>Inspire yourself</b>	Carry something positive (e.g., poem), or negative (e.g., photo of friend who overdosed)
 <b>Leave a bad scene</b>	When things go wrong, get out
 <b>Persist</b>	Never, never, never, never, never, never, never, <i>never</i> give up
 <b>Honesty</b>	Secrets and lying are at the core of PTSD and substance abuse; honesty heals them
 <b>Cry</b>	Let yourself cry; it will not last forever
 <b>Choose self-respect</b>	Choose whatever will make you like yourself tomorrow
 <b>Take good care of your body</b>	Healthy eating, exercise, safe sex
 <b>List your options</b>	In any situation, you have choices
 <b>Create meaning</b>	Remind yourself what you are living for: your children? love? truth? justice? God?
 <b>Do the best you can with what you have</b>	Make the most of available opportunities
 <b>Set a boundary</b>	Say “no” to protect yourself
 <b>Compassion</b>	Listen to yourself with respect and care
 <b>When in doubt, do what’s hardest</b>	The most difficult path is invariably the right one

(cont.)

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 <b>Talk yourself through it</b>	Self-talk helps in difficult times
 <b>Imagine</b>	Create a mental picture that helps you to feel different (e.g., remember a safe place)
 <b>Notice the choice point</b>	In slow motion, notice the exact moment when you chose a substance
 <b>Pace yourself</b>	If overwhelmed, go slower; if stagnant, go faster
 <b>Stay safe</b>	Do whatever you need to do to put your safety above all
 <b>Seek understanding, not blame</b>	<i>Listen</i> to your behavior; blaming prevents growth
 <b>If one way doesn't work, try another</b>	As if in a maze, turn a corner and try a new path
 <b>Link PTSD and substance abuse</b>	Recognize substances as an attempt to <i>self-medicate</i>
 <b>Alone is better than a bad relationship</b>	If only treaters are safe for now, that's okay
 <b>Create a new story</b>	You are the author of your life: be the hero who overcomes adversity
 <b>Avoid avoidable suffering</b>	Prevent bad situations in advance
 <b>Ask others</b>	Ask others if your belief is accurate
 <b>Get organized</b>	You'll feel more in control with "to-do" lists and a clean house
 <b>Watch for danger signs</b>	Face a problem before it becomes huge; notice <i>red flags</i>
 <b>Healing above all</b>	Focus on what matters

(cont.)

 <b>Try something, anything</b>	A good plan today is better than a perfect one tomorrow
 <b>Discovery</b>	Find out whether your assumption is true, rather than staying “in your head”
 <b>Attend treatment</b>	AA, self-help, therapy, medications, groups—anything that keeps you going
 <b>Create a buffer</b>	Put something between you and danger (e.g., time, distance)
 <b>Say what you really think</b>	You’ll feel closer to others (but only do this with safe people)
 <b>Listen to your needs</b>	No more neglect—really hear what you need
 <b>Move toward your opposite</b>	For example, if you are too dependent, try being more independent
 <b>Replay the scene</b>	Review a negative event: What can you do differently next time?
 <b>Notice the cost</b>	What is the price of substance abuse in your life?
 <b>Structure your day</b>	A productive schedule keeps you on track and connected to the world
 <b>Set an <i>action plan</i></b>	Be specific, set a deadline, and let others know about it
 <b>Protect yourself</b>	Put up a shield against destructive people, bad environments, and substances
 <b>Soothing talk</b>	Talk to yourself very gently (as if to a friend or small child)
 <b>Think of the consequences</b>	<i>Really</i> see the impact for tomorrow, next week, next year
 <b>Trust the process</b>	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.)*

☞ <b>Detach from emotional pain (grounding)</b>	Distract, walk away, change the channel
☞ <b>Learn from experience</b>	Seek wisdom that can help you next time
☞ <b>Solve the problem</b>	Don't take it personally when things go wrong—try just to seek a solution
☞ <b>Use kinder language</b>	Make your language less harsh
☞ <b>Examine the evidence</b>	Evaluate both sides of the picture
☞ <b>Plan it out</b>	Take the time to think ahead—it's the opposite of impulsivity
☞ <b>Identify the belief</b>	Examples: <i>shoulds</i> , <i>deprivation reasoning</i>
☞ <b>Reward yourself</b>	Find a healthy way to celebrate anything you do right
☞ <b>Create new "tapes"</b>	Literally! Take a tape recorder and record a new way of thinking to play back
☞ <b>Find rules to live by</b>	Remember a phrase that works for you (e.g., "Stay real")
☞ <b>Setbacks are not failures</b>	A setback is just a setback, nothing more
☞ <b>Tolerate the feeling</b>	"No feeling is final"; just get through it safely
☞ <b>Actions first, and feelings will follow</b>	Don't wait until you feel motivated; just start now
☞ <b>Create positive addictions</b>	Examples: sports, hobbies, AA . . .
☞ <b>When in doubt, don't</b>	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.