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Quotation

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**“Although the world is full  
of suffering, it is full also  
of the overcoming of it.”**

—Helen Keller  
(20th-century American writer)

## 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.

<b>Unsafe Coping</b>	<b>versus</b>	<b>Safe Coping</b>
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.)

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## 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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 <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
















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 <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.)











 <b>Work the material</b>	The more you practice and participate, the quicker the healing
 <b>Integrate the split self</b>	Accept all sides of yourself; they are there for a reason
 <b>Expect growth to feel uncomfortable</b>	If it feels awkward or difficult, you're doing it right
 <b>Replace destructive activities</b>	Eat candy instead of getting high
 <b>Pretend you like yourself</b>	See how different the day feels
 <b>Focus on now</b>	Do what you can to make today better; don't get overwhelmed by the past or future
 <b>Praise yourself</b>	Notice what you did right; this is the most powerful method of growth
 <b>Observe repeating patterns</b>	Try to notice and understand your reenactments
 <b>Self-nurture</b>	Do something that you enjoy (e.g., take a walk, see a movie)
 <b>Practice delay</b>	If you can't totally prevent a self-destructive act, at least delay it as long as possible
 <b>Let go of destructive relationships</b>	If it can't be fixed, detach
 <b>Take responsibility</b>	Take an active, not a passive approach
 <b>Set a deadline</b>	Make it happen by setting a date
 <b>Make a commitment</b>	Promise yourself to do what's right to help your recovery
 <b>Rethink</b>	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.)



 <b>Fight the trigger</b>	Take an <i>active</i> approach to protect yourself
 <b>Notice the source</b>	Before you accept criticism or advice, notice who's telling it to you
 <b>Make a decision</b>	If you're stuck, try choosing the best solution you can right now; don't wait
 <b>Do the right thing</b>	Do what you know will help you, even if you don't feel like it
 <b>Go to a meeting</b>	Feet first; just get there and let the rest happen
 <b>Protect your body from HIV</b>	This is <i>truly</i> a life-or-death issue
 <b>Prioritize healing</b>	Make healing your most urgent and important goal, above all else
 <b>Reach for community resources</b>	Lean on them! They can be a source of great support
 <b>Get others to support your recovery</b>	Tell people what you need
 <b>Notice what you <i>can</i> control</b>	List the aspects of your life you <i>do</i> 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.

## Ideas for a Commitment

*Commit to one action that will move your life forward!*

*It can be anything you feel will help you, or you can try one of the ideas below.*

*Keeping your commitment is a way of respecting, honoring, and caring for yourself.*

- ✦ Option 1: Go through the list of Safe Coping Skills, checking off (✓) the ones you already do, and putting a star (★) next to the ones you want to learn.
- ✦ Option 2: Start keeping a “journal of successes” (times that you coped safely, obstacles overcome, successes in resisting substance use, coping skills that you used).
- ✦ Option 3: Create an “inspiration book” or “inspiration box” to inspire you to stay safe (including photographs of people you love, songs, poems, quotations, news clippings, etc.).
- ✦ Option 4: Fold the list of Safe Coping Skills in half down the middle. Read the names of the skills on the left side and try to remember what each one means. Give yourself 1 point for each correct answer.
- ✦ Option 5: Write a paragraph on what “safety” means to you.
- ✦ Option 6: Try using one new skill this week from the list of Safe Coping Skills and write how it went.
- ✦ Option 7: Fill out the Safe Coping Sheet. (See below for an example applied to this topic.)

### **EXAMPLE OF THE SAFE COPING SHEET APPLIED TO THIS TOPIC**

	<b>Old Way</b>	<b>New Way</b>
<b>Situation</b>	I got laid off from work.	I got laid off from work.
<b>★ <u>Your Coping</u> ★</b>	I feel like I can't cope—this is the last straw. I don't know what to do. I have money problems already, and this will put me under. I got high.	Say to myself, “If I stay safe, I can try to cope with this.” I can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call my brother to talk about it.</li> <li>• Talk to my counselor about how to get a new job.</li> <li>• Go to an AA meeting and be around people.</li> </ul>
<b>Consequence</b>	Felt out of control, felt like a failure.	Able to stay safe without getting high; felt okay. Even though I'm still out of a job, I feel proud of having not buckled under the stress.

***How safe is your old way of coping? \_\_\_\_\_      How safe is your new way of coping? \_\_\_\_\_***

*Rate from 0 (not at all safe) to 10 (totally safe)*

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## Commitment to Recovery

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*A commitment is a promise—to yourself, to your recovery, and to your therapist.  
If you cannot complete your commitment, or need to change it,  
be sure to leave your therapist a message before your next session.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Commitment for next session</b>	
<b>I will do:</b>	<b>By when:</b>

<b>Community Resource to call before next session</b>	
<b>I will call:</b>	<b>By when:</b>

### REMINDERS

- Your next session is scheduled for: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_
- Where will you put this sheet to remember it?: Wallet \_\_\_\_ Refrigerator door \_\_\_\_ Notebook \_\_\_\_  
Other location: \_\_\_\_\_

(tear here) ----- (tear here)

### THERAPIST COPY

Patient Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Commitment for next session</b>	
<b>I will do:</b>	<b>By when:</b>

<b>Community Resource to call before next session</b>	
<b>I will call:</b>	<b>By when:</b>

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## End-of-Session Questionnaire

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To be completed anonymously; do not fill in your name.

Session Topic: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please be honest about your view of today's session, so that the treatment can be made as helpful as possible. Answer questions 1–6 below using the following scale:

0	1	2	3
Not at all	A little	Moderately	A great deal

1. How helpful was today's session for you, overall? \_\_\_\_
  
2. In today's session, how helpful were:
  - a. The topic of the session? \_\_\_\_
  - b. The handout? \_\_\_\_
  - c. The quotation? \_\_\_\_
  - d. The therapist? \_\_\_\_
  
3. How much did today's session help you with your:
  - a. PTSD? \_\_\_\_
  - b. Substance abuse? \_\_\_\_
  
4. How much do you think you'll use what you learned in today's session in your life? \_\_\_\_
  
5. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about today's session? Please be honest about both positive and negative reactions.  
*Positive reactions:* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*Negative reactions:* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
6. How could this treatment be more helpful to you?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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