

## 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.)

From *Seeking Safety* by Lisa M. Najavits (2002). Copyright by The Guilford Press. Permission to photocopy this form is granted to purchasers of this book for personal use only (see copyright page for details).

**☞ 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.)

 <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.

# Safe Coping Skills (Part 1)

from "Seeking Safety: Cognitive- Behavioral Therapy for PTSD and Substance Abuse"  
by Lisa M. Najavits, Ph.D.

- 1. Ask for help-** Reach out to someone safe
- 2. Inspire yourself-** Carry something positive (e.g., poem), or negative (photo of friend who overdosed)
- 3. Leave a bad scene-** When things go wrong, get out
- 4. Persist-** Never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never give up
- 5. Honesty-** Secrets and lying are at the core of PTSD and substance abuse; honesty heals them
- 6. Cry-** Let yourself cry; it will not last forever
- 7. Choose self-respect-** Choose whatever will make you like yourself tomorrow
- 8. Take good care of your body-** Eat right, exercise, sleep, safe sex
- 9. List your options-** In any situation, you have choices
- 10. Create meaning-** Remind yourself what you are living for: your children? Love? Truth? Justice? God?
- 11. Do the best you can with what you have-** Make the most of available opportunities
- 12. Set a boundary-** Say "no" to protect yourself
- 13. Compassion-** Listen to yourself with respect and care
- 14. When in doubt, do what's hardest-** The most difficult path is invariably the right one
- 15. Talk yourself through it-** Self-talk helps in difficult times
- 16. Imagine-** Create a mental picture that helps you feel different (e.g., remember a safe place)
- 17. Notice the choice point-** In slow motion, notice the exact moment when you chose a substance
- 18. Pace yourself-** If overwhelmed, go slower; if stagnant, go faster
- 19. Stay safe-** Do whatever you need to do to put your safety above all
- 20. Seek understanding, not blame-** Listen to your behavior; blaming prevents growth
- 21. If one way doesn't work, try another-** As if in a maze, turn a corner and try a new path
- 22. Link PTSD and substance abuse-** Recognize substances as an attempt to self-medicate
- 23. Alone is better than a bad relationship-** If only treaters are safe for now, that's okay
- 24. Create a new story-** You are the author of your life: be the hero who overcomes adversity
- 25. Avoid avoidable suffering-** Prevent bad situations in advance
- 26. Ask others-** Ask others if your belief is accurate
- 27. Get organized-** You'll feel more in control with lists, "to do's" and a clean house
- 28. Watch for danger signs-** Face a problem before it becomes huge; notice red flags
- 29. Healing above all-** Focus on what matters
- 30. Try something, anything-** A good plan today is better than a perfect one tomorrow
- 31. Discovery-** Find out whether your assumption is true rather than staying "in your head"
- 32. Attend treatment-** AA, self-help, therapy, medications, groups- anything that keeps you going
- 33. Create a buffer-** Put something between you and danger (e.g., time, distance)
- 34. Say what you really think-** You'll feel closer to others (but only do this with safe people)
- 35. Listen to your needs-** No more neglect- really hear what you need
- 36. Move toward your opposite-** E.g., if you are too dependent, try being more independent
- 37. Replay the scene-** Review a negative event: what can you do differently next time?
- 38. Notice the cost-** What is the price of substance abuse in your life?
- 39. Structure your day-** A productive schedule keeps you on track and connected to the world
- 40. Set an action plan-** Be specific, set a deadline, and let others know about it
- 41. Protect yourself-** Put up a shield against destructive people, bad environments, and substances
- 42. Soothing talk-** Talk to yourself very gently (as if to a friend or small child)

With appreciation to the Allies Program (Sacramento, CA) for formatting this Safe Coping List.

© Guilford Press, New York. From: Najavits, L.M. *Seeking Safety: A Treatment Manual for PTSD and Substance Abuse* (2002). Only for personal use (with clients); for any other use contact <info@seekingsafety.org> or <permissions@guilford.com>

# Safe Coping Skills (Part 2)

from "Seeking Safety: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for PTSD and Substance Abuse"  
by Lisa M. Najavits, Ph.D.

- 43. Think of the consequences-** Really see the impact for tomorrow, next week, next year
- 44. Trust the process-** Just keep moving forward; the only way out is through
- 45. Work the material-** The more you practice and participate, the quicker the healing
- 46. Integrate the split self-** Accept all sides of yourself; they are there for a reason
- 47. Expect growth to feel uncomfortable-** If it feels awkward or difficult you're doing it right
- 48. Replace destructive activities-** Eat candy instead of getting high
- 49. Pretend you like yourself-** See how different the day feels
- 50. Focus on now-** Do what you can to make today better; don't get overwhelmed by the past or future
- 51. Praise yourself-** Notice what you did right; this is the most powerful method of growth
- 52. Observe repeating patterns-** Try to notice and understand your re-enactments
- 53. Self-nurture-** Do something that you enjoy (e.g., take a walk, see a movie)
- 54. Practice delay-** If you can't totally prevent a self-destructive act, at least delay it as long as possible
- 55. Let go of destructive relationships-** If it can't be fixed, detach
- 56. Take responsibility-** Take an active, not a passive approach
- 57. Set a deadline-** Make it happen by setting a date
- 58. Make a commitment-** Promise yourself to do what's right to help your recovery
- 59. Rethink-** Think in a way that helps you feel better
- 60. Detach from emotional pain (grounding)-** Distract, walk away, change the channel
- 61. Learn from experience-** Seek wisdom that can help you next time
- 62. Solve the problem-** Don't take it personally when things go wrong- try to just seek a solution
- 63. Use kinder language-** Make your language less harsh
- 64. Examine the evidence-** Evaluate both sides of the picture
- 65. Plan it out-** Take the time to think ahead-it's the opposite of impulsivity
- 66. Identify the belief-** For example, shoulds, deprivation reasoning
- 67. Reward yourself-** Find a healthy way to celebrate anything you do right
- 68. Create new "tapes"** Literally! Take a tape recorder and record a new way of thinking to play back
- 69. Find rules to live by-** Remember a phrase that works for you (e.g., "Stay real")
- 70. Setbacks are not failures-** A setback is just a setback, nothing more
- 71. Tolerate the feeling-** "No feeling is final", just get through it safely
- 72. Actions first and feelings will follow-** Don't wait until you feel motivated; just start now
- 73. Create positive addictions-** Sports, hobbies, AA...
- 74. When in doubt, don't-** If you suspect danger, stay away
- 75. Fight the trigger-** Take an active approach to protect yourself
- 76. Notice the source-** Before you accept criticism or advice, notice who's telling it to you
- 77. Make a decision-** If you're stuck, try choosing the best solution you can right now; don't wait
- 78. Do the right thing-** Do what you know will help you, even if you don't feel like it
- 79. Go to a meeting-** Feet first; just get there and let the rest happen
- 80. Protect your body from HIV-** This is truly a life-or-death issue
- 81. Prioritize healing-** Make healing your most urgent and important goal, above all else
- 82. Reach for community resources-** Lean on them! They can be a source of great support
- 83. Get others to support your recovery-** Tell people what you need
- 84. Notice what you can control-** List the aspects of your life you do control (e.g., job, friends...)