

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)

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