

SAFE COPING SKILLS

1. Ask for help – Reach out to someone safe. **2. Inspire yourself** – Carry something positive (e.g., poem) or negative (photo of a 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, 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. Creating 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 is 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 put your safety above all. **20. Seek understanding, not blame** – Listen to your behaviour; blaming prevents growth. **21. If one way does not 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 people who are receiving help are safe for now, that is 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 will 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 will 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** – For example, 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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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; do not 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 cannot totally prevent a self-destructive act, at least delay it as long as possible. **55. Let go of destructive relationships** – If it cannot 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 is 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** – Do not 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 is 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** – Do not 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 is telling it to you. **77. Make a decision** – If you are stuck, try choosing the best solution you can right now; do not 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...)

YOU CAN DO IT!

Material adapted by Suzanne Welstead (2016) from *Seeking Safety: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for PTSD and Substance Abuse* by Lisa M. Najavits, Ph.D.