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 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 not 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.