
Quotation

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

—Helen Keller
(20th-century American writer)

From *Seeking Safety* by Lisa M. Najavits (2002).

Safe Coping Sheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

You can learn to cope safely, no matter what happens in your life.

	Old Way	New Way
Situation		
★ <u>Your Coping</u> ★		
Consequence		

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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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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☞ 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.)

Try something, anything A good plan today is better than a perfect one tomorrow

Discovery Find out whether your assumption is true, rather than staying "in your head"

Attend treatment AA, self-help, therapy, medications, groups—anything that keeps you going

Create a buffer Put something between you and danger (e.g., time, distance)

Say what you really think You'll feel closer to others (but only do this with safe people)

Listen to your needs No more neglect—really hear what you need

Move toward your opposite For example, if you are too dependent, try being more independent

Replay the scene Review a negative event: What can you do differently next time?

Notice the cost What is the price of substance abuse in your life?

Structure your day A productive schedule keeps you on track and connected to the world

Set an *action plan* Be specific, set a deadline, and let others know about it

Protect yourself Put up a shield against destructive people, bad environments, and substances

Soothing talk Talk to yourself very gently (as if to a friend or small child)

Think of the consequences *Really* see the impact for tomorrow, next week, next year

Trust the process Just keep moving forward; the only way out is through

(cont.)

☞ Work the material

The more you practice and participate, the quicker the healing

☞ Integrate the split self

Accept all sides of yourself; they are there for a reason

☞ Expect growth to feel uncomfortable

If it feels awkward or difficult, you're doing it right

☞ Replace destructive activities

Eat candy instead of getting high

☞ Pretend you like yourself

See how different the day feels

☞ Focus on now

Do what you can to make today better; don't get overwhelmed by the past or future

☞ Praise yourself

Notice what you did right; this is the most powerful method of growth

☞ Observe repeating patterns

Try to notice and understand your reenactments

☞ Self-nurture

Do something that you enjoy (e.g., take a walk, see a movie)

☞ Practice delay

If you can't totally prevent a self-destructive act, at least delay it as long as possible

☞ Let go of destructive relationships

If it can't be fixed, detach

☞ Take responsibility

Take an active, not a passive approach

☞ Set a deadline

Make it happen by setting a date

☞ Make a commitment

Promise yourself to do what's right to help your recovery

☞ Rethink

Think in a way that helps you feel better

(cont.)

☞ Detach from emotional pain (grounding)

Distract, walk away, change the channel

☞ Learn from experience

Seek wisdom that can help you next time

☞ Solve the problem

Don't take it personally when things go wrong—try just to seek a solution

☞ Use kinder language

Make your language less harsh

☞ Examine the evidence

Evaluate both sides of the picture

☞ Plan it out

Take the time to think ahead—it's the opposite of impulsivity

☞ Identify the belief

Examples: *shoulds*, *deprivation reasoning*

☞ Reward yourself

Find a healthy way to celebrate anything you do right

☞ Create new "tapes"

Literally! Take a tape recorder and record a new way of thinking to play back

☞ Find rules to live by

Remember a phrase that works for you (e.g., "Stay real")

☞ Setbacks are not failures

A setback is just a setback, nothing more

☞ Tolerate the feeling

"No feeling is final"; just get through it safely

☞ Actions first, and feelings will follow

Don't wait until you feel motivated; just start now

☞ Create positive addictions

Examples: sports, hobbies, AA . . .

☞ When in doubt, don't

If you suspect danger, stay away

(cont.)

☞ Fight the trigger

Take an active approach to protect yourself

☞ Notice the source

Before you accept criticism or advice, notice who's telling it to you

☞ Make a decision

If you're stuck, try choosing the best solution you can right now; don't wait

☞ Do the right thing

Do what you know will help you, even if you don't feel like it

☞ Go to a meeting

Feet first; just get there and let the rest happen

☞ Protect your body from HIVThis is *truly* a life-or-death issue**☞ Prioritize healing**

Make healing your most urgent and important goal, above all else

☞ Reach for community resources

Lean on them! They can be a source of great support

☞ Get others to support your recovery

Tell people what you need

☞ Notice what you *can* controlList the aspects of your life you *do* 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.