

Safe Coping Skills

Seek Safety

Stay safe - Do whatever you need to do to put your safety above all

Leave a bad scene - When things go wrong, get out

Protect yourself - Put up a shield against destructive people, bad environments, and unhealthy coping

Replace destructive activities - For example, candy is less harmful than drugs, and exercise is better than self-harm

Create Healthy Options

Persist - Never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never give up

Choose self respect - Choose whatever will make you like yourself tomorrow

List your options - In any situation, you have choices

Do the best you can with what you have - Make the most of available opportunities

Talk yourself through it - Self-talk helps in difficult times

Imagine - Create a mental picture that helps you feel different (e.g., remember a safe place)

Notice the choice point - In slow motion, notice the exact moment when you choose unhealthy coping

If one way doesn't work, try another - As if in a maze, turn a corner and try a new path

Create a new story - You are the author of your life: be the hero who overcomes adversity

Make a decision - If you're stuck, try choosing the best solution you can right now - don't wait

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

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

Detach from emotional pain - Practice grounding techniques. Distract, walk away, change the channel

Act Early

Avoid avoidable suffering - Prevent bad situations in advance

Watch for danger signs - Face a problem before it becomes huge; notice red flags

When in doubt, don't - If you suspect danger, stay away

Make Healthy Connections

Ask for help - Reach out to someone safe

Practice honesty - Secrets and lying are unhealthy and can ruin relationships; honesty heals them

Set a boundary - Say "no" to protect yourself, and "yes" to healthy relationships

Seek understanding, not blame- Be curious about your reactions, not judgmental. Blaming can prevent growth

Alone is better than a bad relationship.

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

Say what you really think - When you practice this with safe people, you'll feel closer to them

Let go of destructive relationships - If it can't be fixed, detach. It is important to create boundaries and let go of toxic people when possible

Notice the source - Before you accept criticism or advice, notice who is speaking to you

Reach for community resources - Lean on them! They can be a source of great support

Get others to support your healing - Tell people what you need

Take Good Care of Yourself

Take good care of your body - Eat right, exercise, sleep, practice safe sex

Practice self-compassion - Listen to yourself with respect and care, same as you would for a friend or loved one

Prioritize healing - Focus on what matters

Listen to your needs - Don't neglect yourself

Practice soothing self-talk - Talk to yourself very gently, as if to a friend or small child

Integrate the split self - Accept all sides of yourself; they are there for a reason

Pretend you like yourself - See how different the day feels

Praise yourself - Notice what you did right; this is one of the most powerful methods of growth

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

Use kinder language - Make your language less harsh

Reward yourself - Find a healthy way to celebrate anything you do right

Create new "tapes" - Literally! Take a video where you talk to yourself kindly

Reflect and Grow

Observe repeating patterns - Try to notice and understand how you may be re-enacting unhealthy patterns and getting the same negative results

Examine the evidence - Evaluate both sides of the picture

Notice what you can control - List the aspects of your life you do control (e.g., how you respond to a challenge, where you choose to put your energy and attention, what you say to others, etc.)

Check out your assumptions - Practice discovery. Find out whether your assumption is true rather than staying "in your head." Ask those you trust for their feedback.

Link PTSD and unhealthy coping - Recognize your unhealthy coping strategies may be an attempt to self-medicate and escape

Replay the scene - Learn from the experience and seek wisdom. Review a negative event: what can you do differently next time?

Focus on Your Goals

Make a commitment - Promise yourself to do what's right to help your mental health

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

Focus on now - Do what you can to make today better, don't get overwhelmed by the past or future

Set a deadline - Make it happen by setting a date

Solve the problem - Don't take it personally when things go wrong- try to seek a solution

Plan it out - Take the time to think ahead- it's the opposite of impulsivity

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

Think of the consequences - Really see the impact of your choices for tomorrow, next week, next year

Stay Motivated

Inspire yourself - Carry something that reminds you of what's important to you or a quote to keep you motivated

Find rules to live by - Remember a phrase that works for you (e.g., "Stay real")

Create meaning - Remind yourself what you are living for: Your family? Your future self? Your children? Love? Truth? Justice? God? ...

Notice the cost - What is the price of unhealthy coping in your life?

Stay Active

Take responsibility - Take an active, not a passive approach

Actions first, and feelings will follow - Don't wait until you feel motivated; start now

Move toward your opposite - e.g., if you are too dependent, try being more independent

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

Work the material - The more you practice and participate, the quicker the healing

Expect growth to feel uncomfortable - If it feels awkward or difficult, you're doing it right

Setbacks are not failures - A setback is just a setback, nothing more

Create positive addictions - Put your energy toward things that keep you healthy and connected. Sports, hobbies, counseling groups, 12 Step meetings ...

Fight the trigger - Take an active approach to protect yourself

Do the right thing - Do what you know will help you, even if you don't feel like it

Pace yourself - If overwhelmed, go slower. If stagnant, go faster.

Get organized - You'll feel more in control with lists, "to do's" and a clean house

Build Emotional Tolerance

Cry - Let yourself cry; it will not last forever

Tolerate the feeling - "No feeling is final", just get through it safely

Adapted from: Najavits, L.M. *Seeking Safety: A Treatment Manual for PTSD and Substance Abuse* (2002).