

# 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)

With appreciation to the Allies Program (Sacramento, CA) for formatting this Safe Coping List.

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# Safe Coping Skills (Part 2)

from "Seeking Safety: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for PTSD and Substance Abuse"  
by Lisa M. Najavits, Ph.D.

- 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 and participate, the quicker the healing
- 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; don't 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 can't totally prevent a self-destructive act, at least delay it as long as possible
- 55. Let go of destructive relationships-** If it can't 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's 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-** Don't 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's 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-** Don't 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's telling it to you
- 77. Make a decision-** If you're stuck, try choosing the best solution you can right now; don't 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...)