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, 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  
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)
Safe Coping Skills (Part 2)

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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; 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 - Feel 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...)

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