SAFE COPING SKILLS
(PART 1)

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.
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 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.
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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**SAFE COPING SKILLS (PART 2)**

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