

Introduction to Writing a Safety Plan

What is a Safety Plan? A safety plan is a contract between yourself and your closest support people, be they friends, family, or potentially professional staff. This contract states what you promise to do in case of a mental health crisis, and also states what you give your support people full authority to do on your behalf if you are not of sound enough mind to make important decisions as your care is regarded. Note that this contract is **not** legally binding, and does not have any legal standing. It is only an agreement between you and your support people, nothing more.

Why should I write a Safety Plan? Crisis often strikes unexpectedly, and having a written plan of action for these times helps keep someone with a mood disorder safe and acquiring proper care. As such, the plan should be completed when the person for whom the plan is being filled out is *not* in crisis. Many of these fields to fill out can take some time to find answers for as they are very specific and very personal, e.g. the “Signs I am not doing well” section. These signs vary greatly from person to person and are not always easy to recognize.

Whom should I share the completed plan with? You should always talk to your support people and ensure that they are comfortable with being your contact people in case of crisis. You should also give them copies of your completed plan, so they can assist you in catching the early warning signs of crisis and help you get the care you need. It may also be a good idea to share it with your professionals that are helping you manage your mental health, whether that be a therapist, case worker, or perhaps even a psychiatrist.

What is included in this packet? The first few pages (aside from this sheet) are the base **Safety Plan** portion. This is to be used if you are in full-blown crisis, or are nearing it inevitably. Also included is a **Preventative Safety Plan**, with a focus on maintenance of mental health, to be used to help avoid crisis in the first place. The final pages contain a list of **Safe Coping Skills** as well as a **Pleasant Activities List** that can be used any time, for calming, centering, fun, and better overall wellness. Note that some of these activities may be unsuitable for a person with certain sensitivities or certain addictions, e.g. going on a shopping spree might not be wise for someone with a very limited income or a tendency to overspend.

**THIS DOCUMENT IS NOT LEGALLY BINDING AND IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE
FOR AN ADVANCE HEALTHCARE DIRECTIVE.**

Safety Plan

Date: _____

Signature: _____

1. If I cannot stop thinking about suicide or harming myself, I must contact at least one of the following people.

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

2. If #1 fails, I must contact a help hotline.

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-784-2433 (1-800-SUICIDE)

Local Suicide Prevention Hotline: 2-1-1

Crisis Text Line (Text message-based chat): Text HOME to 741741

Internet Crisis Network (Online text-based chat): www.imalive.org

3. I must keep all of my doctor's and therapy appointments, and continue taking my medications as prescribed.

4. If any self-harm occurs, I will go to the emergency room. If any of my emergency contacts are concerned for my safety, they may take me to the hospital or call 9-1-1 on my behalf.

5. Reasons to stay alive and safe; goals I wish to achieve:

6. Signs I am not doing well:

Safety Plan, cont'd

7. Healthy calming activities I can partake in to keep myself safe while in crisis:

8. Ways others can help me when I am in crisis:

9. Preferences regarding gender, language, religion, etc. of professionals/caretakers in an emergency situation:

10. Potentially dangerous items to remove from my environment:

11. Triggers that may cause me to be angry, upset, or go into crisis; things that do not help:

Safety Plan, cont'd

12. List of my professional supports (doctors, social workers, therapists, etc.):

Name	Type of professional	Phone number
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

13. Things that I may need help with when I'm severely struggling and/or hospitalized:

14. Other notes:

Preventative Safety Plan

1. Activities that keep me energized and focused on wellness:

2. Ways to take care of physical wellness (healthy eating, proper sleep, exercise, etc.):

3. Positive activities that help when I'm on the edge of crisis:

4. Ways to build self-esteem (challenging but manageable tasks that make me feel accomplished):

5. Ways I can prepare for future and potentially difficult situations:

Safe Coping Skills

Ask for help: Reach out to someone safe

Inspire yourself: Carry something positive (e.g. a poem)

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

Persist: Never give up

Be honest: Secrets and lying are at the core of mental illness

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

Take good care of your physical health: Good eating, exercise, sleep, etc.

List your options: In all situations, you have choices

Create meaning: Remind yourself of what you are living for

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: Often the best choice is the most difficult

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

Imagine: Create a mental picture that helps you feel different

Pace yourself: If overwhelmed, go slower; if stagnant, go faster

Stay safe: Do whatever you must to put your safety first

Seek understanding, not blame: Blaming yourself prevents growth

Create a new story: 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

Watch for danger signs: Face a problem before it gets huge

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

Attend treatment: Self-help, therapy, medications, groups, etc.

Create a buffer: Put something between you and danger

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

Structure your day: A productive schedule keeps you on track

Make an action plan: Set a deadline, be specific, and let others know about it

Soothing talk: Talk to yourself very gently

Think of the consequences: See the impact on tomorrow, next week, next year

Safe Coping Skills, cont'd

Trust the process: The only way out is through

Work the material: The more you practice and participate, the faster 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 difficult, you're doing it right

Pretend you like yourself: See how different the day feels

Focus on now: Do what you can to make today better rather than getting overwhelmed by the future or past

Praise yourself: Notice what you did right

Observe repeating patterns: Try to notice your re-enactments

Let go of destructive relationships: If it can't be fixed, detach

Take responsibility: Take an active rather than passive approach

Learn from experience: Seek wisdom that can help next time

Solve the problem: Don't take it personally when things go wrong

Examine the evidence: Try to see both sides of the situation

Reward yourself: Find healthy ways to celebrate progress

Setbacks are not failures: Setbacks are setbacks, nothing more

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

Notice the source: Before you accept criticism or advice, notice who's telling it to you

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

Get others to support your recovery: Tell people what you need

Pleasant Activities List

Working on my car
Planning a career
Getting out of (paying down) debt
Collecting things
Going on vacation
Thinking of how it will be when I finish school
Recycling old items
Going on a date
Relaxing
Watching a movie
Jogging, walking
Listening to music
Thinking about past parties
Buying household gadgets
Lying in the sun
Laughing
Thinking about past trips
Listening to other people
Reading magazines or newspapers
Engaging in hobbies (stamp collecting, model building, etc.)
Spending an evening with good friends
Planning a day's activities
Meeting new people
Remembering beautiful scenery
Saving money
Going home from work
Eating
Practicing karate, judo, yoga, etc.
Thinking about retirement
Repairing things around the house
Working on machinery (cars, boats, etc.)
Remembering the words and deeds of loving people
Wearing shocking clothes
Having quiet evenings
Taking care of plants
Buying, selling stock
Going swimming
Doodling
Exercising
Collecting old things
Going to a party
Thinking about buying things
Playing golf
Playing soccer
Flying kites
Having discussions with friends
Having family get-togethers
Riding a bike or motorcycle
Running track
Going camping
Singing around the house
Arranging flowers
Practicing religion
Organizing tools
Going to the beach
Having a day with nothing to do
Going to class reunions
Going skating, skateboarding, roller blading, etc.
Going sailing or motorboating
Traveling or going on vacations
Painting
Doing something spontaneously
Doing needlepoint, crewel, etc.
Sleeping
Driving
Entertaining, giving parties
Going to clubs (garden clubs, Parents Without Partners, etc.)
Thinking about getting married
Singing with groups
Flirting
Playing musical instruments
Doing arts and crafts
Making a gift for someone
Buying/downloading music
Watching boxing, wrestling
Planning parties
Cooking
Going hiking
Writing (books, poems, articles, etc.)
Sewing
Buying clothes
Going out to dinner
Working
Discussing books, going to a book club
Sightseeing
Getting a manicure, pedicure, or facial
Going to the beauty parlor
Early morning coffee and newspaper
Playing tennis
Kissing
Watching children play
Going to plays and concerts
Daydreaming
Thinking about sex
Refinishing furniture
Watching TV
Making lists of tasks
Walking in the woods or at the waterfront
Buying gifts
Completing a task
Going to a spectator sport (auto racing, horse racing)
Teaching
Photography
Going fishing
Thinking about pleasant events

Pleasant Activities List, cont'd

Staying on a diet
Playing with animals
Eating a donut
Acting
Being alone
Writing diary entries or letters
Cleaning
Reading
Taking children places
Dancing
Weightlifting
Going on a picnic
Meditating
Playing hockey
Working with clay or pottery
Glass blowing
Going skiing
Dressing up
Reflecting on how I've improved
Buying small things for myself
Talking on the phone
Going to museums
Lighting candles
Going bowling
Doing woodworking
Fantasizing about the future
Taking ballet/tap-dancing classes
Debating
Sitting in a sidewalk cafe
Having an aquarium
Participating in "living history" events
Knitting
Doing crossword puzzles
Shooting pool/billiards
Getting a massage
Playing catch, taking batting practice
Seeing and/or showing photos
Thinking about my good qualities
Solving riddles
Having a political discussion
Buying books
Taking a sauna or steam bath
Checking out garage sales
Thinking about having a family
Thinking about happy moments from my childhood
Splurging
Going horseback riding
Trying something new
Working on jigsaw puzzles
Playing cards
Taking a nap
Figuring out my favorite scent
Making a card and giving it to someone I care about
Instant-messaging or texting someone
Playing a board game
Putting on my favorite piece of clothing
Making a smoothie and drinking it slowly
Putting on makeup
Thinking about a friend's good qualities
Completing something I feel great about
Surprising someone with a favor
Surfing the internet
Playing video games
Emailing friends
Going walking or sledding in a snowfall
Getting a haircut
Installing new software
Watching sports on TV
Taking care of my pets
Doing volunteer service
Watching stand-up comedy
Working in my garden
Participating in a public performance (e.g. a flash mob)
Blogging
Fighting for a cause
Conducting experiments
Expressing my love to someone
Going on field trips, nature walks, exploring, spelunking
Gathering natural objects (wild foods or fruit, driftwood)
Going downtown or to a shopping mall
Going to a fair, carnival, circus, zoo, or amusement park
Going to the library
Joining or forming a band
Learning to do something new
Listening to the sounds of nature
Looking at the moon or stars
Outdoor work
Playing organized sports
Playing in the sand, a stream, the grass, etc.
Protesting social, political, or environmental conditions
Reading cartoons or comics
Reading sacred works
Rearranging or redecorating my room or the house
Selling or trading something
Snowmobiling or riding a dune buggy or ATV
Social networking
Soaking in the bathtub
Learning or speaking a foreign language
Talking on the phone
Composing or arranging songs or music
Thrift store shopping
Using computers
Visiting people who are sick, shut in, or in trouble
Staying on a diet
Playing with animals
Flying a plane

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Sourced from the Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skill Training manual by Marsha Linehan,
et al.