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10 Steps to a Mental Health Safety Plan

This article is to help guide you in creating a safety plan together that the person in crisis can use if they are alone or not sure what to do in a mental health crisis situation. This is not a 'how to' on contracting to safety or making a specific suicide safety plan, although this safety plan would be helpful in those situations.

Step 1:

Have a conversation about what a safety plan is and how it might be helpful.

- Safety plan is like a map a person can follow if they are lost. While in a crisis we often lose the ability to think ahead and problem solve. This map will help guide you to where you want to be and what support you want to get.
- Safety plans are only helpful if they are developed by the person who will be using them (with the help and support of someone like you). All the answers to the different sections need to primarily come from the person who is going to use the safety plan.
- Your safety plan should be as accessible to you as possible (on your phone, in your wallet, on your fridge...)

Step 2:

Identify how you know when the safety plan needs to be used. This will be different for everyone, and can change from day to day.

- If someone is feeling lonely and isolated, and is not sure how to reach out to supports
- If someone is feeling too anxious to participate in their daily activities
- If someone is feeling like they want to self harm (Cutting, burning, excessive drugs/alcohol etc)
- If someone is thinking about suicide
- If someone is attempting suicide

Step 3:

Find whatever you will write the safety plan down on and make yourselves comfortable. (Paper/Pen, Computer, Phone etc)

Step 4:

Write down and identify three or more people who you can call for support.

- Make sure you have an array of choices for support, depending on how the person is feeling at the time (family member/friend/therapist/crisis line)
- Make sure a 24 hour crisis line is always included, incase none of the other contacts pick up their phone right away



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Step 5:

Write down three or more places that you can go that make you feel safe.

- These places should all be different, to accommodate how that person is feeling at the time of crisis
- Make sure these locations aren't isolated with little access to support (down by the river, on the highway etc)
- It is helpful if the people identified in step 4 and the locations in step 5 align sometimes, because then you get a safe space with a supportive person all at the same time.
- Make sure one of these locations is the hospital or police station, in case it is a time of day/night where the other spaces are not available or do not provide enough comfort

Step 6:

Write down three or more things that make you happy (or feel better).

- This step can be very hard if someone is still feeling in crisis. If this step is not possible just yet, leave the spot open on the page here, and come back to it later
- Everyone has different things that make them happy. If the person is struggling to find ideas, make it a conversation and see if what you identify as making you happy can spark their interest or their memory
- Identifying things that make you happy, and a support person you can do that with can also be doubly as helpful sometimes
- Make sure these items are realistic. Going to Disneyland may make you happy, but it is unlikely to be a realistic option during your time of crisis.

Step 6:

Write down these sentences and fill in the blanks.

I can handle this because _____

I now I will be ok because _____

I am (add positive sentence) _____

- Writing these when you are well and not in crisis means you are creating positive self talk for your 'in crisis self'
- If the owner of the safety plan answers these themselves, it makes it harder to refute them when they are feeling unwell or in crisis

Step 7:

Write down three or more things that have kept you safe and out of crisis in the past.

- You may find some overlap here from the above steps (specifically a person or activity that has helped in the past)
- Again, having multiple will provide variety for the person when using this in a crisis later on



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- If the creative juices are flowing, try not to have any overlap from the steps above to create even more options for later

Step 8:

Write down a breathing exercise or mindfulness practice that might be helpful in this circumstance.

- Some people practice breathing exercises or mindfulness on a regular basis to deal with their mental health issues. This is a great time to be reminded of what they usually use to mitigate these symptoms
- This is a good time to brainstorm what you have heard other people are doing, or what you have been suggested to do in the past and put it into the plan
- During this step is a great opportunity to practice one of these breathing or mindfulness activities together

Step 9:

Write down what you will do if none of the steps of the safety plan work, or if you are so unwell you are unable to use the safety plan.

- The answer to this one should always be to call for professional help.
- If you are unable to call your health care provider or the crisis line at this time, call **911**

Step 10:

Review the safety plan together and talk about how it might be used moving forward.

- Make sure that all the ideas and plans are made by or supported by the person who will be using it
- Make sure that you will be keeping the safety plan somewhere you can access it easily
- Some people like to share their safety plan with the people around them, to provide a map for the other person as to how to help if you are in a crisis situation
- Congratulate yourselves on being able to come up with so many great ideas about who can help, how you help yourself and what you can do to keep safe