

SAFETY PLAN INSTRUCTIONS

This de-escalation tool helps in times of crisis, suicide ideation, and times when you feel “off” or have out-of-control feelings such as anger or depression. Going through this process yourself can also guide you later to help another person when they are feeling upset, hopeless, or in crisis.

In the United States, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death overall, and disproportionately affects ages 10-64. Contributing factors or causes are complex and often intertwined – mental health conditions, brain chemistry, intrusive thoughts, harassment, abuse, trauma, systemic oppression, unmet needs or rights, lack of support and acceptance, pain, illnesses, isolation, etc.

But suicidality is usually not the regular/true/desired feeling of a person who experiences it. This safety plan can help deescalate those thoughts and feelings, and help keep you alive and safe in a crisis.

Prepare this plan for yourself, and encourage others to prepare one as well, even as a group of two or more working individually together! You can also help build community and relationship, and demonstrate compassion, by walking someone else through this process.

This is your personal plan, so make everything personalized and meaningful to you. Don't worry about what is “normal” or what other people might put on their own plans – everyone is different & that's great. This template is put together from multiple expert guidelines and iterations of group-work. Tweak it as needed to make it work for you!

You can print out the blank version & fill it out manually, or you can edit the editable version & then print it out...or use this information as a guide and make your own in whatever format you can. Whatever is best to make it work for you, remembering that something is better than nothing. It does not have to be perfect or pretty in order to help when its needed!

Keep this plan in a place where you'll remember it, and walk through it / share it with a trusted person if you can. Revisit the plan in different moods and seasons, and update it as needed.

Please know that you are loved and you matter,
even at times when you may not feel like it! ♡

SAFETY PLAN - TO ME WITH LOVE FROM ME ☺

WARNING SIGNS / ALERTS

Signs that something is not all right with me

ARE MY NEEDS MET?

Checklist of needs to make sure I'm taken care of

SAFETY STRATEGIES

What I can do to reduce risk & keep myself safe

STRESSORS & ALLEVIATIONS

My common stressors → counterpoints & helpful steps

REASONS FOR LIVING

Why I like being alive, what I enjoy about life, what gives my life meaning, why me being alive matters

PERSONAL DISTRACTIONS OR COPING STRATEGIES

Things I can do on my own to calm my mind
& get out of urgent crisis mode

EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS OR GOOD ENVIRONMENTS

Other people/places that will help get my mind
off of problems & crisis feelings

PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP

People I know personally, who I can ask for help

HELPER PROFESSIONALS/ORGS

People that are trained to help when I'm in crisis

SAFETY PLAN - TO ME WITH LOVE FROM ME 😊

This is your personal plan, so make everything personalized and meaningful to you! Don't worry about what is "normal" or what other people might put on their own plans – everyone is different & that's great.

Call it whatever you want!

Examples: "Crisis Plan," "De-escalation," "Stayin' Alive," "Climbing Out of the Pit"

Then write yourself a note – whether it's a short sentence or a longer letter – so that crisis-you knows that you have faith in yourself & that things will get better, & want to work through the plan, get help, live, etc. If you experience suicidality or mood swings often and have trouble remembering what it's like to want to live, you could also write a short sentence saying something like "today, I definitely want to live" and date it regularly.

WARNING SIGNS / ALERTS

Signs that something is not all right with me

Thoughts, moods, situations, behaviors, etc. that signal something is "off" or that a crisis may develop. Try to think of things that are specific to you when something may be wrong.

Examples:

Saying or thinking things like "I can't do this anymore," "What's the point," "There's no way out of this," "I hope I don't wake up tomorrow," feeling hopeless, feeling overwhelmed, joking about death, imagining death or dangerous situations, drinking more than usual, feeling lethargic, sleeping too much / too little, withdrawing from loved ones, clinginess/codependency, oversharing, shutting down, getting impatient or snippy with your loved ones (incl pets), getting rid of belongings, cleaning too much / too little, shirking responsibilities, taking care of to-dos or last business especially if you are the only one who can, driving too fast, spending too much, acting impulsively, sensory issues, less frequent hygiene practices

ARE MY NEEDS MET?

Checklist of needs to make sure I'm taken care of

When our needs are not met, they can create or exacerbate negative feelings, especially if there are existing stressors or multiple unmet self-care needs. It is helpful to list the unmet need or complaint, and resolutions (especially easy-to-achieve ones), which can then be used as a checklist in times of distress.

Examples:

- Tired? (sleep/rest/relax)
- Hungry? (eat something)
- Thirsty? (drink water)
- Weak? (get electrolytes, rest)
- Comfortable? (change temperature, clothes, place)
- In pain? (take medicine, relax body or face)
- Breathing well? (take 5 deep breaths)
- Need hugs/social contact? (reach out to a friendly person)
- Need my pets? (pet, snuggle, play with pets)
- Feel icky? (wash face or use face wipes, shower, brush teeth, change clothes, put on lotion)
- My S.H.I.T. – sleep, hugs, ingest, temp

SAFETY STRETEGIES

What I can do to reduce risk & keep myself safe

Sometimes the wave of suicidal thoughts does not subside quickly or may be easily triggered to come back. By implementing safety measures, you can reduce the access to means of suicide or harm. Simply making it more inconvenient does save lives.

Examples:

- Sit on the floor or in a place where you feel safe (room, closet, corner, favorite chair, under a blanket) – make it physically less convenient to do anything harmful
- Go outside or to a public place, or even to another room where it is safer
- Avoid alcohol or drugs
- Avoid talking to certain people, reading certain news, going on certain social media outlets, tense shows – avoid triggers
- Reduce access or sight of suicidal means – move pill bottles into a cabinet or drawer so they are not seen, lock up weapons and move to another room or ask someone to take them for a while

STRESSORS & ALLEVIATIONS

My common stressors → counterpoints & helpful steps

Over time you can get to know yourself and know what are common stressors or triggers for you. Stressors are especially hard to deal with when you are in distress, and you might find yourself dwelling on them and believing them to be impossible barriers to happiness. List them in advance, along with steps or plans you have to help alleviate them, positive aspects that you may forget about in a crisis, etc.

Examples:

- Rough family dynamics → family members you get along with, chosen family, people who support / understand or can be buffers, how to get some alone time, plans / steps / verbiage to distance yourself
- Loneliness / isolation → people you like, people you want to get to know better, good online forums or IRL environments
- Living somewhere you don't like (home, neighborhood, area) → things you do like about where you live, steps/plans to move, other places to spend time
- Periodic moods / hormones / mental health fluctuations → reminder that this happens, it's not real, it will pass, check back in x amount of time
- Lack of LGBTQIA+ affirmation → you are beloved & the divine is pleased, you are not alone, role models, loud queer voices making progress
- Money/poverty/capitalism → theory to learn, ways to teach theory, ways to earn or save a little extra
- Climate change, politics, need for social change, etc. → signs of progress & hope, changemakers you respect, how you can make a difference

REASONS FOR LIVING

Why I like being alive, what I enjoy about life, what gives my life meaning, why me being alive matters

These can be really hard to think of or easy to downplay when you are feeling hopeless. So write down some that are personal to you, and trust yourself when you read them later! No reason is too "minor" or "silly" – if it gives you happiness or purpose, it's important.

If this is something you struggle with frequently, it's not a bad idea to maintain a more detailed list, similar to a daily gratitude practice, by writing down (on paper or digitally) each day/week/month what you are looking forward to and why you're glad to be alive.

Examples: something you enjoy or are learning (music, language, hobby, subject), commitments that you value or important obligations (volunteer roles, helping take care of someone else), your pets (very common!), your loved ones, life goals, places you'd like to see, habits or feelings you enjoy (walking in nature, the feel of the wind on your face, dressing up to go out), things that inspire you or cheer you on (including the It Gets Better Project at itgetsbetter.org), notes from loved ones or even strangers

PERSONAL DISTRACTIONS OR COPING STRATEGIES

Things I can do on my own to calm my mind
& get out of urgent crisis mode

Things you can do by yourself to quiet intrusive thoughts, distract yourself enough to get past the peak of crisis feelings, and/or help cope. Whether you need more distraction or more direct coping actions will depend on you and possibly on your condition at the time.

Examples: relaxation techniques, 10 deep breathes, counting/alphabetizing/sorting something, sitting with your legs up against the wall, exercise or physical activity, walking to the end of the block, playing with your pet, painting your nails, working on a project or hobby (crochet, etc.), playing an instrument, listening to music (maybe a specific song or playlist)

EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS OR GOOD ENVIRONMENTS

Other people/places that will help get my mind
off of problems & crisis feelings

Similar to personal distractions or coping strategies, but these are activities that involve other people or public places. These are not people who will talk you through suicidal feelings, but who will provide a distraction.

Examples: a favorite coffee shop, someone who always has good jokes or memes, someone very chatty or interesting.

PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP

People I know personally, who I can ask for help

These are people you actually know, who you can ask for help. This is something that is very hard to think of when you are feeling hopeless, so it may be a good idea to write the names and then write something like "yes, really" or "they really do care, I promise."

Realistically, depending on your relationship with them, it might vary on what kind of help you can ask for or how much you feel comfortable telling them. Some people don't know enough about suicidality and will freak out or call the police or have you involuntarily committed, so with those people you might just say you're having a bad day and could they cheer you up. Other people might understand more, might help talk you down, might even know about this safety plan and will help walk you through it again together, may sit with you a while even while you call help lines, etc.

Try to come up with at least 3 names; if you're preparing this plan with someone else or helping someone else prepare their own, consider letting them know if you would be comfortable being one of their safety contacts!

In most phones nowadays, you can also mark contacts as starred/favorites and sort them into groups. That's a great idea (for both this group of people and the distraction group of people) so that you always have easy access anytime you have your phone near you.

HELPER PROFESSIONALS/ORGS

People that are trained to help when I'm in crisis

Professionals or organizations you can call for help during a crisis, who are specifically trained and knowledgeable and willing to help! Some common ones listed at the bottom of the template; this list is also helpful in case someone you know is experiencing a crisis and needs help; you will have easy access to info to help them, even if their needs are different than yours.

If the safety plan ever feels like "too much," jump right to this section! It's okay to skip previous steps, but don't skip this one, ok?

Other contacts to put here:

- Your therapist/counselor/etc.
- National Suicide Prevention 24/7 Lifeline: 800-273-8255 (-TALK) which will connect to the local crisis line; note that the local Utah line will call police in some cases
- Crisis text line: text "home" (or anything) to 741-741
- Samaritans: 877-870-4673 (-HOPE)
- Trevor Lifeline for LGBTQIA+ youth: 866-488-7386
- Trans Lifeline, which will not call the police: 877-565-8860
- Boys Town for youth, children, & families: 800-448-3000 or text to 20121
- NAMI helpline (during business hours): 800-950-6264 (-NAMI)
- RAINN: 800-656-4673 (-HOPE)
- Safe Harbor Crisis Center for abuse, assault, rape, stalking, etc.: 801-444-9161
- For K-12 students in Utah, safeut.org or SafeUT app to chat, or 833-372-3388
- 211 (in many states), which connects to United Way; also an app
- More resources, esp. for marginalized communities, at itgetsbetter.org/get-help
- More resources, incl. texting services & internet forums, at unsuicide.org