

My Safety Toolkit



EMOTIONAL SIGNS

Not Caring:

- Sadness
- Recreation is no longer fun

Anxiety:

- Restlessness
- Agitation
- Insecurity
- Worthlessness

Irritability:

- Hypersensitivity
- Defensive
- Arrogant
- Argumentative
- Rebellious
- Angry

Overdoing or Denial:

- Exaggerating
- Working too hard
- Denying you have problems
- Ignoring symptoms
- Feeling suspicious

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

Avoiding Things:

- Keeping to yourself
- Avoiding work
- Having trouble accepting responsibility
- Neglecting responsibility

Doing things to extreme:

- Alcoholism
- Gambling
- Spending sprees
- Sexual promiscuity

Administrative problems:

- Late to work
- Poor appearance
- Poor personal hygiene
- Accident prone

Legal problems:

- Indebtedness
- Shoplifting
- Traffic tickets
- Inability to control violent impulses

PHYSICAL SIGNS

Frequent illness

Physical exhaustion

Reliance on self-medication

Ailments: headache, insomnia, appetite changes, weight changes, indigestion, nausea, diarrhea, constipation, sexual changes.

SUGGESTION LIST TO HELP YOU RELAX AND MANAGE STRESS IN YOUR LIFE

- Talking with friends
- Listening to music
- Prayer
- Dancing
- Exercise
- Watching TV
- Working
- Writing
- Going for a walk outside
- Going for a ride
- Eating (but be careful not to eat too much)
- Taking a bath or shower
- Practicing relaxation techniques
- Positive self-talk
- Positive thinking
- Avoiding situations that increase stress
- Talking with a mental health professional
- Seeking support from a family member or a supportive friend

Remember that when you need to talk and cannot reach a friend, family member, or your regular therapist you can call the unit and ask to talk with a therapist. Day or night, rain or shine, unless our census is zero, there is always a therapist or psych nurse that you can talk with to help you cope with your problems and get through a crisis.

THINGS I CAN DO WHEN I'M OVERWHELMED

When you are feeling overwhelmed, it is difficult to focus and think of things you can do which might help you feel more relaxed and in control. Think of things that used to give you pleasure or which have helped you feel more able to cope. But also add a few new ideas to this list so that you can try something new. Please be specific: Example—listen to music, take a walk, etc.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____
- 9 _____
- 10 _____
- 11 _____
- 12 _____
- 13 _____
- 14 _____
- 15 _____
- 16 _____
- 17 _____
- 18 _____
- 19 _____
- 20 _____

List any triggers that may cause you to be angry, depressed, upset, or cause a relapse of symptoms.

List your warning signs that you are having difficulty in your mental and emotional health.

Hint: Use the check-off list of warning signs that applied to you.

List the coping skills or resources that you must use to make thing better.

IDENTIFYING YOUR COPING PATTERNS

A coping mechanism or pattern is simply something we do in order to decrease our emotional pain. It only becomes a problem when the coping mechanism interferes with our daily functioning, is used excessively (too much), or when it physically harms us.

The list below reflects some common coping mechanisms. This list is not complete and you may add that you use which are not listed. Circle the ones that apply to you. Put a plus (+) sign by the positive coping skills and a negative (-) sign by the negative or harmful coping skills.

Hiding behind a partner
Forgetting
Creating chaos
Not sleeping
Staying in control
Fantasizing
Dogmatic beliefs
Minimizing
Self-mutilation
Suicide attempts
Alcoholism
Compulsive exercising
Compulsive sex
Workaholism
Abusing others
Spacing out
Taking care of others

Rationalization
Sleeping excessively
Leaving your body
Repeating abuse
Humor
Gambling
Perfectionism
Running away
Staying busy
Compulsive eating
Drug addiction
Anorexia/bulimia
Shoplifting
Avoiding sex
Physical illness
Avoiding intimacy
Staying super alert

The following are common signs that a person is doing well. Check the ones that apply to you when you are doing well.

- ☐ I am eating right. (3 or more balanced meals a day.)
- ☐ I am sleeping 6 or more hours at night.
- ☐ I am smiling frequently.
- ☐ I exercise regularly (3 or more times a week.)
- ☐ I have good personal hygiene.
- ☐ I shower and groom myself daily.
- ☐ I am enjoying daily activities (i.e. cleaning, working outside, walking, working.)
- ☐ I am proud of myself.
- ☐ I am accomplishing tasks (big or small.)
- ☐ I am talking to my family/friends.
- ☐ My emotions are under control.
- ☐ I am using my coping skills.
- ☐ I am journaling regularly.
- ☐ I am keeping my appointments with my counselor/doctor.
- ☐ I am taking my medications as prescribed.
- ☐ I can handle annoyances more easily.
- ☐ I can handle my workload.
- ☐ I am performing well at work.
- ☐ I accept complements from others.
- ☐ I am assertive.
- ☐ I am easier to get along with.
- ☐ I can handle constructive criticism.
- ☐ I am sociable.
- ☐ I am having fun.
- ☐ I am goal oriented.
- ☐ I am task oriented.
- ☐ I am finding enjoyment in my hobbies.
- ☐ I am comfortable with who I am.
- ☐ I am able to control my thoughts.
- ☐ I am safe.
- ☐ I am using my resources (family, friends, counselors, AA, support group)

Other: _____

COPING PATTERNS CONTINUED:

Now that you have identified your own coping mechanisms, please identify which ones are the most dangerous and damaging to you and the ways they are still useful to you. Based on this information you can now make informed choices and changes related to how you cope.

DAMAGING COPING MECHANISM #1 _____

What are the benefits of this coping mechanism?

How is this coping mechanism dangerous to me?

What better coping skill could I replace this with?

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Think back over the days/weeks leading up your hospitalization. Check the statements that apply to you during that time. These are warning signs that you need to be on the alert for and get extra help if they start re-occurring.

- ☐ I lost interest in doing things.
- ☐ I stopped caring about my personal appearance.
- ☐ I stopped caring about my future.
- ☐ My thoughts raced.
- ☐ I felt alone.
- ☐ I became obsessed with:
 - ☐ Religion
 - ☐ Self
 - ☐ Drugs/Alcohol
 - ☐ Sex
 - ☐ Food
 - ☐ Money
 - ☐ Shopping
 - ☐ Sleep
 - ☐ Other
- ☐ I could not make decisions.
- ☐ I had disturbing thoughts.
- ☐ I couldn't sleep.
- ☐ I couldn't get along with others.
- ☐ I felt bad much of the time.
- ☐ I became nervous or tense.
- ☐ I felt depressed most of the time.
- ☐ I felt worthless.
- ☐ I had difficulty remembering things.
- ☐ I had difficulty concentrating.
- ☐ I lost my appetite.
- ☐ I fought and argued all the time.
- ☐ Nobody liked me anymore.
- ☐ People had trouble understanding what I said.
- ☐ I had bad dreams.
- ☐ I wanted to hurt myself or someone else.
- ☐ I was always exhausted.
- ☐ I was drinking/drugging.
- ☐ Other people became scared of me.
- ☐ I became afraid all the time for no real reason.
- ☐ My weight changed dramatically.
- ☐ I felt people were talking about me or plotting against me.
- ☐ I heard voices that others did not hear.
- ☐ I saw things that others did not see.

Other: _____

Healing involves change. However, change can be scary just because it is unfamiliar and because the loss involved.

Some examples of this loss are:

Loss of a therapist when you are well

Loss of extra attention when you are not in a crisis

Loss of you identity as a sick person

Since healing is a very vague and general word. It is important that you personalize it with your own definition.

Examples of this might be:

Healed = Sober

Healed = Not Suicidal

Healed = Not Depressed

Fill in your definition: Healed = _____

IDENTIFY THREE THINGS YOU WOULD HAVE TO GIVE UP IF YOU WERE HEALED:

If healed, I'd have to give up:

If healed, I'd have to give up:

If healed, I'd have to give up:

What will replace these things you will have to give up?

STRESS REDUCTION TECHNIQUES

Recognizing your stress cues: It is important to recognize when you are under stress and to try to reduce the stress at the first possible moment. Each person needs to identify his or her own stress cues. Some common cues are anxiety, anger, blushing, gritting your teeth, yelling, shortness of breath, tightness in chest or throat, clenched fists. Make a list below of things that happen to you when you are stressed. Your stress cues may have a pattern to them (example: tap toes, then throat gets tight, then tearful, etc.) you can identify a pattern you can learn to intervene at an even earlier level (sooner) and decrease the chance that you will act out because of overwhelming stress.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____

STRESS REDUCTION IDEAS

Whenever you experience one of your stress cues, you can utilize one of the following stress reduction techniques. You have the ability to be in control of your response to stress so that you do not harm yourself. Please add some of your own ideas to this list.

- Take 12 deep, slow abdominal breaths
- Progressive muscle relaxation—tense then tighten muscles
- Visualize and focus on a restful, peaceful scene
- Exercise
- Talk with someone supportive
- Play
- Eat a well-balanced diet
- Decrease or eliminate alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine and pills

Add Your Own.

SAFETY PLAN TIPS

1. Get help before things get out of hand. Do not hesitate to call a doctor or therapist if you need one.
2. Practice deep breathing and relaxation techniques several times a day. This will help greatly when you are in crisis.
3. Eat regular meals. Do not skip meals. Avoid excessive sugar and caffeine.
4. Do not use alcohol!
5. Make a list of things to do for the day and stick to it.
6. If anxious or manic, regulate your activities to avoid over-stimulation. Restrict yourself to activities that are quiet and soothing, such as a long, slow walk; a warm bath; a relaxing swim; etc.
7. Reduce the stress in your environment. Keep away from stressful people.
8. If anxious or manic, stay at home or in familiar surroundings. Steer clear of stimulating environments.
9. Do not overwhelm yourself by committing to extra activities outside your usual routine. Pace yourself.
10. When anxious, manic, or depressed, do not make any major decisions. Put off decisions until you are able think clearly.
11. When anxious, manic, or depressed, avoid spending money. Give your credit cards or money to a trusted friend.
13. If depressed, force yourself to get out of bed at a reasonable time and shower. Groom yourself! Looking better will help you feel better!
14. Build structure into your life. Most people do better with a daily and weekly routine.
15. If all of your relaxation techniques are not working to help put you to sleep and you are unable to sleep at night, get help from a doctor right away. Loss of sleep will aggravate your condition and cause further problems.
16. Put your Safety Plan where you can find it easily and review it regularly! Don't let denial get in the way of getting extra help when you need it.

MY SUICIDE PREVENTION PLAN

It is important to make a commitment to life and to have a written plan which supports this commitment. Please fill out this suicide prevention plan.

Example:

When I am feeling suicidal I will call my therapist, go to a friend's house, etc.
I will not hurt myself, take too many pills, etc.

You fill in your prevention plan:

When I am feeling suicidal, I will:

I will not:

Important Phone Numbers

I will call _____ at phone # _____

If I cannot get through to this person I will call _____ at phone # _____

The phone number for suicide prevention is 1-800-SUICIDE
Help is also available by calling 911 Emergency Services.

I deserve to live because:

*If you cannot think of any reasons to write down, ask someone who cares about you to help fill in these lines.

Date _____ **Signature** _____

Please describe in your own words what you are like when you are doing well (behaviors feelings thoughts).

Hint: Use the check-off list of signs that you are doing well.

List the healthy habits you need to do every day to keep yourself doing well.

List the names and phone numbers of your supporters along with what you need from them.

1. PARKVIEW HOSPITAL – 2 NORTH 584-4455 _____

Taking Care of Yourself When You're Feeling Overwhelmed

Keep yourself safe. Get rid of any pills you don't need or
give your medications to someone who can give them to you one dose at a time.
Remove any dangerous objects or weapons from your home.

Take your medicine regularly.
Avoid alcohol and drugs not prescribed for you.

Set realistic goals for yourself. Work at them slowly, one step at a time.
Know your limits and don't try to go beyond them until you feel better.

Stay busy. Make a written schedule for yourself every day and stick to it.
Set priorities for things that need to be done first. Cross things out as you finish them.

Be good to yourself. Schedule enjoyable activities, such as:
listening to music, playing an instrument, meditating, doing relaxation exercises,
doing needlework, sewing, writing, reading a book or magazine, taking a warm bath,
going window shopping, playing games, watching a movie or TV, gardening, playing
with your pet, learning something new, enjoying a hobby, taking a drive or a walk.

Take care of your body. Eat a well-balanced diet. Don't skip meals.
Get as much sleep as you need and exercise regularly.

Talk to other people. Attend a support group meeting.
Ask for help when you need it.

Remember this too shall pass!

Friend: _____

Relative: _____

Friend: _____

Clergy: _____

Friend: _____

Therapist: _____

Psychiatrist: _____

Dep/Bipolar Support Alliance: 477-1515

Crisis Center: 635-7000

Suicide Hotline: 596-5466

Before You Kill Yourself.....

You've decided to do it. 'Life is impossible. Suicide is your way out.

Fine - but before you kill yourself, there are some things you should know. I am a psychiatric nurse, and I see the results of suicide - when it works and more often, when it doesn't. Consider, before you act, these facts:

Suicide is usually not successful. You think you know a way to guarantee it? Ask the 25-year-old who tried to electrocute himself. He lived. But both his arms are gone.

What about jumping? Ask John. He used to be intelligent, with an engaging sense of humor. That was before he leaped from a building. Now he's brain damaged and will always need care. He staggers and has seizures. He lives in a fog. But worst of all, he knows he used to be normal.

Even less violent methods can leave you crippled. What about pills? Ask the 12 year-old with extensive liver damage from an overdose. Have you ever seen anyone die of liver damage? It takes awhile. You turn yellow. It's a hard way to go.

No method is fool proof. What about a gun? Ask the 24-year-old who shot himself in the head. Now he drags one leg, has a useless arm, and no vision or hearing on one side. He lived through his "fool-proof" suicide. You might too.

Suicide is not glamorous. You may picture a movie star in a slinky negligee drifting off to eternal sleep from an overdose of pills. But you picture omits a likely sickening reality: as she dies, her sphincter muscles relax, and that beautiful gown is soiled with her excrement.

Who will clean your blood off the carpet, or scrape your brains from the ceiling?

Commercial cleaning crews may refuse that job - but someone has to do it. Who will have to cut you down from where you hanged yourself, or identify your bloated body after you've drowned? Your mother? Your wife? Your son?

The carefully worded "loving" suicide note is no help. Those who loved you will never completely recover. They'll feel regret, and an unending pain. And rage, because at that moment, you cared only about yourself.

Suicide is contagious. Look around at your family: sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, husband, wife. Look closely at the four-year-old playing with his cars on the rug. Kill yourself tonight, and he may do it ten years from now. It's a fact that suicide often follows suicide in families, and kids are especially vulnerable.

You do have other choices. There are people who can help you through this crisis. Call a hot line. Call a friend. Call your minister or priest. Call a doctor or hospital. Call the police.

They will tell you that there's hope. Maybe you'll find it in the mail tomorrow. Or in a phone call this weekend. Or when you meet someone shopping. You don't know- no one does. But what you're seeking could be just a minute, or day or a month away.

You say you don't want to be stopped? Still want to do it? Well then, I may see you in the psychiatric ward later. And we'll work with whatever you have left.

Anonymous
Reader's Digest 1988