

The Safety Plan

A safety plan is essential for clients who experience self-injurious behavior or suicidal ideation. It provides a structured approach to managing distressing thoughts and urges by identifying support systems, distraction techniques, and available resources. A stress management skills plan also helps clients respond to different stress levels.

This worksheet aims to assist therapists in creating a safety plan with clients to manage self-injurious behavior and suicidal ideation. It may also help clients develop a stress management skills plan, and explore the benefits and consequences of engaging in stress management behaviors.

1 Safety Plan

- Discuss the importance of a safety plan in managing self-injurious behavior and suicidal ideation.
- Collaborate with the client to identify activities that serve as distractions and help manage distress, such as reading, watching TV, schoolwork, or light stretching.
- Identify trusted individuals who can provide support during difficult times, such as partners, friends, family members, or work confidants.
- Explore available resources and crisis helplines that can be accessed in times of distress.

2 The Thermometer Metaphor

- Introduce the thermometer metaphor to develop understanding of distress levels and appropriate distress tolerance skills.
- Explain that crisis survival skills like TIPPs, ACCEPTS, self-soothe, pros and cons, or IMPROVE the moment may be necessary at higher levels of distress.
- Discuss how, at lower levels of distress, acceptance, willing thinking, or turning the mind can be used to foster a different approach to distress.

3 Skills Toolkit

- Collaborate with the client to develop a stress management skills plan based on their stress levels.
- Identify specific skills to use at different stress levels. For example:
 - At higher stress levels (eight or nine), encourage the use of TIPP skills, such as walking outside in cold air or holding an ice cube to the back of the neck.
 - At lower stress levels (three or four), suggest deep breathing and grounding exercises, which can be done at their desk or at home.
- Teach square breathing, which involves breathing in for four seconds, holding for four seconds, breathing out for four seconds, and holding for four seconds. Repeat for a minute or two.
- Explain double exhalation breathing, where the client breathes out for twice as long as they breathe in, to calm the nervous system and decrease stress.

4 Pros and Cons

- Introduce the concept of pros and cons in relation to stress management behaviors.
- Encourage the client to create a pros and cons board and evaluate the short-term and long-term benefits and consequences of using stress management skills.
- Guide the client to consider whether and how their behavioral choices align with their values.

Key Points

- Creating a safety plan and stress management skills plan with clients can provide them with practical tools to manage self-injurious behavior, suicidal ideation, and distress.
- As a therapist, it is crucial to develop these plans collaboratively, considering the client's unique triggers, support systems, and accessible resources.
- Exploring the pros and cons of stress management behaviors helps clients make informed choices that align with their values and contribute to their overall well-being.