

Safety Plan Info Sheet and Protocol

Why do we need Safety Plans?

Experience with trauma survivors over the years has shown that focusing on safety as an ongoing concern is vital. Survivors often have trouble identifying what is safe behavior and their deficits in anticipating future events may lead them to have difficulty in anticipating the consequences of unsafe behavior. In the Sanctuary Model when the word “safety” is used, it is in reference to four all-encompassing domains of safety: physical, psychological, social, and moral. Safety Planning requires attending to all four domains simultaneously and coming up with a plan for avoiding danger.

It is clear, however, that safety issues are not simply applicable to people in treatment. To foster rational thinking and appropriate behavior, an organization must be a place in which people feel safe. Creative and innovative planning and implementation is not possible without some degree of calm and safety.

What is a Safety Plan?

A Safety Plan is a list of simple activities that a person can choose when feeling overwhelmed so that the person can avoid engaging in the unsafe, out-of-control, or toxic behavior he or she is accustomed to resorting to under stress, and instead, use an activity that is safe, effective, and self-soothing. The items in a Safety Plan should be simple things that people can do anytime, anywhere without embarrassment. In the Sanctuary Model, everyone has a Safety Plan so that having one and using it becomes a social norm, not simply an instruction pointed at a client. It is a form of Universal Precautions like washing one’s hands. Staff members will want to carry Safety Plans on the backs of ID badges, so they are always there, always conveniently accessed, and model this behavior to youth. Safety Plans are recorded on cards for the youth and for the staff to carry with them as a useful cognitive-behavioral self-management tool. Youth can keep them in their wallet, on their mirrors, on the refrigerator back home.

Safety Plans are designed to help people achieve increasing levels of skill in regulating their own emotional states. The creation of Safety Plans is a relational tool, adjusted over time to meet both increasing skill levels and increasing demands for those skills. It is both an individual and a group tool in the Sanctuary Model, providing a simple cognitive-behavioral skill for the individual and setting group expectations for the entire community. When people see each other using their safety plans, it strongly reinforces the notion that high levels of emotional distress can and should be managed, but that everyone all must *learn* to do that.

Domains of Safety

There are 4 domains of safety that we refer to when we are creating safety plans. Most of us only think of physical safety, but it is worth examining the others as well, since sometimes our unsafe behaviors are more likely to be on one of the other categories.

- Physical safety - keeping our bodies safe (not hitting or destroying property)
- Psychological safety – being safe within ourselves (not becoming suicidal or participating in negative self-talk)
- Social safety – being safe with others (not teasing, name calling or shaming)
- Moral – being safe to do the right thing (not keeping a harmful secret or colluding with someone who is doing something wrong)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Safety Plan Form Outline

Creating Your Safety Plan

Step 1: Identify which emotions are most difficult to manage for you. (Remember that there are often other emotions underneath what looks like anger: sadness, shame, frustration, etc.)

Step 2: Identify what types of situations are likely to trigger the emotions you identified in step one. (being ignored, being asked to do more than your share, etc.)

Step 3: Identify the signs that you or those around you might notice when your emotions are becoming overwhelming. (crying, pacing, fidgeting, scribbling, etc.)

Step 4: Identify five things that you can do to help keep yourself, and those around you physically, emotionally, socially, and morally safe. Some of them can/should involve other people or leaving the physical space you are in (get a hug, call a friend, make some tea or coffee, take a walk) and at least two should be things that you can do on your own and without leaving the physical space you are in (deep breathing, squeezing your hands, counting tiles on the floor, etc.).

Transfer these five things to your safety plan card, which you will use as a physical reminder of coping skills that work for you in challenging times.
