



# **Safety Plan Guide**

**for NOWMATTERSNOW.ORG SAFETY PLAN**

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## When you're on fire: shut it down

*Sometimes people do things in the heat of the moment that they would never do otherwise. This may never happen to you, but if it does, do these things.*

***If you feel an overwhelming urge to kill yourself:***

### **1) Hit reset**

- If you're using drugs or alcohol, take a break
- Let yourself sleep, or if you can't:
- Take a cold shower or put your face in ice water for 30 seconds (and repeat)

This slows your system way down and helps you get back to calm.

### **2) Wait to decide**

- Don't make any important decisions, especially the decision to die
- Do not panic. Ignore thoughts about not caring whether you die

### **3) Make eye contact with someone (it's a powerful pain reliever)**

- Find someone you're comfortable with, look them in the eye and say "Can you help me get out of my head?"
- Can't think of someone? Find anyone (a passerby on the street, a convenience store clerk, a bus driver) and just make eye contact. Relax your face.
- Keep trying until you make eye contact and connect with someone else.

**What might work best for you?** (but don't write off ice-water)

*Write down what you'd want to do if you ever felt on fire:*



## Important

*Don't let today end without doing the following. Start now.*

- Save 800-273-8255 (Lifeline) and 741741 (Crisis Text, text "Hello") in phone.
- Make a plan to remove your preferred suicide methods from your home.
- Removed preferred suicide methods from my home.

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# To prevent a fire: think ahead

*Suicidal thoughts are not unusual, but they're a good indication of suffering.*

**If you were planning to kill yourself, how have you thought of doing it?**

*Write down any plans you've considered and the steps you've made towards these approaches:*

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**What's the #1 thing that prompts suicidal thoughts or drug use for you?**

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**Why do you want to live or not use drugs?**

*Write down your best reason or reasons for living. No reason is too small. You don't even have to be certain right now, just jot down a couple ideas if you are not sure.*

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## Store matches and gasoline safely

*Many people who die by suicide use guns or other methods in their home - and make the decision and act in a time as short as a few moments. Research shows if we don't have ways to harm ourselves available in the heat of the moment, we are less likely to try to kill ourselves. People don't just "find another way."*

We think about suicide safety in the same way the think about other kinds of safety. We do things to reduce risk of fire - we store matches and gasoline safely. Chances are unlikely that a fire will happen, but it is worth the effort.

| <b><i>If:</i></b>   | <b><i>Do this:</i></b>  |
|---|---|
| You have guns in the house                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Lock them up and give the key or combination to someone else<br><input type="checkbox"/> Store them separately from ammunition<br><input type="checkbox"/> Store them away from the home   |
| If you use or have access to prescription meds or opioids       | <input type="checkbox"/> Take them out of the home<br><input type="checkbox"/> Lock them up and give the key or combination to someone else<br><input type="checkbox"/> Keep only non-lethal doses of prescription meds around<br><input type="checkbox"/> Don't let anyone who has or uses opioids into the home |
| Let's address the other ways you've considered killing yourself | <input type="checkbox"/> Make a plan for alternative routes or methods if these include things necessary for your everyday life.<br><input type="checkbox"/> Do drugs and alcohol increase suicidality? How do you want to address that?  |

**What is your specific plan for when and with whom you will do the above?**

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# Who will fight fire with you?

## Who can you teach what to do in a fire? (create your A Team)

Write down the people in your life who you feel connected to or want to feel more connected to. Especially people who you find non-judgemental, caring and who can keep a calm head. It's okay if you can't think of anyone, many people can't.

Here's an example.

*"I'm working on taking better care of myself. I'm calling it my A-Team. Here's what that would look like [describe when and how often]. Here's what would be helpful [e.g., listening and not trying to convince me that I shouldn't feel bad, come over and sit with me, distract me by watching movie with me, help me get out of my head]. We would talk about the best ways to do that so that it worked for you. Would you be willing to be someone I might call on if things were sliding? Just think about it for now."*

| <b>Name</b> | <b>What you'll ask them to do (ex: say "I believe in you")</b> | <b>When you'll ask them</b> |
|-------------|--|-----------------------------|
|             |  |                             |
|             |  |                             |
|             |  |                             |

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For some of us, the idea of asking for help is scary. For some of us, we've been in so much pain that we've asked for help in ways that pushed others away (for example, refusing to take help, personal attacks, getting drunk and out of control). We want to be open to feedback about how people want to be asked for help. People who are afraid need grace - give them room to make suggestions. In the process, sometimes relationships can grow stronger

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## Ideas for Finding People for your Plan

Can be healthcare providers, peer supports, friend, family member or online communities such as "Talk Life". Someone from alcoholics anonymous, from church, temple or other place of contemplation. Start by asking questions of these people, about themselves, on a regular basis to get to know them and begin a friendship

### Choose crisis resources and add them to your phone contacts list

These are in addition to 1-800-273-8255 (Suicide Prevention Lifeline, options for veterans and Spanish) and 741741 (Crisis Text Line, text "Matters" to initiate). Check the box on page 2 when you've entered.

| <i>Additional Organizations</i> | <i>Site/phone number</i>           |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Nowmattersnow.org               | nowmattersnow.org/help-line        |
| My3 safety plan app             | Apple store or Google Play         |
| Warm Line                       | warmline.org or google "warm line" |
| Trevor Lifeline (LGBTQ youth)   | 1-866-488-7386                     |
| Trans Lifeline (transgender)    | 1-877-565-8860                     |
| 9-1-1                           | Ask for mobile crisis unit         |

### What do you usually do to cope?

| <i>Strategy</i> | <i>A situation in which it would be most helpful:</i> | <i>When you'll practice:</i> |
|-----------------|---|------------------------------|
|                 |   |                              |
|                 |   |                              |
|                 |   |                              |



## In a fire: keep yourself safe

*Suicidal thoughts by themselves are not dangerous--what you do with them makes the difference*

**Choose some ways to manage suicidal thoughts and/or urges to use:**

|                          | <b><i>Strategy</i></b>  | <b><i>Why try it</i></b>  |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Paced breathing<br>( <a href="http://nowmattersnow.org/skills/pacedbreathing">nowmattersnow.org/skills/pacedbreathing</a> )                 | Taking longer on the exhale slows your nervous system   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Self-talk: "This makes sense: I'm stressed and/or in pain."   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | "I want to feel better, not use opioids or kill myself."  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | "I can manage this pain for this moment."   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Practice taking opposite action<br>( <a href="http://nowmattersnow.org/skill/opposite-action">nowmattersnow.org/skill/opposite-action</a> ) | Acting completely opposite to your urges if acting on those urges is not helpful and you are in pain. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Practice mindfulness<br>( <a href="http://nowmattersnow.org/skill/mindfulness">nowmattersnow.org/skill/mindfulness</a> )                    | Choosing what to pay attention to so that painful emotions aren't choosing for you.                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ice water   | Also slows down your nervous system   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Call/text a crisis number or A-Team member  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Practice a favorite distraction:  |   |



## Fire drill: time to practice

### **Practice paced breathing**

nowmattersnow.com/skills/pacedbreathing OR Paced Breathing app



[Trex LLC under Health & Fitness]

You may have heard people talking about the benefits of breathing. Sometimes that can seem like an oversimplification of the problems we are going through. And that's true. But, hold off on judging for now, because this is different.

Paced Breathing is another way to affect your vagal nerve, the nerve that runs from your head down to your feet and that is an indication of how emotionally regulated one is. By making your exhale longer you're your inhale, you can, in a sense, soothe your vagal nerve. If you do this when in a crisis, it will help you become less emotionally overwhelmed faster. If you do this every day it can reduce your emotional level baseline – meaning you could become calmer overall.

Watch the video of the woman named Marsha on the NowMattersNow.org website under Paced Breathing. It explains a little more about the skill. Would you be willing to try this at home? You can do this immediately following ice-water as well, or in combination with a skill called Mindfulness of Current Emotion.

### **What's been stressful for you this week?**

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### **Tips**

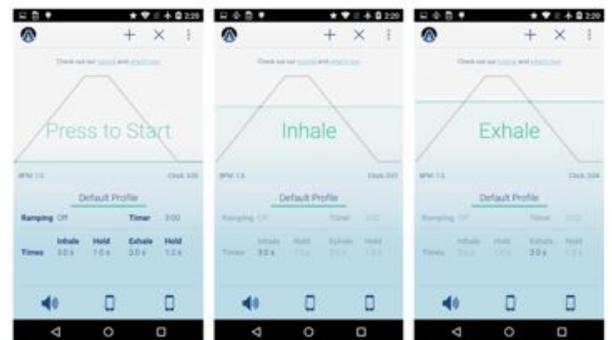
“If feel anxious and this makes it hard to breathe”

make the counts of your breath shorter

“I got distracted”

That's normal, us the app that has noises and a visual to help pay attention.

[download “Paced Breathing” app from Trex LLC under Health & Fitness]



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## **Practice ice-water**

We use ice-water to trigger the mammalian dive response and affect our vagal nerve. This helps us to calm ourselves. This has been studied by having people submerge their *full face* in a bowl of ice-water while holding their breath. You can do this for 30 seconds in ice-water, 30 seconds out; repeat for 5 minutes. People with lived experience have found useful effects by taking cold showers, but this has not yet been tested in research studies. We think of ice-water as having a range of impact: from holding wrists under water at one end all the way down to submerging yourself in cold lake water – the more dramatic, the more impactful. There is a range of different ways you can use ice. From triggering the vagal nerve response (the far and most strong extreme) to holding ice (less powerful, but distracting).

### **What thoughts or questions do you have? Write down 2.**

1.

2.

**What are 2 ideas for how someone could use this idea in their life.** (e.g., ice-water from kitchen, ice-packs stored in freezer, ice cubes in water in a tub stored in breakroom at work).

1.

2.

### **Let's discuss. Write down 3 responses to above thoughts or questions.**

1.

2.

3.

### **Tips for Ice Water Usage**

If you have a heart condition, eating disorder or on beta blockers, it is possibly (but highly unlikely) that this could cause problems by lowering heart rate quickly. You can check with medical provider. Always do this safely, and make plans for if you were to become dizzy if you aren't physically your strongest (sit on the floor instead of stand, have someone with you, hold onto something).

**I will try this skill \_\_\_\_\_ using \_\_\_\_\_**  
 e.g. at home, at work, using frozen peas from my freezer

### **When?**

**Practice opposite action** [nowmattersnow.org/skill/opposite-action](http://nowmattersnow.org/skill/opposite-action)

When experiencing strong emotions, we often have urges to act in ways that are not really in our best interest (e.g., pull the covers over our head and stay in bed when sad, not participate in class meetings when anxious). Instead, completely throw your attention into the *here* and *now* and act *opposite* to your urges. This includes changing your posture, facial expression, and voice tone.

*For anxiety:* Approach what you are afraid of. Do what you are afraid of doing over and over.

*For unhappiness:* Do things that make you feel competent and self-confident.

Think of a time when your emotional intensity was a 5, 6 or a 7 and you acted on an urge that was not in your best interest in the short or long term (but that created some immediate relief).

**Example**

1. What your urge was (no more than one to two sentences)

*I was riding the bus to a job interview and the bus was running late. My urge was to go to get lost in thoughts such as “I always ruin good chances”, “How many blocks is it now?”, “I won’t get the job”, to clench my fists and jaw, and to check my watch.*

2. What you did instead (what you did opposite, include change in body posture/position, voice tone)

*I did opposite action. Instead of acting on my urges, I threw myself into the current situation. I chose to pay attention to the people on the bus as if they were the most interesting people in the world. I sat up, with my shoulders back (a non-anxious posture), put my palms facing up on my lap and relaxed my jaw. I described the people on the bus one at a time (e.g., man with black hat, mustache, and dark circles under eyes using mindfulness nonjudgmental and present moment descriptions). I made my exhale longer than my inhale (not acting on urges and paced breathing).*

3. How you had to keep coming back to moment (get outside of head and how you threw yourself in).

*It was key to bring my attention back to the people on the bus, the way I was holding my body, and to my breath.*

4. Summarize what you did (and if I hadn’t, then X would have happened) and tell them no step is too small

*I used opposite action to counter my urges to act anxious (anxious thoughts and constantly checking my phone). If I had acted on my urge to worry about the future and things I couldn’t control, I would have been more difficult to think clearly when I did arrive.*

Your Example

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

When would it be useful to try Opposite Action? What might get in the way of using it?

Why is it important to do it all the way? What’s one small step you can take between now and next week using Opposite Action?

**Practice mindfulness** [nowmattersnow.org/skill/mindfulness](http://nowmattersnow.org/skill/mindfulness)

Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, nonjudgmentally, and in the present moment.

- *Be nonjudgmental:* See but don't evaluate. Take a nonjudgmental stance. Just the facts. Focus on the "what," not the "good" or "bad," the "terrible" or "wonderful," the "should" or "should not."
- *Be one-mindful:* Be completely present to this one moment – this present place, this person, thing or activity, this reality.
- *Be effective:* Concentrate on doing what works. Do what is needed in each situation. Stay away from "fair" and "unfair," "right" and "wrong," "should" and "should not."

One thing I'd like to pay *less* attention to:

One thing I'd like to pay *more* attention to:

Exercise (this is not meditation, this is practicing mindfulness)

1. *First:* Get in mindful position with your feet flat on the floor, palms placed upwards and resting on thighs, sitting up. Focus on one thing only - the sensation of your breath leaving and entering your body. That may be as it crosses your lips or your nostrils. Choose one place. Then rest your eyes gently on a spot in front of you and begin
2. *After ask yourself:* What's one thing you noticed? Did you bring your attention back when it wandered? Tell them they did a good job. Did you notice that you had that thought?
3. *After, know this:* There is no good or bad job, this is about teaching your brain to choose what to pay attention to (instead of emotions or distractions choosing for you).

Watch Videos: [NowMattersNow.org](http://NowMattersNow.org) → Mindfulness → Ursula (then Anna Brown, Sarah)

## **Practice Mindfulness of current emotion**

When upset, we often get wrapped up in our thoughts – overthinking situations and trying to figure it out.

Instead, try solving the problem of feeling bad another way: focus on where in your body you are most intensely feeling your emotions, such as anxiety and unhappiness.

For example, this might mean focusing on that sinking feeling in your stomach or the tightness in your chest. Let those feelings wash over you like waves.

Keep doing this until the feelings diminish.

Practice for 1 minute.

### Example

1. What was happening (use intensity example of 5, 6, 7) and that you couldn't solve the problem right (either right now or ever)

*I had recently been dumped, and everything reminded me of him. I would see a plant and think – he has plants in his yard. There wasn't anything I could do because he'd broken up with me (or at least anything that was wise).*

2. How you scanned your body, and give example of (in detail) of what you felt

*I was really feeling anxious and sad. I scanned my body, between my neck and the top of my legs and asked "Where do I feel this in my body". I felt a tightness in my chest (hollowness surrounded by tightness) and a soft sinking feeling in my stomach.*

3. How you guided yourself to breath it in and let it go when you exhaled

*I wanted to run away, but instead I focused my attention in on those feelings letting them be seen and letting go of all my thoughts of him. I let them wash over me. My mind kept coming back to thoughts of him. I would say "He left, I wish it were different" And then I would feel those sensations again.*

4. How you kept doing it until the intensity came down, but that you had to keep bringing your attention back over and over.

*It was difficult because my mind wanted to keep thinking about him. But I knew my body needed to be heard so I kept bringing my attention back over and over. It was really hard, but I did this until emotional intensity was a 4. It took 15 minutes.*

Plan a time in the next week when you will use it. Write out what you will do following the guide above.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Videos: [NowMattersNow.org](http://NowMattersNow.org) → Mindfulness of Current Emotion → Marsha (and first two of Ursula, longer example would be third of Ursula)