

SAFETY PLANNING



A more thorough planning method created by peer organizations (ProjectLETS and Campaign for Psychiatric Abolition) & compiled by Mel B.

"More often than not if an individual in a mental health crisis grabs something as a weapon it's gonna be in self defense because they're scared or experiencing paranoia. Sometimes you can say, 'I see you're holding a knife in your hand, are you feeling scared right now?' or 'Can you trust me enough to put that knife down while we talk?' or 'I know you won't hurt anybody but I'm concerned there are other people around who may think you'll hurt somebody so can you put it down?' "

- Shannon Benaitis

REMEMBER

Remember that mental health issues related to trauma generally have an intuitive logic to how they unfold. Similarly, there is an intuitive logic to how to de-escalate. If someone is paranoid, make them feel safe. Remember that it makes sense for someone with a trauma background to relieve their fear and misdirect it.

DONT ' S

- Blame or accuse
- Lie (about who you are, what you can do for them, who you are getting involved)
- Demonstrate disbelief about their experience
- Make demands
- Try to touch or transport someone without their consent or by surprise
- Stand in their personal space
- Block door/exit pathway
- Force them to speak
- Whispering or laughing (can increase agitation or paranoia)
- Using a loud voice
- Threatening or criticizing
- Standing over the person
- Direct eye contact (can be perceived as threatening)
- Talking about the person with others in front of them without including or addressing them

DO ' S

- Try to understand and reflect on what the person is experiencing and what they're communicating about
- Ask simple questions, one at a time, and use plain language
- Be direct! Ask if they're considering killing themselves, if they have tools or plan. Ask if they're comfortable enough sharing that plan or giving you/getting rid of the tools. Ask if they have already executed their plan
- Consider moving to a different environment; be conscious of body language (non-threatening posture, open arms, relaxed hands)
- Ask what will help them to feel safe and in control, offer choices
- Speak to the individual. Get their input. Talk through options. Explain how each situation and choice will go.

SAFETY PLAN QUESTIONS

WHO DO YOU WANT TO INVOLVE IN AND/OR DISCUSS THIS CARE PLAN WITH?

- Who do you trust to be with you during a time of crisis or distress?
- Are they someone who gets stressed easily?
- Do they understand your mental illness(es), the root causes, and your triggers?
- Do they live locally and are they connected to a network of your friends or loved ones to co-ordinate help if necessary?
- Ask your clients to try to discuss this with more than one person if possible

WHAT ARE SPECIFIC WORDS OR ACTIONS THAT CAN HELP CALM YOU DOWN OR GROUND YOU?

e.g. a wet flannel, eating/drinking, sleep, constant communication, being held tightly in a comforting manner

WHAT ARE SPECIFIC WORDS OR ACTIONS THAT SHOULD BE AVOIDED TO PREVENT MAKING THINGS WORSE?

e.g. discussion around certain topics, involving certain family members, dismissal of what you're experiencing

WHAT ARE SIGNS THAT YOU ARE BECOMING MORE UNWELL OR UNSAFE?

- In the time leading up to the crisis point, what do you have in place to prevent a crisis?
- Do you have a way to communicate what those are and if you feel yourself spiraling?
- Are you a risk to just yourself in crisis or is there a possibility that you could cause harm to others? What is a way to de-escalate the situation if the prospect of causing harm arises?
- What are definite no go's (e.g. calling estranged relatives, grabbing you) that you know will escalate the crisis?
- If you take medication/if it helps, do people know where it is stored?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

IS THERE ANY WAY IN WHICH YOUR MENTAL WELLBEING HAS OR WILL IMPACT YOUR PHYSICAL WELLBEING?

For example, this would include drugs, self-harm, etc.

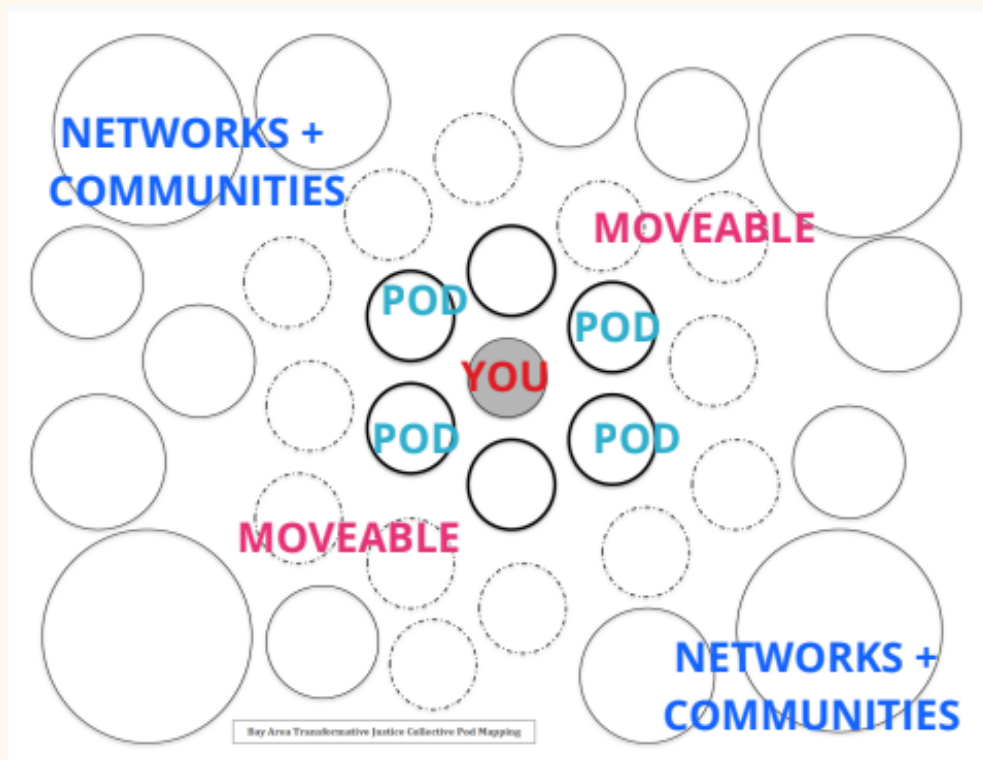
If self harm comes up...

- What does self-injury mean for you when that happens?
- What feels helpful about it at the time?
- What is the self-injury trying to get out or express?
- If you could describe what this has been like for you in the past, what would you say?

ADDITIONAL HELPFUL QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How do you react to danger - fight, flight, freeze?
- How does your identity impact how you respond to others when you are in crisis?
- What do you feel most unprepared to handle?
- How do you process difficult information you hear?
- What three things can you do to center yourself?
- Do you have a crisis box?
 - If not, help client prepare a box of things that will help soothe them in crisis. Examples could be photos of loved ones, their accomplishments, a weighted blanket, favorite music or books, headphones, journal, stuffed animal, fidgets, letters from others or themselves. You can also have them add a copy of their crisis plan in there as well.

PODMAPPING



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Podmapping is a way to help a client create a network of support for the days they are not seeing providers in services. The main goal of podmapping is to help the client answer the question: besides calling your therapist or assessment team when you hit the crisis point, who can help you de-escalate and co-regulate or take care of yourself in the interim (or even provide extra supports to avoid escalation during times of stress)?

The pod is made up of people who are close to your client in their day-to-day life - one person in a pod could call and check on you each evening at a certain time, another person each morning, another person comes by once or twice a week to help with chores/ADLs/self care/grounding activities. Who are these people? How can we help you delegate this work (e.g. helping you reach out and ask for the assistance from each person during a session)?

SELF CARE DURING CRISIS SITUATIONS

WAYS TO DEAL WITH BEING STRESSED OR TRIGGERED WHILE HELPING SOMEONE IN CRISIS

- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Comfort vs stretch vs danger zone model
- Self grounding
- Not fully losing self in the reality of the other person - make sure you're not in "amygdala hijack" mode!

CONSIDER

What do you need to feel safe navigating a crisis with someone?

How can you ask your team to help support you in feeling safe in these ways?

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Dealing with crisis situations is taxing, and we care about our clients and their well-being. Keep in mind that it is just as important for you to regulate yourself during their crisis! Remember, when clients can sense that you are regulated, they will have an easier time regulating themselves alongside you.

THREE 30-SECOND VISUALIZATIONS TO GROUND YOURSELF

- Gold band of light
- Sieve
- Waterfall

POST - CRISIS

- Externally process your feelings and emotions with your supervisor, or if need be, your own personal therapist, shortly after the event.
- Attend therapy regularly to bolster against compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.
- Engage in music, art, or nature.
- Move your body and get that tension out! Exercise, running, a long walk, or even punching a pillow can help with this.
- Journaling about your feelings to help process outside of work.