

MAINTAINING SERVICE CONNECTIONS IN A TIME OF CRISES

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Increased Mental Health and Substance Abuse Problems during COVID-19

The combination of COVID-19, economic problems, racial protests, and political division in 2020 has resulted in:



We are facing a national mental health crisis that could yield serious health and social consequences for years to come.

American Psychological
Association, 10/12/20

Factors That Exacerbate Mental Health Problems and Substance Abuse during COVID-19

- Economic problems
- Job loss
- Isolation
- Loss of support system
- Grief
- Decreased access to treatment
 - Closures
 - The digital divide
- Interpersonal violence
- Trauma
- Wear and tear on professional supports

In Our Treatment Courts

Lack of in-person contact +

Loss of incentives like handshakes and hugs +

Greater difficulty forming a peer support group among participants +

The digital divide +

Sharing the same stresses as our participants =

Decreased connections

What can we do?



CREATE A CRISIS SAFETY PLAN

Every Court Participant Needs a Safety Plan

The plan should include:

1. A comprehensive list of mental health, trauma, and substance use triggers
2. Internal resources (i.e., coping that can be done alone)
3. External resources (i.e., coping that can be done in public or with others)
4. Making the environment safer (i.e., removing means of self-harm, substance use, suicide, and/or violence)
5. Personal supports (i.e., a list of people who will be supportive)
6. Professionals (i.e., a list of healthcare professionals, self-help/support group meetings, and crisis management services available)

The Safety Planning Intervention

- SPI is crisis response planning developed for emergency rooms and crisis settings (Stanley & Brown, 2011)
- It is a 20-45 minute intervention that identifies:
 - Warning signs
 - Internal coping strategies
 - Social support activities
 - Help-seeking behaviors
 - Means restriction
- Developed collaboratively with the participant



Suicide Safety Plan

Patient Safety Plan Template

Step 1: Warning signs (thoughts, images, mood, situation, behavior) that a crisis may be developing:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 2: Internal coping strategies – Things I can do to take my mind off my problems without contacting another person (relaxation technique, physical activity):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 3: People and social settings that provide distraction:

1. Name _____ Phone _____
2. Name _____ Phone _____
3. Place _____ 4. Place _____

Step 4: People whom I can ask for help:

1. Name _____ Phone _____
2. Name _____ Phone _____
3. Name _____ Phone _____

Step 5: Professionals or agencies I can contact during a crisis:

1. Clinician Name _____ Phone _____
Clinician Pager or Emergency Contact # _____
2. Clinician Name _____ Phone _____
Clinician Pager or Emergency Contact # _____
3. Local Urgent Care Services
Urgent Care Services Address _____
Urgent Care Services Phone _____
4. Suicide Prevention Lifeline Phone: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Step 6: Making the environment safe:

1. _____
2. _____

Safety Plan Template ©2008 Barbara Stanley and Gregory K. Brown, is reprinted with the express permission of the authors. No portion of the Safety Plan Template may be reproduced without their express, written permission. You can contact the authors at bhs2@columbia.edu or gregbrown@mail.med.upenn.edu.

The one thing that is most important to me and worth living for is:

Name:

My Personal Recovery Safety Plan

Congratulations on your commitment and efforts to maintain sobriety!

Let's work together to develop and write down a plan which will help support you and prepare for tough times should you hit bumps.

These are top reasons which I choose to be sober today:

-
-
-

Here are a few things that I do regularly to stay sober:

-
-
-

These are actions I can take if and when I have cravings: (examples: call a support, eating if hungry, going to a meeting, reading recovery material, reminding myself that cravings can be intense but pass, or thinking of the consequences of using)

-
-
-
-

Places I can go which provide positive distraction (like 12-step meetings, a coffee shop, the library, or specific family or friends etc).

-
-

My Triggers or Early Warning Signs - Things I need to look out for include: (examples could be, cravings, changes in attitude towards recovery, or behaviors)

-
-
-
-

Here are a few people I can call who support my recovery:

Name	Number
.....
.....
.....

Overdose Prevention Plan

A top-down view of a group of diverse people's hands clasped together in a circle, symbolizing unity and social connection. The hands are of various skin tones and are positioned around a central point, creating a sense of shared purpose and support. The background is a soft, light blue gradient.

**THE OPPOSITE OF
ISOLATION IS
SOCIAL CONNECTION**

The Rat Park Studies

- Early studies suggested that rats in a cage preferred cocaine-laced water to plain water
- A series of studies by Bruce Alexander (c.f., Alexander et al., 1981)
- Alexander showed that rats placed in an environment with other rats and given stimulation rarely drank the cocaine-laced water
- Those that did drink it rarely and did not show signs of addiction





**ALL
HANDS
ON
DECK!**

All Hands on Deck

- Isolation is a critical risk factor for suicidal behavior and overdoses



- Treatment court teams need to surround the participant with treatment, caring, and structure





All Hands on Deck

- Everyone on the team has a role to play
- Psychologically, we hold the participant gently but firmly
- Talk with and get to know each participant as an individual
- Each person seeks to establish a connection with the participant, so that s/he is surrounded by and involved in multiple relationships
- That allows the participant to connect with anyone, or at least someone, to tell them about urges to harm themselves or use substances
- Being told is an opportunity, a test, and an honor

CREATE

REMINDERS

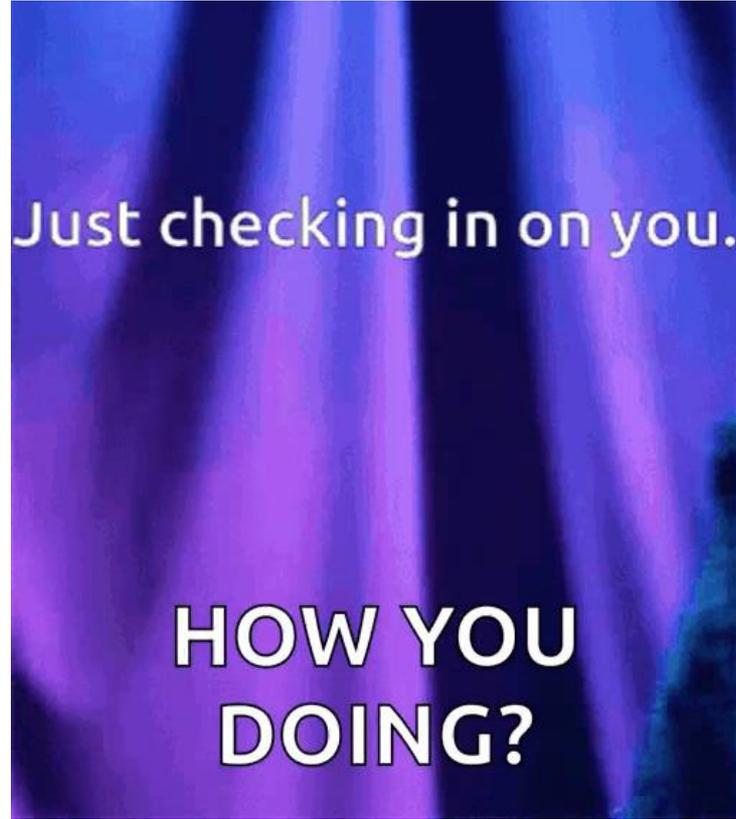
- Challenge coins
- Pens
- A laminated list of phone numbers to carry
- A laminated list of 10 coping skills to carry
- A laminated paper-sized list of coping skills to hang
- Get a court cell phone and send out texts to participants
- Be creative!



Check in with Participants

- Assign team members to do this (case managers, peer support/mentors, etc.)
- Consider slowing withdrawal of support between phases
 - For example, schedule phone check-ins when decreasing frequency of court appearances
- Reach out to and utilize community supports (homeless shelter staff, sober living houses, community IOPs) to do check-ins
 - Note that this requires good relationships before you ask





Involve Extenders

- Ask family members who are liked to check in regularly
- Ask about friends who are healthy influences
 - Obtain releases of information
 - Get them to check in

Increase Access to Treatment by:



- Utilizing CARES Act funding to pay POs and Sheriffs to increase community supervision (twice weekly check-ins)
- Utilizing CARES Act funding to purchase technology (smart phones or tablets) with pre-paid video and data to increase access to treatment
- Using state funds for transportation and community housing
- Encouraging participants to use public wifi in parking lots (libraries, restaurants, etc.)

RESOURCES

Prevention Plans

- Free Suicide Safety Plan at <https://www.scribd.com/doc/233889034/Safety-Plan-Template#download>
- Free Substance Abuse and Harm Reduction plans available at <https://drugfree.org/drug-and-alcohol-news/center-uses-harm-reduction-recovery-safety-plans-reduce-opioid-overdoses/#>

NATIONAL

SUICIDE  PREVENTION
LIFELINE™

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

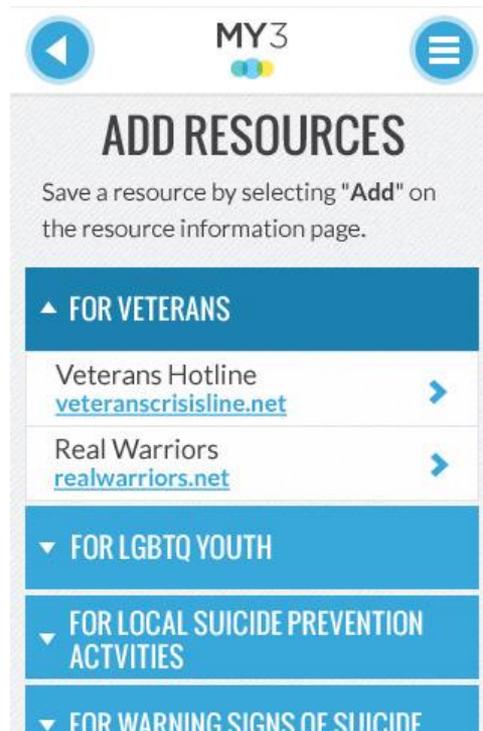
Rat Park

- TED Talk by Johann Hari

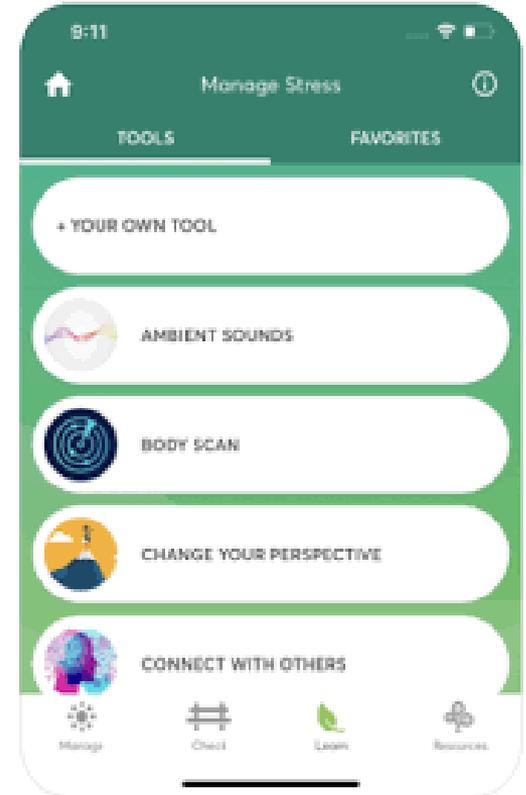
https://www.ted.com/talks/johann_hari_everything_you_think_you_know_about_addiction_is_wrong#t-239084



My 3 App



COVID Coach App



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