



Safety Contracts

Safety Contracts are used in response to a client expressing suicidal ideation. While ultimately symbolic, they have an excellent track record for putting some positive closure on processing suicidal ideation or gestures.

Essentially the client signs a personalized individually crafted agreement promising to use only safe behaviors. There may be various limits built in, perhaps some scheduled check-in's, and typically an agreement to let a staff person know if suicidal ideation re-emerges. A combination of the following steps can serve as a guideline to create a safety contract:

- ◆ Identify personal warning signs. (I will use this crisis plan when...).
 - List any thoughts, behaviors, emotions, images, physical sensations, etc. that you typically experience while in crisis.
- ◆ Self-management Strategies. (Things I can do on my own...).
 - Develop coping strategies that can be done in response to warning signs.
 - Often times, these include relaxation or distraction techniques.
- ◆ Healthy Structures which serve as distraction. (My schedule for the remainder of the shift will look like...).
 - If self-management strategies do not reduce emotional distress, use a social setting as distraction.
- ◆ Social Support. (If self-management and healthy structures don't work, I will let a staff person know by...).
- ◆ Follow up. (I will speak with <therapist> at <time>.).
 - If self-management and/or social supports do not reduce emotional distress, I will let staff know by...).
- ◆ Environmental Safety. (I will turn in my shoes, etc., to increase safety...).
- ◆ Identify Reason to Not act on any Suicidal Ideation. (I agree to not harm myself because doing so would...).

Sample:

Angus has been struggling with some scary thoughts, thinking/wishing that he had never been born. Angus has identified that being around staff and peers can be helpful. When alone, reading a book and writing in a journal is helpful. Calling home to speak with his family can also be helpful.

For the rest of the night, Angus agrees to stay with the group and to fully participate in bedtime routines, including getting his laundry started. He's going to call home between 9:00 and 9:15pm. Staff will do at least a brief check-in once an hour. Angus will rate how he's doing on a scale from 1 (doing great) to 5 (totally overwhelmed). At any time tonight, if Angus is at a 4 or above, he agrees to let a staff person know the he needs a check-in.

Angus agrees to not hurt himself in reaction to how he is feeling. He wants to feel better and to be able to go home during the upcoming vacation week.

Name

Staff Name

Date