

Crisis Management and Safety Planning

Sometimes everything feels unmanageable. Sometimes we might feel so overwhelmed with anxiety, depression, grief, or trauma that we struggle to cope. We might have thoughts of wanting to just run away from it all, or even thoughts about wanting to die.

If you are feeling this way, know that you are not alone. Many others are in the same situation too. Many people and fictional heroes show us how challenging it can be to endure as many difficulties as you have, be it a loss of a friendship, a loss of a relationship, relentless bullying, or another excruciating event.

For example, when Willow Rosenberg from the TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, experiences a devastating loss, she doesn't know how she will survive. Willow's girlfriend, Tara Maclay, was killed by a stray bullet, leaving Willow overwhelmed with grief. In the moment, everything feels so dark and bleak that Willow becomes self-destructive, nearly destroying the world with her magic, because she doesn't want to live. Willow's friends help Willow to feel supported in her grief process and she's able to grieve in a healthy way over time.

Many people think that grief only refers to someone dying, but that's not true. We can also experience something called *ambiguous grief*, which is when we lose something, like a friendship, a relationship, physical function, a part of our identity, or our usual coping mechanisms. For example, a lot of people experienced ambiguous grief during the COVID-19 global pandemic because they were unable to travel, attend comic conventions, or other events, where they previously felt safe and supported.

Other people might experience ambiguous grief when their friends or family members are not being supportive or understanding about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Losing support during the time when we are most vulnerable can feel like a tremendous loss, because it *is* a valid loss. In some ways, it might feel like a part of us died. And how could it not?

At a time of crisis, we might believe that things will never get better. We might think that we cannot handle what we are going through. We might even judge ourselves for feeling this way and isolate from others.

It is in those times that we are in the greatest need of compassion and support. Needing a caring friend while you are struggling is not a weakness. It is what allows us to get through some of the most challenging times of our lives. Every hero, be it Batwoman or Willow Rosenberg, has a sidekick or an activity that they can turn to when they are struggling.

Let's create your own Hero Plan for when you are in crisis. A crisis is any event that is very hard to manage. It does not necessarily mean that you are having suicidal thoughts, though that might happen too. A crisis could be a panic attack, a time when you are burned out or overwhelmed, when you can't seem to be able to manage your tasks, when you had a conflict with someone, or when you are struggling with physical or mental health symptoms.

First, let's identify some common symptoms that you might have when you are struggling. For example, you might be having thoughts about self-harm or suicide, bouts of crying, feelings of insecurity, and calling yourself unkind names. Some people might have self-critical thoughts, such as *Nobody cares about me and I'm a failure.*

Everyone goes through multiple crisis events in their lives. The more we learn about our crisis experiences, the more we can prepare to cope with them when they arise.

In the space below or on your phone, please write down some of your common crisis symptoms.

My crisis symptoms: _____

Now, let's think of a few coping skills you can use on your own when you are in crisis to make yourself feel a little better. For example, you might want to play a relaxing game on your phone, do a breathing exercise, go for a walk, play with your pet, watch an episode of your favorite show, draw, or redecorate your room. Please write out a few ideas below or in your phone:

Coping skills I can use when I'm in crisis _____

Sometimes you might be able to cope with a crisis on your own and sometimes it can be helpful to talk to someone. See if you can think about a few people to contact to either receive emotional support or to provide some distraction for you. Please write down their names below or in your phone.

People I can contact when I am going through a hard time: _____

Sometimes when we are going through a hard time, it can be helpful to reach out and help someone else in need. For example, you can make a social media post about how to cope with the kind of situation you're dealing with or reach out to other people.

Do you know other people who might also be going through a hard time? It can help both you and them if you text or call and encourage each other. Everyone appreciates someone checking on them and making sure they know there is good life ahead!

Here are 3 people I can text or call, to share and hear positive things we want to do in the future.

_____, _____, and _____.

Create some **positive self-talk statements** or reminders you can tell yourself during stressful times. For example, you can remind yourself that you've been through this before, that you are not alone in feeling this way, and that it does get better after a while.

And finally, let's identify how you can receive support if you are having a mental health crisis. Again, a mental health crisis could mean that you are thinking about self-harm or suicide, but it could also mean that you are having a rough day and you have no one to talk to.

If you are living in the United States, you can text “**Hello**” to the Crisis Text Line: **741741**. If you live outside the United States, look up the crisis text line in your area. This is a free and confidential service in the USA (other countries have similar services available as well).

Their website is <https://www.crisistextline.org>

Please fill out the emergency plan below:

In case of a mental health crisis, I can reach out for support by texting:

You also can text the word “**START**” the Trevor Project, a free confidential text line for LGBTQIA community. Their number is **687-687** in the USA.

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help-now/>

If you are under age if you or someone you know are being abused, you can call or text this number: **1-800-422-4453** or chat online through your phone, computer, or tablet:

<https://www.childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline>

If you have experienced sexual abuse or assault, please contact RAINN :

<https://www.rainn.org>

Remember that things often seem most challenging just before they start getting better. Allow yourself to get some rest, to sleep, to reach out to compassionate friends or crisis counselors. And remember that **you matter**. You help to make the world a better place and you might not even realize how many people you’ve already helped through your kindness.

Your work here isn’t finished yet. You are loved and you make a difference. No matter how dark things get, please remember that you are not alone. Please stay.