

Resources

911

In an emergency, call 911 or go to your local emergency room.

Within the U.S.

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

Crisis Hotline: 1-800-273-8255

SMS (Text): 838255

TTY: 1-800-799-4889

For Spanish: 1-888-628-9454

For Support in Over 150 Other Languages: 1-800-273-8255

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

The Trevor Project (for LGBTQ youth, friends and family members)

Crisis Hotline: 1-866-488-7386

www.thetrevorproject.org

Crisis Text Line (Steve Fund program providing crisis support to youth of color)

SMS (Text): Text STEVE to 741741

www.stevelfund.org/crisistextline/

Veterans/Military Crisis Line (for active U.S. service members, veterans, and family members)

Crisis Hotline: 1-800-273-8255

Peer-to-Peer Talkline: 1-877-838-2838

www.veteranscrisisline.net

Outside of the U.S.

International Suicide Hotlines

1-800-784-2433

www.suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines.html

Introduction

Brain science tells us that when in an acute emotional state our thinking brain may be offline, with all energy and attention diverted to our reptilian brain, which is responsible for impulse and survival. While this mechanism is crucial if we are being chased by a lion, when we are experiencing an emotional or mental health crisis, bypassing our thinking brain may be a rather unfortunate design flaw.

We work very hard to take care of ourselves the best way we know how. Many of us have spent years developing coping tools, building strategies to keep us grounded and stretching our perspective so that we can think and plan clearly and rationally. How frustrating it is then to be unable to access all of those resources when we most need them!

A previous client put it this way,

“I’ve been in and out of therapy for more than a decade. I’ve worked so hard and I know what to do in a crisis. I know I’m not alone. I know there are people I can call and there are things I can do to keep myself safe and calm myself down. In the moment though, I couldn’t remember. I tried and tried, but I just couldn’t remember.”

Once we understand how our brain works in an emergency, we can be more strategic in our crisis planning. We can capture the basic elements - the things we most need to remember - and have those readily available to us in print or on our phones or computers. That way, if we’re emotionally overwhelmed and can’t access our thinking brain, all of the details we need to remember are right in front of us.

I have found this method of crisis planning helpful, both personally and professionally. I hope it will be useful to you as well.

—Jenn Brandel, LICSW

How to Use *My Crisis Plan*

My Crisis Plan is designed with basic prompts to help you collect the information you may need to know if you are in an emotional or mental health crisis. The format is simple and straightforward. While it may be easiest to set up your plan when you are in a calm state, or when you are with a therapist or someone you trust, you may feel able to answer many of the questions even if you are feeling distressed.

The very first step in your crisis plan should be determining if you are at risk for harming yourself or someone else. If you have concerns about safety, your first step will be to notify someone you are in danger and get help. Focusing on completing a full version of your crisis plan can wait until you are in a safe place.

You may find it helpful to share your crisis plan with others in your life. That way, the people who are closest to you will know what you are needing and may be able to help mobilize supports and remind you of the tools that will help you. Your friends and loved ones may also find it comforting to know you have a crisis plan in place.

Some people may find it helpful to just skim the questions in *My Crisis Plan*, the prompts may help them reflect on and identify tools and strategies that they have found useful in the past. I strongly encourage you to take the time to write out your crisis plan - to answer as many questions and list as many resources as you can. Those that have used this method have found it most helpful when they are needing their plan most.

Am I In Crisis?

At times we may find it difficult to differentiate between times we are emotional or upset and times we are feeling unsafe or out of control. Below are some questions to help you differentiate upset from crisis.

AM I IN DANGER?

Do I have a plan to hurt myself or someone else?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do I have access to a means to hurt myself or someone else (i.e. weapon, drugs, etc.)	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I overwhelmed by thoughts of hurting myself or someone else?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I worried that I might act on an impulse that could threaten the health or well-being of myself or someone else?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I afraid that I cannot keep myself safe on my own?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

This tool is not a substitute for a professional safety assessment. If you answer yes to any of the five questions above, please mobilize emergency services immediately by using a hotline, calling 911 or going to your local emergency room.

AM I UNABLE TO CARE FOR MYSELF?

Have I skipped meals repeatedly or gone whole days without eating?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Have I lost or gained weight in a way that feels sudden or unusual in the past few days?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Have I gone without showering, bathing or properly cleaning my body for more than three days?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Have I gone without sleep for more than twenty-four hours?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I concerned that my judgment is poor and that I may act in a way that could put me at risk for harm?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I unsure if I can trust my perceptions (unable to tell what is real, hearing or seeing things that others don't, having thoughts that seem strange or disturbing)?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Have I withdrawn from activities I know are important to me?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Has my work or school performance declined?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Have I become isolated or have my relationships suffered as a result of my emotional distress?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

AM I IN UNRELENTING EMOTIONAL DISTRESS?

Am I feeling out of control of my thoughts or emotions in a way that frightens or unsettles me?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I unable to stop crying?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I numb or emotionally shutdown in a way that worries me?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Have I tried all of my usual coping tools and nothing is working?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do I feel like I cannot bear feeling this bad for even one more minute?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

(Fill in any other questions you feel may help you differentiate upset from crisis.)

	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

If you answered yes to any of the questions listed above, it is likely you are suffering a significant degree of distress and may be in need of some kind of intervention to help bring you some relief. Consider reviewing your crisis plan below or, if you need immediate help, utilize a hotline, call 911 or go to your local emergency room.

My Crisis Plan

Your Name: _____

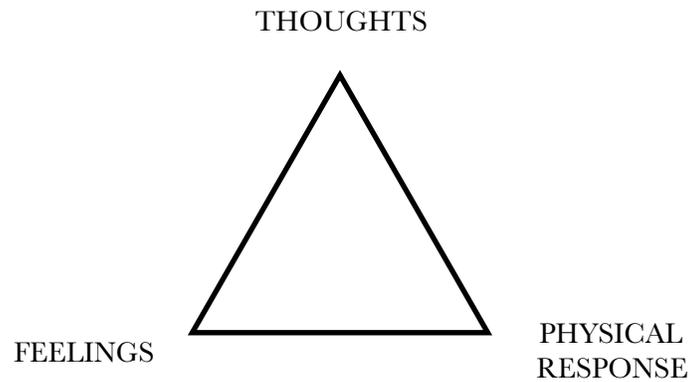
Date Plan Was Written: _____

Who to Call in an Emergency

Name	Phone Num- ber	Alternate Phone Num- ber	Email Ad- dress

The Triangle

Every experience is made up of
1) thoughts, 2) feelings and 3) physical response.



If I can find relief on any point of the triangle, it will affect the other points.

If I can quiet my thoughts, my physical response will calm and my emotions will dissipate.

If I can calm my emotions, my thoughts will quiet and my physical response will relax.

If I can relax my physical response, my thoughts will quiet and my emotions will dissipate.

I can find which point on the triangle I can most easily affect and start there.

About the Author

Jenn Brandel is a licensed clinical social worker in Boston with over twenty years of experience working as a psychotherapist, trainer, supervisor and consultant. She has had the honor of being recognized as a leader in her field - making numerous media appearances and speaking at conferences and professional venues throughout New England. Her clinical work centers around the use of mindfulness, compassion, and humor to facilitate connection and healing.

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