

BEYOND SEPTEMBER GUIDE

How to Build an Action Plan So You Don't Relapse

A safety plan is a written, step-by-step plan for what you'll do the next time the dark thoughts come back — made now, while you're thinking clearly, for the version of you who won't be. It's one of the most proven tools in suicide prevention. Fill this in. Keep it on your phone and on paper.

Step 1 — Know your warning signs

Write the thoughts, moods, situations, or behaviors that show up before a crisis for you. Examples: skipping sleep, going quiet on friends, 'what's the point' thoughts, drinking more, giving things away. Your early signs are yours — name at least three.

Step 2 — Things I can do alone to get through the hour

List what helps you ride out a wave without anyone else: a walk, a shower, music, journaling, breathing exercises, a show that calms you, a pet. Write at least five — the urge passes, and these buy the time it needs to pass.

Step 3 — People and places that distract me

Name people you can be around without explaining anything, and places that feel safe: a friend's couch, a 24-hour diner, a gym, a faith community, a busy park. Distraction is a legitimate strategy, not avoidance.

Step 4 — People I can ask for help

Write names and numbers of people you can be honest with: family, friends, a peer specialist, a sponsor, a pastor. Tell them they're on this list. If the list feels short, that's common — step 5 matters even more.

Step 5 — Professionals and crisis contacts

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — call or text 988, or chat 988lifeline.org (24/7, free, confidential)
- Crisis Text Line — text HOME to 741741
- Your therapist, psychiatrist, or doctor: write their numbers here
- Nearest emergency department: write the address here
- If in immediate danger: 911

Step 6 — Make the environment safer

During a suicidal period, distance from lethal means saves lives. Store medications securely or with someone you trust; lock up or temporarily remove firearms (a trusted person, a gun shop or range that offers storage, or local law enforcement can help). This step is the single most concrete thing on the list.

Step 7 — My reasons to stay

Write what you're staying for — people, pets, plans, faith, curiosity, even spite. When the thoughts come back, this page argues with them in your own handwriting. That's the whole point.

Keep it alive

- Review it monthly, and after any close call — update numbers and what works.
- Share it with your therapist and at least one person on your step-4 list.
- If you use the plan and it wasn't enough, that is not failure — go to step 5, and let people carry it with you.

Prefer a structured template? The Stanley-Brown Safety Plan is the most widely used clinical version — ask any counselor for it, or find it at suicidesafetyplan.com. And if tonight is the hard night: call or text 988.

Sources & further reading

- Stanley-Brown Safety Plan: suicidesafetyplan.com • 988lifeline.org
- CDC — Suicide prevention resources: cdc.gov/suicide • NIMH: nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention

Beyond September is an awareness and education initiative. This guide is general education — it is not medical, mental-health, or crisis care, and it is not a substitute for advice from a qualified professional. If you are struggling right now, call or text **988** or chat at 988lifeline.org. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.