

**The Initiative:**

CCADV member programs want to more effectively engage and support people around use/misuse of substances. In line with FVPSA's promotion of trauma-informed care models, the Seeking Safety curriculum for assisting survivors in better managing their trauma responses was piloted by advocates from 9 organizations.

**Why Seeking Safety?**

Seeking Safety, a tool for expanding skills for emotional safety, has been well received by survivors and advocates in other states. In addition, with its strong empirical research base, organizations that use Seeking Safety can respond to increasing requests from funders for evidence of quality services by reporting their high-fidelity use of an evidence-based tool.

**What We Found:**

- Advocates: "Compared with the traditional support group, Seeking Safety felt equally comfortable to lead, but at the end of Seeking Safety instead of a sense of being drained, tired, and defeated, the women were smiling, energized, and were expressing hope."

Has being part of this Learning Circle changed your interactions with survivors?	Yes	No
	80%	20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- It has given me more tools that I can offer when speaking with them about their trauma or substance use. It has made me feel more helpful.</li><li>- It changed the way I saw drug misuse in many ways.</li><li>- It has helped me open discussions about substance use with clients.</li><li>- I think it has given me more information so that I can better understand the client's background and give them the support they need.</li><li>- Yes, working with this curriculum opened the door to trauma they hadn't spoken about to me.</li></ul>		

Participants: "I think this was really great and should be done weekly."

"I enjoyed coming to session today, and I walk away with many healthy behaviors."

"I can do this!!! I am finding my power and I'm not crazy."

**Lessons Learned:**

- The trauma-informed format of the sessions is valuable. After 1-2 sessions of facilitation advocates felt comfortable; participants easily transitioned to the Seeking Safety format.
- Slight modifications to some materials (especially the Check In/ Check Out & Commitment forms) helped the curriculum fit better for facilitation by advocates.

**How YOU Can Learn More:**

Full Seeking Safety Learning Circle Report: <http://ccadv.org/what-we-do/special-projects/tic/> /  
Support and training materials from CCADV: contact Amy Pohl at [apohl@ccadv.org](mailto:apohl@ccadv.org)



## Seeking Safety Learning Circle Final Project Report

### The Seeking Safety Learning Circle

CCADV member programs have stated that they want to know how to effectively engage and support people around use/misuse of substances. At the same time, FVPSA has promoted advocacy organizations' use of trauma-informed care models. This Seeking Safety Learning Circle was intended to provide concrete tools for advocates to use with survivors with trauma symptoms and/or a narrow range of tension-reducing behaviors.

Trauma-Informed approaches are not designed to engage in trauma processing, but rather are a way to be aware of the trauma people have experienced, avoid triggering/traumatizing people, support individuals' coping, and allow survivors to manage their trauma responses successfully so they are able to engage in and benefit from services. Seeking Safety was selected as the Learning Circle curriculum because it is a trauma-informed tool for expanding skills for emotional safety. In addition, because of the strong empirical research base for this curriculum, and its inclusion of a session Adherence Scale for facilitators, organizations that use Seeking Safety could report to funders their use of an evidence-based tool which they are using with high fidelity as evidenced by the Adherence Scale scores. This could help organizations to respond to the increasing requests from funders for evidence of effectiveness.

On the other hand, this curriculum was written for mental health clinicians' use. Given the clinical language in the materials, this Learning Circle project intended to explore two overarching questions:

1. How can advocates work with this curriculum so it fits with their (non-therapist) role?
2. How can advocates use this curriculum with survivors who don't misuse substances?

(See attachments: *Seeking Safety – FAQ*; *Seeking Safety – Overview*; *Seeking Safety - Brochure*)

### Organizations that joined the Learning Circle!

We had 12 sites for the Learning Circle. The primary contacts for each organization are listed below.

Participating Community-Based Advocacy Organizations		
1. Renew	Cortez	Cheryl
2. Archelta County Victim Assistance	Pagosa Springs	Karen
3. TESSA	Colorado Springs	Cynthia D'Wanna
4. Safehouse Denver	Denver	Kayla
5. A Woman's Place	Greeley	Megan Brittany
6. Crossroads Safehouse	Fort Collins	Missy
7. Alternative Horizons	Durango	Jordan Loida
8. Family Tree – Women In Crisis	Lakewood	Megan
9. Lutheran Family Services	Denver	Whitney
Latin@ Outreach Program participants		
11.	Trinidad	Itzel
12.	Colorado Springs	Kristiana Carmen
13.	Leadville	Idali

Each site agreed to do the following activities:

- Attend an In-Person training
- Present an overview of Seeking Safety to their peers
- Join once per month teleconferences Oct – March
- Work with their supervisor to coordinate Seeking Safety at their location
- Offer 6 sessions of Seeking Safety 😊

For more detail on the activities, see the attached *Next Steps Checklist*.

### **Assessment plan**

After consultation with staff at the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health, CCADV decided to evaluate the Learning Circle through the following approaches:

- Input from the facilitators
  - Job satisfaction (PROQOL) questionnaire pre/post
  - Knowledge/skill/comfort survey pre/post
  - Monthly teleconferences (process documentation of themes re. success/challenge)
  - Self-assessment on 'Adherence' at each session
  - End of project survey
- Supervisor feedback on the session they observe
- Participant feedback
  - Participant trauma symptoms questionnaire pre/post
  - End of session feedback form at each session
  - Seeking Safety Group Feedback Questionnaire at final session

### **Activities advocates engaged in**

- Attend In-Person training:
  - 24 advocates from 13 organizations
- Complete and return Discussion with Supervisor planning sheet
  - 15 advocates
- Meet with supervisor to Attend Monthly Teleconferences:
  - 15 advocates attended at least one of the 6 teleconferences
  - Average number of teleconferences attended = 3.7
- Present an overview of Seeking Safety Learning Circle to peers
  - 12 sites
- Of the 3 Latin@ Outreach Program sites, the Coordinators joined teleconferences and discussed possible implementation with local partners, but no Seeking Safety sessions were conducted.
- Of the 9 participating organizations, all 9 conducted at least two Seeking Safety sessions
  - Of the 8 sites that offered groups, the average number of sessions offered = 4.6
  - At the one site that offered individual sessions, the total number of sessions held = 7
- Sessions were held in a variety of configurations: residential, non-residential, community; mainstream, culturally specific; adults, youth; closed, open, drop-in; evening , daytime; weekly, bi-weekly, monthly.

### **Process themes arising from teleconference discussions**

Questions which emerged through the teleconferences:

- How will survivors who are accustomed to a different group format feel about Seeking Safety?
- How does Seeking Safety feel if there are only a few participants?
- What modifications to the curriculum would best meet the needs of survivors from specific cultural backgrounds?
- How can this group be promoted when recruiting from the community?
- How is Seeking Safety being implemented at other organizations? What topics are others using?
- Are topics based on substance misuse working in general DV group settings?

Challenges:

- Advocates' time is under many demands which can interfere with coordinating logistics and attending teleconferences.
- Discomfort by some advocates and some group participants re. substance abuse language in curriculum.
- Advocates wanting to offer groups to Spanish speaking participants from the community did not have recruitment materials or bicultural mentors for using/adapting this curriculum.

Successes:

- Nearly all advocates felt confident in their group facilitation skills at the start of this Learning Circle. Even so, it is helpful to improving comfort and confidence with Seeking Safety when a facilitator can discuss the topics with other advocates in advance. Also useful to share how sessions went, as some topics seem to work best when covered over two sessions.
- Seeking Safety works well with small groups. Even if 2-3 survivors attended, it was an engaging and meaningful session which the participants felt was beneficial.
- "Compared with the traditional support group, Seeking Safety felt equally comfortable to lead, but at the end of Seeking Safety instead of a sense of being drained, tired, and defeated, the women were smiling, energized, and were expressing hope."
- The format of the sessions is valuable. It took advocates 1-2 sessions of facilitation to be comfortable, but the participants easily made the transition to the Seeking Safety format.
- A slightly modified Check in/ Check out tool and Commitment form helped those components fit better for advocates and feel less clinical. (See attachments: *Seeking Safety – Handouts*)

### **Comments from Participants' End of Session Feedback forms**

The few completed forms that were shared with CCADV contained the following comments:

- Need longer session ☺ Very valuable to me and I feel I need this to help me through my journey.
- I can do this!!! I am finding my power and I'm not crazy. It feels good to get his voice out of my head.
- A bit longer to be able to really process and get through the topic would be helpful.
- I like [advocate's] personality. She talks real, not like a counselor ... that's good to my heart.
- I think this was really great and should be done weekly.
- I felt closer to the women in the shelter after this session
- I enjoyed coming to session today, and I walk away with many healthy behaviors.

## Advocates' pre/post assessments

### • Professional Quality of Life Scale

This is a 30 question survey which assesses three areas of work impact for people in helping professions, Compassion Satisfaction, Burnout, and Secondary Traumatic Stress. Thirteen advocates completed the pre and the post. Due to the small number of Learning Circle participants and short duration of Seeking Safety sessions offered (if at all) these pre/post scores are interesting but not necessarily meaningful.

Score range	Our group score on each section	Level
0 to 22	19.5 (Pre – Burnout) 19.2 (Post- Burnout)  21 (Post – Secondary Traumatic Stress)	Low
23 to 41	22.5 (Pre – Secondary Traumatic Stress)	Average
42 to 50	43.2 (Pre – Compassion Satisfaction) 42.3 (Post – Compassion Satisfaction)	High

Questions with biggest pre/post score change:

#### *Compassion Satisfaction*

- I feel invigorated after working with those I help (higher at post)
- I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with helping techniques & protocols (higher at post)

#### *Burnout*

- I feel connected to others (higher at post)
- I feel worn out because of my work (lower at post)
- I feel overwhelmed because my case load feels endless (lower at post)

#### *Secondary Traumatic Stress*

- I am preoccupied with more than one person I help (lower at post)
- I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my life as a helper (lower at post)

### • Skills/ Knowledge/ Comfort

Advocates completed a Knowledge/Skills/Comfort survey at the start of the Learning Circle, and again at the end of the Learning Circle. Some of the Pre/post data showing change is noted.

NOT including when talking about shelter rules, I bring up the topic of alcohol and drug use with the survivors I am working with.		
	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>
No, I don't bring it up.	15%	7%
Sometimes I bring it up.	35%	27%
Often I bring it up.	<b>25%</b>	<b>40%</b>
Always I bring it up.	25%	27%

I feel confident talking with survivors...						
	Disagree		Somewhat agree		Strongly agree	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
...about trauma symptoms	10%	0%	19%	13%	71%	88%
...about their alcohol and/or drug use	<b>19%</b>	<b>0%</b>	43%	38%	<b>38%</b>	<b>63%</b>
...about the connection between trauma and substance use	<b>19%</b>	<b>0%</b>	29%	19%	<b>52%</b>	<b>81%</b>

Survivors with substance misuse symptoms would say that I...								
	Never/Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
...believe they know what is best for themselves	17%	6%	22%	25%	50%	50%	<b>11%</b>	<b>19%</b>
...am interested in helping them solve their problems in their own way	0%	0%	5%	13%	70%	38%	<b>24%</b>	<b>50%</b>
...help guide them to make good decisions for themselves	<b>6%</b>	<b>0%</b>	12%	13%	53%	31%	<b>29%</b>	<b>56%</b>
...help them feel empowered by my interactions with them	<b>6%</b>	<b>0%</b>	6%	13%	53%	40%	35%	47%

- **Overall Learning Circle Evaluation**

Advocates completed an Overall Evaluation at the end of the Learning Circle which inquired about the advocate's experience with the curriculum, their coworkers' response to the curriculum, survivors' experience with the curriculum, the Learning Circle process, and ongoing impacts at their organization.

	Not at all	Somewhat	Very much
Has being part of this Learning Circle improved your ability to serve survivors?	0%	60%	<b>40%</b>
Has being part of this Learning Circle increased your understanding of trauma impacts?	13%	33%	<b>53%</b>
Would you recommend this curriculum to other advocacy organizations?	0%	20%	<b>80%</b>

Which of these best characterizes your co-workers' response to Seeking Safety?	
Answer Choice	Responses
They were not interested in it	7%
They were content with just me knowing about it	14%
They were willing to learn about it	36%
They were eager to learn about it	43%

Has being part of this Learning Circle changed your interactions with survivors?	Yes	No
	80%	20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It has given me more tools that I can offer them when speaking with them about their trauma or substance use. It has made me feel more helpful.</li> <li>It changed the way I saw drug misuse in many ways.</li> <li>It has helped me open discussions about substance use with clients.</li> <li>I think it has given me more information so that I can better understand the client's background and give them the support they need.</li> <li>Working with Seeking Safety helps with open communication in a group setting.</li> <li>Yes, working with this curriculum opened the door to trauma they had not spoken about to me.</li> <li>I think it gave me specific tools around substance misuse that I was lacking.</li> </ul>		

Has being part of this Learning Circle changed the conversations you have with peers?	Yes	No
	80%	20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes in a sense that I can contribute more on a discussion relating to trauma, which gives me a chance to help even further.</li> <li>I think it allows the topic of substance abuse to be less taboo and helps staff as a whole have a more informed way to discuss it.</li> <li>Awareness that they are not two separate issues to be treated independently.</li> <li>I am able to give ideas to peers about their clients and substance use.</li> <li>It opened more dialogue with co-workers about groups.</li> <li>We cross-trained everyone at the shelter and they feel capable to hold sessions.</li> </ul>		

Has being part of this Learning Circle led to any change in practices, paperwork, or policies?	Yes	No
	36%	64%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A short concise intake for first time visits, and a deeper understanding to be documented as survivors choose as we build relationship if and when there are continued meetings.</li> <li>Actually, I am in the process now.</li> <li>We have tailored our program to be sensitive to substance abuse issues &amp; trauma symptoms.</li> <li>We added a 'Seeking Safety 101' to their program plan. This is just a reminder to clients and staff to discuss Seeking Safety to see if they would like to participate.</li> </ul>		

Advocates' impressions of how participants felt about Seeking Safety:

- They loved the curriculum and were disappointed when we finished our 6 sessions. They were excited that we decided to continue the curriculum.
- Participants generally enjoyed the material and thought that it gave them information they had never had before. They did mention the overuse of substance abuse language. They really enjoyed the check in time and check out. They felt that this gave them consistency and made them feel more comfortable in group.
- People report feeling good after.
- They like the dialogue and 'informality' of Seeking Safety.
- I believe the participants enjoy the time and attention they receive from Seeking Safety meetings. The participants had a chance to share and discuss the topic at hand that meant the most to them. Most importantly, I felt they all took away something from Seeking Safety, and they could use throughout their journey.
- All of my impressions of the participants' experiences with Seeking Safety seemed very positive. I felt that after each session there was something that they took away from it and that what they took away was something that they could do and change themselves. They all seemed interested in a second session and very enthusiastic about making positive changes.
- Clients seemed to really enjoy the group, and the discussions and skills that came out of it. The clients really liked some of the handouts and how certain components were really broken down within those handouts (ie: long-term PTSD problems handout) in their conceptualization of how PTSD has been affecting their lives. Clients also reported liking the topics covered in Seeking Safety and wanted the group to be longer in duration.
- They enjoyed the curriculum. The group typically ended on a positive note - I think the 'Commitment to Self' facilitated this. Participants remarked that they felt hopeful after sessions. It opened up opportunities for clients to discuss substance use (or other unhealthy coping), when they may not have had an opportunity to do so with a traditional domestic violence education group.
- They have responded very resoundingly to DV being an issue in their community, and for most in their own lives. The most potent part of each session is when they share openly of their experiences with violence and all the repercussions that come of it, and then in turn gain and offer support from each other. The support given is less on an emotional level but either more with practical tips or by making jokes to lighten things up or just through listening quietly to each other. There is still a lack of trust with each other so it's taking time to draw connections, but it's slowly coming
- Participants became eager for the next session, wanting to go faster and do more in each session.
- The group responded and the discussion flowed.



## Lessons Learned

CCADV initiated this Seeking Safety Learning Circle with two overarching questions:

1. How can advocates work with this curriculum so it fits with their (non-therapist) role?
2. How can advocates use this curriculum with survivors who don't misuse substances?

### Question 1: Making the curriculum fit for advocacy

Based on feedback from the advocates at the participating sites, we learned that the Seeking Safety curriculum can indeed be daunting to advocates due to its mental health/clinical approach & language. Reading the first two chapters as preparation for facilitation, as recommended by the curriculum author, was a task which required an amount of time to focus which was hard for advocates to carve out in their schedules. The materials use clinical terms (therapist, client, treatment, PTSD, Substance Use Disorder) which are not a good fit with advocacy. Advocates wanted to be clear with the group participants that Seeking Safety was not a mental health treatment, and that advocates were not serving as therapists.

In order to make the curriculum work better for advocates, key materials were modified. The initial Group Agreement Form was modified to reflect the advocacy context in which it was being used. In addition, the two materials used at every session were modified to likewise reflect an advocacy context. These materials are the Check In/Out form and the Commitment form. The commitment form was modified so that rather than emphasizing 'case management' an activity based in self-care or skill rehearsal would fit well. For the session handouts, advocates commonly reported verbally addressing the clinical language during the discussions by making statements about alternate ways for participants to think about the material. For example when handouts addressed participants as having PTSD, advocates paused to say that in no way was the curriculum or their participation diagnostic as to PTSD or implying participants had a mental health condition. Advocates invited participants to consider handouts' references to 'PTSD' as a stand-in for any ways that difficult experiences have lasting effects.

A second way in which advocates worked to make the curriculum a fit for their advocacy role was by modifying the name of the group, such as Self Care Skills Group, and also modifying the recruitment materials. Multiple sites chose not to include the terms PTSD or Substance Use Disorder or 'substance misuse' on recruitment flyers. One site which recruited participants from the community chose to use 'affected by trauma' as an umbrella term, and to give examples of an array of events which could be traumatic including also sexual assault, immigration journeys, car accidents, deportations, etc.

### Question 2: Using the curriculum with survivors who don't misuse substances

Some advocates decided to focus their initial 6 sessions on topics which seemed more related to healthy relationships and trauma impacts instead of introducing the topics which seemed more anchored in substance abuse disorders. As they did with 'PTSD,' advocates invited participants to consider handouts' references to 'substance abuse' as a stand-in for any of many ways that people may over-rely on tension-reducing behaviors. Such reconceptualization of the handouts was not particularly elegant, however advocates report that participants readily accepted the alternate conceptualization and nonetheless found the content to be relevant and useful. Some advocates also noted that via the handouts' inclusion of substance abuse, several participants disclosed having substance misuse concerns which the advocate had previously been unaware of. Survivors who did self-identify substance misuse concerns found the handouts to be pleasantly direct and non-judgmental.

## **Appendices**

- Seeking Safety – FAQ
- Seeking Safety – Overview
- Seeking Safety – Brochure
- Seeking Safety – Next Steps Checklist
- Seeking Safety – Handouts
  - Treatment Agreement
  - Check In/Check Out
  - Commitments
  - Group Feedback Questionnaire

## Why would I want to join this? -- FAQs

Some trauma survivors experience long-lasting trauma symptoms (ie. difficulty feeling calm; intrusive memories of trauma events) and some survivors misuse substance in an attempt to manage those distressing symptoms. Advocacy organizations in Colorado have expressed that they want more tools for helping these survivors reduce their distress and achieve more safety.

- **What is the advantage of using Seeking Safety?**

Seeking Safety is an evidence-based tool for helping survivors reduce trauma symptoms and substance misuse. This curriculum empowers advocates to be more effective in helping survivors achieve safety and well-being.

"I run a drop-in group for women at a DV agency ... the Seeking Safety topics all reflect real needs DV survivors have and are practical and interesting. We always have powerful conversations."  
– Worker in CA

- **Is it compatible with advocacy? Is it practical?**

Rooted in an empowerment approach, prioritizing safety, validating individual experience, flexibly supporting skill-building, Seeking Safety reflects advocacy values.

"Aspects of the manual rated highest across sites included learning coping skills, and safety as a priority of treatment. ... Women stated clearly that they intended to use what they had learned, and that they would recommend it to others"

– Seeking Safety participants' feedback

- **How simple is it to use?**

Advocacy organizations identify limited financial resources and lack of staff training in substance abuse treatment as barriers to addressing survivors' substance misuse, yet Seeking Safety is \*free\* to Learning Circle participants, does not require special facilitator certification, and can be flexibly used as a supplement to existing individual or group meetings.

"We have implemented Seeking Safety in our one-on-one peer counseling and support groups. Advocates feel more competent in working effectively on these issues ... We have seen participants feel empowered more quickly due to having safe coping skills"

– Advocacy organization in CA

- **What's the Learning Circle time commitment?**

The Learning Circle project is a 6 month commitment (Oct 2015 – March 2016) that will include having an advocate (or 2!) attend an in-person facilitator training day in September. The facilitator will join monthly tele-conference meetings, and facilitate 6+ sessions of Seeking Safety at your organization.

The curriculum has 25 topics, but has been shown to be helpful in "a condensed (six session) Seeking Safety intervention."

– Cash Ghee, Bolling, & Johnson (2009)

- **What kinds of results can we expect to see?**

Seeking Safety is useful for people with trauma symptoms, but also has the benefit of being useful for reducing substance misuse also. You can expect to see all survivors learning skills to feel less distressed, and some survivors reporting they are finding new ways to manage without as much substance use. Advocates will likely report feeling more comfortable and confident in talking about substance use and more satisfied in doing their job.

"The agencies who made changes, reduced barriers and implemented Seeking Safety, showed improved shelter functioning, improved client outcomes, and improved staff morale. It was a huge success!"

– TIC program administrator in CA

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## Overview of 'Seeking Safety' as an evidence-based practice

*"We have implemented Seeking Safety techniques in our one-on-one peer counseling and support groups. Advocates feel more competent in working effectively on these issues due to a better understanding of how DV survivors are impacted by mental health/substance abuse. We have seen participants feel empowered more quickly due to having safe coping skills"*

Advocacy organization in CA quoted in DeNike & Reyes 2009, p.21

### OVERVIEW AND FORMAT OF SEEKING SAFETY

First published in 2002, **Seeking Safety is a curriculum which intends to teach coping skills for reducing the most distressing and dangerous symptoms experienced by people with PTSD and substance use disorders (Najavits 2007).** Seeking Safety does not engage in clinical trauma processing work. Instead, this curriculum presents 25 coping skills and encourages participants to rehearse the skills for application to their daily life. Seeking Safety was designed to be compatible with people's other wellness interventions such as 12-step meetings, therapy, medications, or others, and was designed for people who may only remain involved for short periods of time. This curriculum views substance use as a dangerous tool for coping with the distress of trauma symptoms, and it seeks to compassionately support the replacement of that tool with other coping skills. Seeking Safety uses a strengths perspective, positive reinforcement, and personalization of skills to engage and support participants.

Seeking Safety is a curriculum consisting of 25 topics, which can be covered in any order. Each of the topics can be completed in one hour, or one topic could be discussed over multiple sessions depending on participant preference. To provide predictability, each session is highly structured with consistent elements of a 'check-in', quotation reading, asking participants to review the topic handouts, discussion of how the topic ties to the individual's life, and finally a 'check-out,' including making a commitment to take an action before meeting again. Participants talk about the meaning and potential usefulness of each topic skill, and rehearse how they may use it in life situations. **Seeking Safety is structured to provide predictability within sessions, avoids recounting of traumatic material, and promotes skills for life stability and emotional stability.**

### ADAPTATIONS FOR DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

This manual was designed to provide for a high degree of flexibility in use. Adaptations, such as adding more examples relevant to a particular audience, incorporating arts, or taking more than one session to cover any individual topic, are supported. Seeking Safety has been successfully conducted with diverse groups, including with people who have one of the targeted disorders but not the other, and with people from a variety of socioeconomic and ethnic/racial backgrounds. It has been conducted with groups of adolescents, veterans, people experiencing homelessness and/or domestic violence, people with mild traumatic brain injury, people with severe and persistent mental illness, and others. In addition, the Seeking Safety manual has been translated into nine additional languages.

**Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

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*CCADV works to eliminate domestic violence in all its forms.*

A noteworthy aspect of Seeking Safety is in the flexibility regarding the curriculum facilitator. **This treatment has been successfully conducted by mental health clinicians, substance use treatment providers, advocates, paraprofessionals, and peers.** Seeking Safety is promoted as having a "public health emphasis: low cost, and can be used by almost any clinician, client, and program" (Najavits et al, 2014, p.296) which enables ready adoption into a variety of settings.

## EVIDENCE FOR SUCCESS

Seeking Safety has been included in 20 research projects, is more empirically studied than any other intervention for PTSD and substance use disorders, and has been shown to be an effective intervention (Najavits et al. 2014). Seeking Safety was first evaluated during the Women with Co-occurring Disorders and Violence Study, which showed improvements with participants' mental health and trauma-symptoms (Fowler & Faulkner 2010). Additional studies have included three randomized controlled trials, currently the 'gold standard' for demonstrating treatment efficacy, and have found that Seeking Safety outperformed treatment-as-usual (Najavits 2007, pp154-155). As stated in Najavits et al., 2014, "the model has been researched with a broad range of clients and typically chronic and severe populations. It has shown consistent positive outcomes on a wide range of variables and strong client satisfaction" (p. 296). **Seeking Safety had been robustly investigated and found to be effective.**

## RELEVANCE TO SURVIVORS OF INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE

Survivors of domestic violence, also referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV), stand to benefit from Seeking Safety. Survivors of IPV have higher than general population rates of PTSD and substance use disorders. Macy & Goodbourne, 2012, cite research findings that "women victimized by IPV have substance problems at 5 times the rate of women in the general population" and that "nearly 68% [of survivors in a domestic violence shelter] were at moderate to high risk for substance abuse problems" (p. 234). **Addressing both trauma symptoms and substance misuse concerns together is important given the interconnections between safety and sobriety, and yet such integrated interventions can be hard for survivors to locate and join.**

While the majority of women seeking substance use treatment identify prior childhood and/or adult experiences of abuse, only a minority of US treatment facilities report consistent use of trauma-informed interventions, and even fewer are equipped to address domestic violence-specific service needs (Macy & Goodbourne, 2012). In addition to substance use treatment facilities, many women with co-occurring trauma symptoms and substance misuse concerns are accessing domestic violence advocacy organizations. Despite the prevalence of trauma and substance misuse among women accessing domestic violence advocacy services, DeNike & Reyes note that "**while the mental health and substance abuse fields have been grappling with trauma, the domestic violence field has equally been struggling with issues related to mental health and/or substance abuse. ... Most DV service providers ... feel unprepared to deal with these issues**" (2009, p. 6). Seeking Safety can help domestic violence advocacy organizations integrate substance misuse interventions into their work with survivors.

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Seeking Safety is a promising intervention to incorporate into the work of domestic violence advocacy organizations. Seeking Safety fits well with the core philosophy of domestic violence advocacy organizations in that they each strive to assist with safety and stability through an empowerment approach flexibly applied based on client need. While domestic violence advocacy organizations identify limited financial resources and lack of staff experience in substance abuse as barriers to addressing survivors' substance misuse (DeNike & Reyes 2009; Macy & Goodbourne 2012), **Seeking Safety is low cost, does not require specific certification, and can be implemented in various ways including as a supplement to existing individual advocacy or support groups.**

In addition, while domestic violence advocates may be inexperienced, and therefore uncomfortable, with addressing substance use/misuse with women they are serving, advocates would likely be reassured by the dual-issue benefit of each of Seeking Safety's session topics. As a stage I stabilization intervention and as an intervention which has been shown to be effective with paraprofessionals and peer facilitation, advocates without specific mental health service provision training are well suited to use Seeking Safety. Ideally, Seeking Safety could become peer-led or co-facilitated at domestic violence advocacy organizations as another avenue for survivor involvement and empowerment.

## CONCLUSION

Seeking Safety is a widely adopted, evidence based, and well-received intervention for reducing the symptoms of PTSD and substance use disorders. This intervention has been used in many treatment settings with a wide diversity of populations, and can be facilitated by people in a variety of roles ranging from mental health clinician to peer. **Seeking Safety may be a useful tool for improving the confidence and comfort of domestic violence advocates to address substance use/misuse with survivors seeking assistance at their organizations.** Rooted in psychoeducation and coping skills building, Seeking Safety has a good theoretical and practical fit with domestic violence advocacy organizations, and the low cost and imminent readiness for implementing the treatment endorse it as a tool which advocates can adopt into their work.

### *Have questions? Want more information?*

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*CCADV works to eliminate domestic violence in all its forms.*

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## Topics in Seeking Safety

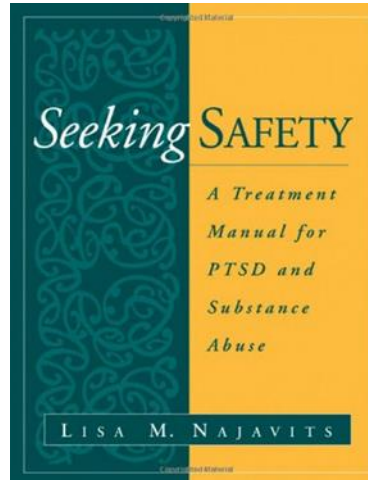
There are 25 topics to choose from, and they can be presented in any order. Each topic supports healing from both trauma and substance misuse.

Topics include:

- ∞ Safety
- ∞ PTSD: Taking Back Your Power
- ∞ Asking for Help
- ∞ Setting Boundaries in Relationships
- ∞ Getting Others to Support Your Recovery
- ∞ Healthy Relationships
- ∞ Community Resources
- ∞ Taking Good Care of Yourself
- ∞ Coping with Triggers
- ∞ Self-Nurturing
- ∞ Detaching from Emotional Pain (Grounding Skills)
- ∞ Life Choices

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Women who attend 6 or more sessions often report an increased sense of safety and reduced trauma symptoms.



## For More Information:

✧ [www.seekingsafety.org](http://www.seekingsafety.org)



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## Seeking Safety

There are effective ways to  
manage trauma symptoms  
and to reduce substance  
misuse!

The Seeking Safety curriculum  
helps survivors heal from  
trauma & substance misuse

Seeking Safety may  
be useful to you!

Find out more...



## What is Seeking Safety?

Seeking Safety is a skills group for people with a history of trauma &/or substance misuse. It focuses on coping skills and useful problem solving. The 25 topics can be conducted in any order.

### *Trauma symptoms*

(like anxiety, flashbacks, nightmares, feeling numb, having a hard time remembering things or trusting people)  
*are common responses to threatening situations.*

*You CAN learn to manage these difficult symptoms! ☺*

## Is this therapy? What is peer support?

Seeking Safety doesn't require a therapist! It is not trauma therapy, but rather it is a skills group that can be used by advocates, and groups can even be peer-led. ☺ Peer support means being with and learning from others with similar experiences.

This curriculum is educational. People *don't* share details of their traumas. Seeking Safety is valuable for anyone who has been impacted by trauma, even if they don't have a PTSD diagnosis or problem use of substances.

## Did you know there's a connection between trauma & substance misuse?

Yes! Use of substances is a common way that people who have been through threatening situations will try to feel better. Domestic violence survivors may use substances for a variety of reasons, including to manage pain, get to sleep, feel something positive, feel less scared. If trauma symptoms or substance use are disrupting your life, there are effective ways to manage your symptoms and use.

Trauma and substance misuse are profoundly connected. Consider these linkages noted in Seeking Safety:

- **The dual diagnosis of PTSD and substance abuse is surprisingly common. The rate of PTSD among women in substance abuse treatment is 30% - 59%.**  
(Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes, & Nelson, 1995; Langeland & Hartgers, 1998; Najavits, Weiss, & Shaw, 1997; Stewart, 1996; Stewart, Conrod, Pihl, & Dongier, 1999; Triffleman, 1998)
- **People with PTSD & substance abuse are vulnerable to repeated traumas.** (Fullilove et al., 1993)
- **People with both disorders suffer a variety of life problems ... including other disorders, interpersonal and medical problems ... homelessness, HIV risk, and domestic violence.**  
(Brady, Dansky, Sonne, & Saladin, 1998; Brown & Wolfe, 1994; Dansky, Byrne, & Brady, 1999)
- **A "downward spiral" is common. For example, substance use may increase vulnerability to new traumas, which in turn can lead to more substance use** (Fullilove et al., 1993). From patients' perspective, **PTSD symptoms are common triggers of substance use** (Abueg & Fairbank, 1991; Brown, Recupero, & Stout, 1995), **which in turn can heighten PTSD symptoms** (Brown, Stout, & Gannon-Rowley, 1998; Kofoed et al., 1993; Kovach, 1986; Root, 1989).

## How can Seeking Safety be beneficial to me?

Many survivors struggle with managing their trauma symptoms and substance use. Too often trauma symptoms or substance use are seen as 'weaknesses' but that is not true! These are normal responses to abnormal situations. Through compassionate discussion of these difficult topics, Seeking Safety can be a tool to help you gain new information and skills. Learn to navigate triggers and more effectively build the life of safety and wellbeing which you deserve!

**\* Safety - Trust - Choice - Collaboration - Empowerment - Cultural Competence \***

## Next Steps Checklist

### Preparations

- ☐ Group will determine schedule for monthly teleconference discussions
- ☐ Meet with your supervisor to complete the 'Post-Training Discussion with Supervisor Sheet'
- ☐ Introduce Seeking Safety to your coworkers at a staff meeting
- ☐ Set up a schedule for when you will begin offering Seeking Safety, how often the sessions will be conducted, how you will let survivors know about it, etc.
- ☐ Join the monthly group teleconference discussions (October 2015 – March 2016)

### Conduct Seeking Safety sessions ☺

- ☐ When a new participant joins the group, ask them to complete the trauma symptoms checklist. You can say something like:
  - “Our organization is curious to learn how people’s trauma symptoms might change after they participate in this group. This is a checklist of some ways people can feel. If you are willing to fill this out, you would mark a number between 0 and 10 that best reflects how much you have felt each thing in the last 2 weeks. It would take about 5 minutes to do. It is your choice, and it’s ok to say no. What do you think about doing the checklist?”
- ☐ At the end of every session,
  - the group members will complete the End of Session Questionnaire
  - you will complete the Adherence Scale – Brief Version
- ☐ Invite your supervisor to observe one of the groups. They will complete the Adherence Scale – Brief Version also.
- ☐ At the end of a group member’s participation (either they are leaving the group, or if the group is ending) ask them to complete the Seeking Safety Feedback Questionnaire

### After the Learning Circle has been completed

- ☐ In March, complete an End of Project Survey, as well as the follow up version of the Job Satisfaction survey and Pre/Post-Test.
- ☐ Review the process with staff and see how Seeking Safety has impacted practice and whether you want to continue offering it
- ☐ As you have time and interest, share your experience and promising practices through input to CCADV’s Learning Circle project report, blog posts, and a Membership webinar!

Your choice points:

- Which topics to use, and in what order you will conduct them?
- How many sessions to conduct in total?
- Whether to talk about one topic for more than one session?
- If you want to add mindfulness practices at the start?
- If you want to add arts activities?
- If you will facilitate alone or with someone else?
- 
- 

Any notes to self as you work through the curriculum:

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## Seeking Safety Skills Group Agreement

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- The goal of this group and curriculum is safety above all!
- I will try my very hardest to recover, including reading session materials, completing commitments between sessions, and reaching out for all help available to me.
- I am always welcome back, even if I miss a session or if I relapse.
- The more I put into practicing the positive coping skills, the more I'll get out of this group.
- I understand that I may feel worse before I feel better, but that I should stick with this group and practice of the positive coping skills.
- Everything said in treatment will be kept strictly confidential. I am aware, however, that there are certain legal conditions where the facilitator is a mandated reporter:
  - (1 ) if I am in serious danger of harming myself or others;
  - (2) if child or elder abuse becomes known.
- I will strive to be open and honest with the facilitator about my safety (including self-harm, suicidal impulses, and danger to others), my substance use, and any negative reactions I have to the group or the facilitator.
- I will be on time for sessions, and will leave a message if I need to cancel.
- I will not be high or intoxicated when I arrive at group.
- I will notice my strengths. I'll keep actively recognizing my strengths, talents, and abilities, and the things I do well in between our group meetings. ☺

### GROUP GUIDELINES

- I will not discuss details of trauma or substance use, to avoid upsetting other group members.
- I will strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect (e.g., no interrupting others, no physical contact between group members).
- To help everyone feel safe, it is essential that nothing a group member says in session is ever repeated to anyone outside of the group.

*The group facilitator, in return, agrees to conduct the highest-quality group possible, with respect and care, to help promote your safety and recovery.*

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Participant signature

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Date

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Facilitator signature

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Date

#### Adapted

From *Seeking Safety* by Lisa M. Najavits (2002). Copyright by The Guilford Press. Permission to photocopy this form is granted to purchasers of this book for personal use only (see copyright page for details).

### **Commitment to Yourself**

A commitment is a promise to yourself. Keeping your commitment is a way of respecting, honoring and caring for yourself.

<b>What is one commitment to yourself?</b>
I will:

<b>What are supports that can help you with your commitment?</b>
I will contact:

### **Commitment to Yourself**

A commitment is a promise to yourself. Keeping your commitment is a way of respecting, honoring and caring for yourself.

<b>What is your commitment to yourself?</b>
I will:

<b>What are supports that can help you with your commitment?</b>
I will contact:

## **Group Check In**

- How are you feeling?
- What healthy coping have you done?
- Any unhealthy coping?

## **Group Check Out**

- Name one thing you got out of today's session (and any problems with the session).
- What is your commitment to yourself for the week?
- Are there any supports you need to reach out to?

## Seeking Safety Group Feedback Questionnaire

*Your feedback is appreciated! It tells us what is working well, and how we might improve the group.*

**How many Seeking Safety group sessions have you attended?** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>How helpful...</b>	-3 ☹ Greatly harmful	-2 ☹ Somewhat harmful	-1 ☹ A little harmful	0 Neutral	+1 ☺ A little helpful	+2 ☺ Somewhat helpful	+3 ☺ Greatly helpful
...was the group overall?							
...was the focus on safety?							
...was the use of quotes?							
...were the handouts?							
...was the Check In/Check Out?							
...were the self commitments?							
...were the discussions?							
...were the skills that were introduced?							

	Yes	No	Maybe	Comments?
<b>Did you learn something in this group that you will use in the future?</b>				
<b>Would you recommend this group to someone else?</b>				

**What was the \*best\* part of this group?**

**What was the \*worst\* part of this group?**

**What changes would you like to see made to the group?** For example, should it be longer? Shorter? Topics to add? Topics to delete? Or something else?

**Thank you!!**