DIGNITY DREAM · SEPTEMBER 2026

The Stay Plan

A written plan for the hours when your own thinking is not on your side. You build it now, while you are steady, so that the version of you who is struggling does not have to build anything at all.

SEVEN PAGES · FREE PRINTABLE · DIGNITY-DREAM.COM

Read this first

Two minutes of setup makes the rest of this work.

This plan follows the structure of the Stanley-Brown Safety Planning Intervention, a brief written intervention used in clinical and emergency settings. Research on safety planning has found reduced suicidal behavior and higher rates of treatment engagement in the months following completion, compared with usual care.

It works because of one specific thing: it removes decision making from the moment of highest distress. Intense suicidal crises are often time limited. The purpose of a written plan is to give you something to follow while that window passes.

Four rules that make this effective

- Write it in your own words, not clinical words. You have to be able to read it fast.
- Fill it in on a steady day, not a hard one.
- Keep it somewhere you will actually reach for. Photo on your phone, inside a cabinet door, in your bag.
- Give a copy to one person who would show up for you.

The order matters

Steps one through six move from what you can do alone toward reaching other people. Start at the top and work down. If a step does not help, go to the next one. You do not have to get through the list to be allowed to call someone.

This is not a contract

Nothing here asks you to promise anything or prove anything. It is a set of instructions you are writing to your future self, and you are allowed to revise it any time your life changes.

If you are in danger right now, stop filling this out and use these

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Call or text, 24 hours, free and confidential in the United States.

988

Crisis Text Line. Text HOME to 741741.

Outside the United States, find your local line at findahelpline.com. If there is immediate danger, call your local emergency number.

STEP ONE

My warning signs

The thoughts, feelings, body signals, and behaviors that tell you a hard stretch is starting. Write what is true for you, not what sounds serious enough.

THOUGHTS I NOTICE

1.

2.

3.

WHAT MY BODY DOES

1.

2.

3.

WHAT I START DOING, OR STOP DOING

1.

2.

3.

Common early signals

Sleep changes in either direction. Cancelling plans you wanted to keep. Not answering messages. Feeling like a burden to people who love you. Numbness rather than sadness. Giving things away. Sudden calm after a long stretch of distress.

STEP TWO

What I can do on my own

Actions that lower the intensity without needing anyone else. Specific and physical works better than abstract. Not "relax." Instead: "shower with the light off," "walk to the corner and back."

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

STEP THREE

People and places that pull me out of my head

You are not asking these people for help here. You are using their company, or a public setting, as a distraction. A coffee shop, a gym, a sibling you can sit next to without explaining anything.

PEOPLE WHOSE COMPANY STEADIES ME

1.

2.

PLACES I CAN GO

1.

2.

STEP FOUR

People I can tell

Now you are asking directly. Write names and numbers so you do not have to search for them. Research on help seeking has found that being asked about suicidal thoughts does not increase them, and often lowers distress. The same holds when you are the one who brings it up.

NAME	NUMBER

The sentence, ready to use

"I am having thoughts of ending my life and I do not want to be alone right now." You do not owe an explanation, a reason, or a plan for what happens next. That one sentence is the whole ask.

STEP FIVE

Professionals and crisis lines

Fill this in ahead of time so it is already there.

CLINICIAN, DOCTOR, OR AGENCY	NUMBER

- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Call or text 988.
- Crisis Text Line. Text HOME to 741741.
- The Trevor Project, for LGBTQ young people. 1-866-488-7386, or text START to 678-678.
- Veterans Crisis Line. Dial 988, then press 1.
- SAMHSA National Helpline, for substance use and mental health treatment referral. 1-800-662-4357.

STEP SIX

Making my surroundings safer

This step is the one people skip, and it is the one with the strongest evidence behind it. Reducing access to lethal means during a crisis period is one of the most effective suicide prevention strategies identified in public health research, because it puts time and distance between an impulse and an irreversible act.

WHAT I WILL CHANGE, AND BY WHEN

1.

2.

3.

WHO IS HELPING ME DO IT

1.

2.

WAYS PEOPLE COMMONLY BUILD IN TIME AND DISTANCE

- [ ] Ask someone I trust to hold something for me for a set period, with a date to revisit it.
- [ ] Store medication outside my home, or keep only a limited supply on hand.
- [ ] Use a lock box, and give the key or code to someone else.
- [ ] Agree on a temporary change with my household rather than a permanent one.
- [ ] Ask my clinician or pharmacist how to do this safely for my situation.

Why temporary counts

The goal is not to change your life permanently. It is to make the highest risk window survivable. Most intense crises pass. This step is what makes sure you are still here when it does.

THE LAST PAGE

My reasons to stay

Reasons for living are measured in clinical research as a protective factor, separate from the presence of distress. Name them specifically. Not "my family." Instead: "Sunday mornings with my sister, the way she says my name."

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

ONE THING I STILL WANT TO SEE HAPPEN

Where I am keeping this plan

WHO HAS A COPY

SIGNED

DATE TO REVIEW THIS

Keep these where you can see them

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, call or text. Crisis Text Line, text HOME to 741741. Outside the United States, findahelpline.com.

Dignity Dream is an educational resource, not a crisis service and not a substitute for care from a licensed professional. This plan is adapted from the Stanley-Brown Safety Planning Intervention and is most effective when completed with a clinician.