

# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## A Trauma-Informed Guide for Parents of Children in Crisis.

When your child is struggling with self-harm, suicidal thoughts, or emotional overwhelm.  
When things feel out of control, you don't need to do everything...

**Just return to these four simple touchstones:**

### **S — Safety Check**

Pause and ask: Is my child safe right now? Have I done what I can?  
(See the [Safety Checklist](#) in this guide for support.)

### **A — Arise**

You are already what your child needs most.  
Your grounded presence - imperfect but steady - is the anchor in their storm.

### **F — Feel, Don't Fix**

Let go of the urge to solve.  
Feel what's here - in you and in them. That's what creates emotional safety.

### **E — Exhale**

Pause before reacting. One breath can change everything.  
It interrupts reactivity and reconnects you to your inner compass.

**S.A.F.E.™** is not a fix-all.

It's a way to come back to yourself, so you can better be with your child.

It's not about getting it perfect.

It's about staying steady enough to show up with presence and love.



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# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

A Trauma-Informed Guide for Parents of Children in Crisis.

The resources provided here are intended for educational and emotional support purposes only. They are not a substitute for professional medical, psychological, or crisis intervention care.

This material is grounded in lived experience, compassion, and trauma-informed insight, but it is not clinical advice. Every child and every family is different. If you are concerned about your child's immediate safety, wellbeing, or mental health, please seek support from a qualified mental health professional, your GP, or your local crisis service.

Trust your intuition. You know your child better than anyone else. This practice is here to help you feel steadier and more connected, but it does not replace the care and support of trained professionals.

In an emergency, please do not wait.

Contact emergency services or a trusted crisis line in your area. If you're unsure who to call, you'll find a list of international helplines and support services in the final section of this guide.

You are not alone.  
You are doing your best.  
And support is always available.

**S.A.F.E.™** is a way to come back to yourself, so you can better be with your child.



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# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

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# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

Welcome!

If you are holding this booklet, it's likely to mean that you're walking through something incredibly tender.

## **Your child is hurting**

You're doing your best to stay steady, in moments that feel anything but safe

First, please breathe

**You are not alone**

You are not failing

You are here, now

That matters... That is everything

I created this guide to support you through some of the hardest moments a parent can face. It's not filled with quick fixes. Instead, I hope you'll find calm, clear information, steady guidance, and reminders of **how important you are**, as part of your child's healing.

## **You're not supposed to know all the answers**

You just need a way to stay grounded - so you can be present, not panicked.

## **I invite you to go slowly and let your nervous system catch up**

I hope these pages help you feel less alone and more equipped to walk this path compassionately and courageously

You matter more than you know

**So, let's walk this walk, together**

*Teri x*



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# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## SAFETY CHECKLIST

**Is my child physically safe right now?**

**Ask yourself:**

- Are they actively trying to harm themselves?
- Are they in medical danger (e.g., bleeding heavily, faint, disoriented)?
- Do they have immediate access to means of harm (e.g., blades, pills, ligatures)?

**If YES:**

- Stay calm. Let them know you are here.
- If possible, gently remove means of harm without escalating fear.
- Seek **urgent medical support** if the risk is high ([see 'Is This an Emergency' section for criteria](#)).

**Have I asked them directly how they're feeling?**

**Ask calmly and without pressure:**

*“Are you feeling safe right now?”*

*“Are you thinking about hurting yourself?”*

*“Do you feel like it's too hard to be here?”*

Asking about suicidal thoughts **does not increase risk** - it builds **trust** and connection. If they say yes, **stay!** Listen! Let them speak! - Attune to them first, then help.

**Have I removed immediate access to dangerous items?**

**Without shaming or secrecy:**

Safely store sharp objects, medications, alcohol, cords, etc.

Let your child know this is about **safety, not punishment**.

**Use language like:**

*“I want to make things feel safer, not take away your control. Let's do this together.”*



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## SAFETY CHECKLIST

**Am I regulated enough to help them feel safe?**

- Am I panicking or trying to control?
- Can I offer a calm presence, even if I feel unsure?
- Do I need to call a friend, therapist, or crisis line for myself first?
- Let your tone be soft.
- Let your body posture be open.
- Let silence be okay.
- Let your nervous system be **steady enough**.

*Presence doesn't mean perfection. "Steady enough" is enough.*

**And You, Dear Parent...**

- Take breaks.
- Cry if you need to.
- Call someone you trust.
- You don't have to hold this alone.

**Do I know who to call if things escalate?**

- A crisis or suicide hotline (UK, US, AUS, etc.)
- A trusted professional: therapist, school counsellor, GP
- A calm support person who can help you co-regulate

**Have I reminded myself: I am not alone in this?**

- Let yourself breathe.
- You're not failing.
- You're here.
- That already matters.

*This moment is hard. It's asking a lot. You don't have to carry it all or fix everything.*



# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## IS THIS AN EMERGENCY?

**DO NOT HESITATE TO CALL EMERGENCY SERVICES, SEEK SAME-DAY OR EMERGENCY SUPPORT:**

### **If there are any signs of:**

- Unconsciousness
- Seizures
- Uncontrolled vomiting or convulsions
- Signs of infection (e.g., fever, pus, from a self-inflicted wound)
- **Serious or deep wounds** that may require stitches or urgent medical care (e.g., gaping cuts, heavy bleeding that doesn't stop with pressure).

### **If your child:**

- Has taken an **overdose** of any kind, even if they appear “fine.”
- Is **dissociating** or unresponsive and you're unsure whether they're safe.
- Is **actively** trying to **end their life** or has a **clear, immediate plan** to follow through imminently.
- Is speaking or acting in a way that suggests **psychosis**, such as: Hearing voices, severe confusion or paranoia, or loss of touch with reality.
- Showing signs of **aggression or intent to harm someone else** (physically or otherwise).

### **IN THESE MOMENTS, STAY CALM BUT TAKE ACTION!**

Your child may resist, but your loving clarity matters. Tell them...

*“I love you. I need to make sure you're safe.  
We're going to get support.”*

### **Always start with connection - but don't abandon safety**

Attuned presence is primary, but it is never a replacement for lifesaving action when required.

Prioritise safety for all involved. Seek emergency services or take them to the Emergency Department, or nearest medical centre. Do so gently, **without panic** and, ideally, **with their knowledge and consent** (where possible).



# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## WARNING SIGNS - Know What to Look Out For

### **Monitor closely & offer relational support if your child...**

- Is self-harming regularly, even if wounds appear minor
- Expresses passive suicidal ideation (e.g., "I wish I didn't exist")
- Is suddenly unusually calm, after a period of intense distress
- Is engaging in risk-taking behaviours or substance abuse is escalating
- Is withdrawing from everything they used to care about

In these moments, stay connected and open

Don't minimise - but don't panic

Ask them gently:

*"Can you tell me more about what you're feeling?"*

or

*"What's going on inside when that thought shows up?"*

Let them know:

*"You don't have to hide this from me. I want to understand."*

And...

You may still wish to speak to a therapist or mental health professional yourself, to get support, but the goal is not to pathologise your child, instead to expand safety and trust in your relationship

Please remember, **you know your child better than anyone.** Your intuition matters here

Trust your own discernment. No checklist can replace the insight of a parent who is attuned and present.

What is this moment asking of you? What is your child's behaviour trying to express?

### **If something inside you says this doesn't feel safe, listen to that**

If something in you says 'they need my presence more than any protocol right now', trust that too!



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# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## WARNING SIGNS - Know What to Look Out For

**Sometimes, when a child voices suicidal thoughts, it's a bid for connection and not an emergency.**

### **DO...**

Listen deeply without judgment.

Stay curious. Ask:

*“Can you tell me more about what you're feeling?”*

Let them express what's behind the thoughts without trying to fix it.

Ground yourself before making decisions.

### **DON'T...**

Panic or threaten hospitalisation impulsively.

Dismiss or downplay what they've said.

Assume all talk of suicide means immediate danger - but always **take it seriously**.

### **When Attunement Alone is Not Sufficient**

If you feel that you cannot maintain presence due to:

- Being too dysregulated yourself
- Having your own trauma activated
- You feeling panicked, helpless, or unsafe

First **regulate**, and then **reach out** to a safe person

If you feel unable to 'co-regulate' with your child (bring a calm presence) and risk continues to escalate, involve a trusted professional (therapist, doctor, crisis team) - see [your Safety Plan](#)

***The presence of suicidal thoughts in your child is not a failure - it's a cry for safety, connection, and containment.***

You **can't** take all their pain away.

But you **can** meet them in it.

And that... is everything.



# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## Responding to Self Harm

Self-harm is not attention-seeking. **It is a coping mechanism...** A survival strategy... A way for your child to externalise internal pain that feels too big to hold.

If you've discovered your teen is self-harming, you're likely feeling a mix of shock, fear, helplessness, and urgency. That's okay. You don't need to be perfect here - you just need to be present. **Here's how you can respond:**

### **Stay grounded...**

Take a moment to regulate your own nervous system before responding. A calm, attuned adult is the most powerful support a child in distress can receive.

### **Don't panic or shame...**

Avoid saying things like "Why would you do this?" or "This is so dangerous!" Even well-meaning worry can feel like judgment. Instead, meet them with compassion:

*"I see you're hurting. I'm here."*

### **Approach any wounds with care:**

If the injury requires medical attention, remain gentle and matter-of-fact. If it's superficial and doesn't need urgent care, offer antiseptic and bandages, and ask if they'd like help.

*"Would you like me to help clean it, or would you prefer privacy?"*

### **Let them lead the pace of the conversation:**

*"Do you want to tell me what was going on when this happened?"*

*"Is there something that felt overwhelming today?"*

Be okay with silence. Your grounded presence says way more than words.

### **Reassure them:**

*"You're not in trouble. I'm so glad you let me know. We'll figure this out together."*

### **Use S.A.F.E.™ as your anchor:**

**S – Safety Check:** Are they physically safe right now?

**A – Arise:** Stay present. Your calm nervous system matters.

**F – Feel, Don't Fix:** Make space for the pain without rushing to make it go away.

**E – Exhale:** Pause before reacting. Even one breath can shift the moment.



# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## Responding to Self Harm

### **Medical Box Essentials:**

(Make this accessible. Label everything clearly. Keep it stocked.)

- Gauze pads (various sizes)
- Wound cleaning agent (e.g., saline)
- Medical tape
- Butterfly skin closure strips
- Antiseptic cream
- Fabric plasters and sterile bandages
- Clean towel
- Clingfilm (for burns)

### **Wound Care (Non-Serious Cuts):**

- Apply pressure to stop bleeding
- Clean gently with wound solution
- Use butterfly stitches if needed
- Apply a thin layer of antiseptic cream
- Cover with gauze or a plaster
- Secure with tape; use a bandage for extra protection

### **Minor Burns:**

- Rinse under **cool** (not cold) water for at least 10 minutes
- Cover with clingfilm or clean plastic
- Secure gently with tape
- Add a loose bandage if needed

### **When to Seek Emergency Medical Help. Call for help if:**

- Bleeding is heavy** or won't stop
- A **deep cut** exposes dark red muscle
- Numbness** is present (possible nerve damage)
- Burn** affects face, palms, joints, or is **chemical/severe**
- Signs of infection:** redness, swelling, pus, fever



# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## Trauma-Informed Communication

### **Non-shaming phrases to support conversation:**

You may not always get it “right,” but the effort to stay connected is what counts. Young people in distress don’t want or need to be ‘fixed’. They want to be seen, heard, and believed.

*“I’m not here to fix you – I’m here to be with you.”*

*“I can see how much you’re holding. I’m not going anywhere.”*

*“You’re allowed to feel everything. You’re safe with me.”*

### **Lead with curiosity, not correction**

*“Help me understand how things have been feeling for you lately.”*

### **Validate before offering support**

*“That sounds really hard.”*

*“It makes sense that you feel that way.”*

### **Speak to their experience, not their behaviour**

Be sure to focus on the emotion, beneath the action, even if the behaviour feels confronting or scary

### **Don’t make it about you**

Be mindful not to shift the focus to your own fears, guilt, or frustration. Hold space for their pain without centring your own

### **Listen more than you speak**

Silence can be powerful. Resist the urge to fill it or fix it

### **If they’re not talking, keep showing up.**

Connection doesn’t always happen through words. It happens through consistency, warmth, and the feeling of being accepted and welcome - even in silence.



# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## Trauma-Informed Communication

### Non-shaming phrases to support conversation:

**When your child talks about suicide or shows signs of deep distress.  
Instead of jumping to solutions or calling services too soon, first... ask yourself:**

Can I sit with what I'm hearing, without trying to change it?

Can I stay available, so my child feels safe enough to open up further?

Am I rushing to fix because 'I' feel afraid - or because my child truly needs external support?

### Let them lead... Stay curious, not corrective.

They might like to hear from you:

*"Thank you for trusting me."*

*"That must feel really heavy. I'm right here."*

*"You don't have to be okay right now. I'm not going anywhere."*

*"We don't need to solve this. Let's just sit together for a bit."*

*"Would you like me to just listen, or would it help to talk through options?"*

And avoid saying:

*"You're not really suicidal."*

*"You have so much going for you."*

*"Let's get you straight into therapy."*

*"Why didn't you come to me sooner?"*

*"If you do this again, I'll have to take drastic action."*



# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## Grounding Strategies for You

### **Gentle nervous system supports to use in the moment:**

You can't help your child feel safe if your own system is in collapse.  
When things feel overwhelming, come back to yourself with these grounding tools...

#### **Box breathing**

Inhale slowly through your nose for 4 seconds

Hold your breath for 4 seconds

Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds

Hold your breath again for 4 seconds

Repeat this cycle 3 - 4 times

Imagine tracing the sides of a square with your breath: up, across, down, across

#### **5-4-3-2-1 Senses Practice (Orienting):**

5 things you can see

4 things you can feel

3 things you can hear

2 things you can smell

1 thing you can taste

Helps return your body to the present moment

#### **Anchor Phrases**

Repeat silently to yourself:

***"This is hard, and I'm doing my best."***

***"I don't have to fix this. I just have to stay present."***

#### **Soothing touch:**

Place a hand on your heart or belly and breathe

Let your body feel your own presence

#### **Go outside:**

Touch a tree. Feel the ground. Let the earth hold what's too much to carry

#### **Find your supports:**

You don't need to go through this alone. Reach out to a friend, therapist, parent support group or a helpline. Even one safe person can make all the difference



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# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## CRISIS LINES

### Here are some global helplines

If yours is not listed, search:

“[your country] + suicide crisis line” or “[your city] + mental health urgent care.”

### International Crisis Lines

**International Lifeline** (Befrienders Worldwide): <https://www.befrienders.org>

**United States (988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline):** Dial or text 988

**Canada:** Talk Suicide Canada – 1-833-456-4566

**Australia** (Lifeline): 13 11 14

**New Zealand:** 1737 – free call or text

**UK:** NHS 111 / 999 - (Samaritans): 116 123

**India** (iCall): +91 9152987821

**Text services:** Try searching “crisis text line + [your country]”

### UK Crisis Lines

**Samaritans:** 116 123 (24/7)

**SHOUT:** Text “SHOUT” to 85258

**Papyrus HOPELINEUK** (for under 35s): 0800 068 41 41

**NHS 111** – for urgent but non-emergency medical help

**Emergency:** 999

**If you're unsure what to do, call a crisis line - they can guide you in real time.**



# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## Further Global & International Resources

Here is a list of trusted, global, and regionally inclusive online resources for parents of children or teens in crisis—including self-harm, suicidal ideation, and mental health struggles. These offer education, crisis support, and tools for both parents and young people.

### **Befrienders Worldwide:**

[www.befrienders.org](http://www.befrienders.org)

A global network offering emotional support to prevent suicide. Lists helplines in over 30 countries.

### **Mind (UK-based, with global resources)**

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Mental health charity offering practical guidance on helping a loved one in crisis. Many resources apply beyond the UK.

### **UNICEF Parenting Hub**

[www.unicef.org/parenting](http://www.unicef.org/parenting)

Offers articles and tools for supporting children's emotional wellbeing in all regions of the world.

### **The Jed Foundation (JED)**

[www.jedfoundation.org](http://www.jedfoundation.org)

US-based but with widely applicable tools to support teens and young adults in emotional distress. Parent and caregiver guides included.

### **Mental Health First Aid International**

[www.mhfainternational.org](http://www.mhfainternational.org)

Provides training and support for recognising and responding to mental health crises globally.

### **Dr Gabor Maté / Sat Dharam Kaur - Compassionate Inquiry**

[www.compassionateinquiry.com](http://www.compassionateinquiry.com)

While not a crisis service, the resources help parents understand trauma and deepen their ability to attune and respond non-reactively.

### **Dr. Shefali - Conscious Parenting**

[www.drshefali.com](http://www.drshefali.com)

Transformational tools for parents seeking to stay present and grounded, especially when children are struggling emotionally.



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# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## Global Text & Helplines for Youth in Crisis

### **Crisis Text Line – Global Service**

Text-based support via WhatsApp or SMS (depending on region)

[www.crisistextline.org](http://www.crisistextline.org)

Available in: USA, UK, Canada, Ireland, and via WhatsApp internationally

Text HELLO to +1 (289) 206-5243 on WhatsApp (international access)

24/7 support with trained volunteer crisis counselors

For youth in distress, experiencing emotional overwhelm, suicidal ideation, or self-harm urges

### **Befrienders Worldwide**

[www.befrienders.org](http://www.befrienders.org)

Global network of emotional support centers for youth and adults

Access helplines and chat support in over 30 countries

Youth-friendly, non-judgmental, often with trained peer supporters

Focus on active listening and suicide prevention

### **Youthspace.ca (Global Access to Trained Peer Supporters)**

[www.youthspace.ca](http://www.youthspace.ca)

Age: 12–29

Free, confidential, emotional support by trained volunteers

Available worldwide via webchat and email

Topics include suicidal thoughts, gender identity, abuse, depression, and loneliness

### **7 Cups (Global Peer Support + Therapy Referrals)**

[www.7cups.com](http://www.7cups.com)

Anonymous chat support for youth from trained listeners

Global access to free emotional support

Also offers professional therapy (fee-based)

Youth-specific communities and support spaces

### **iCall Psychosocial Helpline (Available Globally via Email & Skype)**

[www.icallhelpline.org](http://www.icallhelpline.org)

Confidential psychosocial support for all ages, including youth

Based in India but open to global requests via email and Skype

Email: [icall@tiss.edu](mailto:icall@tiss.edu)

Offers trauma-informed, LGBTQ+ inclusive, and youth-focused care

### **Lifeline Chat International Directory**

[www.findahelpline.com](http://www.findahelpline.com)

Searchable global directory for youth crisis support via phone, text, or webchat

Created by Mental Health Innovations and partners

Allows users to find local or international helplines that support youth in crisis



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# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## What I Wish I had Known

### How Did I Get Here?

My daughter was in deep crisis - hurting herself, shutting down and seemingly disappearing before my eyes. I was terrified. Nothing had prepared me for this. My nervous system was hijacked. I had no clue and would've given anything for answers. I stopped believing that I could even make a difference. The stakes felt too, impossibly, high.

I did everything I could to try and fix it all. I searched for experts, answers, therapies, plans. I blamed myself. I was second-guessing everything, including my daughter. I knew I was failing her and that she deserved way better than me. I felt desperate, useless and alone

What I wish I had known back then is this...

**I didn't need to have all the answers.**

**I didn't need to be perfect.**

**I just needed to stay.**

It wasn't my job to erase her pain - but to simply hold space for it.

It wasn't a sign of failure to feel overwhelmed - It was a call to slow down and listen

### **And it wasn't my fault. This was actually our turning point**

What got me through were moments... the smallest, (shakiest sometimes) moments where I learned to come back to myself - where I stopped rushing, where I paused and eased my panic and remembered that **connection was more powerful than control**

Those moments became the beginning of something new - for her and for me.

Now, I offer this to you - as someone who's lived it

**S.A.F.E.™** is not a magic wand, not a perfect solution. It's something real, something steady

It's a way to come back to yourself

A way to stay connected - when it matters most

A way to remember: that **you matter too!**



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# S.A.F.E.™ at Home

## MY (FILLABLE) SAFETY PLAN

*“In moments of crisis, I can return here. I don't have to do it all—I just have to take the next step.”*

### Local Emergency Number (e.g., 999 / 911 / 112):

### Nearest Hospital / Emergency Department:

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### Mental Health Crisis Lines:

### Child's Therapist / Mental Health Professional:

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### GP / Family Doctor:

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### School Contact (e.g., Counsellor / Mentor):

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone / Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### Trusted Adults We Can Call:

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_ | Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
- Name: \_\_\_\_\_ | Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
- Name: \_\_\_\_\_ | Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### Taxi Number:

### Safe Items Stored / Potential Dangers Removed:

- Medications checked & secured
- Sharp items out of reach
- Alcohol / substances removed or locked
- Safe comfort tools available (weighted blanket, fidget, calming music, etc.)



# S.A.F.E. Practice™

## S — Safety Check

**Stop. Breathe. Check: Is more action needed - or have I done enough?**

Is my child physically safe right now?

Have I removed any obvious means of harm?

Have I asked them calmly, “Are you feeling safe right now?”

Do I have a clear support plan if needed (doctor, crisis line, trusted adult)?

Am I regulated enough to offer steady presence?

Have I reminded myself: I don’t have to fix everything - I just need to stay.

## A — Arise

**You are what your child needs most. Stay! Your presence matters.**

Take a moment to check in with yourself: How am I doing?

Let go of the pressure to fix.

Come back to presence, even shakily.

Your child feels your energy more than your words.

Ground yourself in the truth:

***“I’m here to STAY, not to rescue.”***

## F — Feel, Don’t Fix

**Pause the problem-solving. Feel what’s here.**

Stay with your child’s feelings - without rushing to change them.

Allow yourself to feel your own emotions, too.

Presence is more healing than a perfect response.

Offer comfort without control:

***“I’m right here with you.”***

Trust that feeling is the beginning of healing - for both of you.

## E — Exhale

**Interrupt reactivity. One breath can change everything.**

Before responding, pause.

Take one conscious breath.

Soften. Let presence lead, not panic.

This breath helps shift from reaction to connection.

Exhale = space to choose a healing response.

