

Seeking Safety: A Treatment for Substance Use and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Clinical Guideline

MVP Health Care, as part of its continuing Quality Improvement Program, has adopted Seeking Safety: A Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder guideline. The full guideline is available at: [Seeking Safety | SAMHSA](#)

Impact of The Condition

- Trauma and PTSD are well-known risk factors in the development of addictions and can increase vulnerability to addiction relapse. As many as 80% of women seeking drug treatment report lifetime histories of sexual and/or physical abuse. ^[1]
- Developmental trajectories may be altered due to prolonged substance use, making the treatment process more difficult for both addictions and PTSD.
- The risk of impulsive and potentially self-endangering behaviors is high for people with co-occurring symptoms of PTSD and substance use disorders.
- A Trauma-Informed Care approach to the assessment of substance use disorders and treatment planning for addictions can improve outcomes.

Summary of the Guidelines

Seeking Safety is an evidence-based counseling model that is focused on finding safety and safe spaces in the present for people with symptoms of trauma and addiction. It was initially developed in 1992 at Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital with funding from NIDA. Over the decades of its implementation, Seeking Safety has been found to be applicable across many age groups, cultural backgrounds, and geographies. The model has been translated into several languages and adapted for use with adolescents. It has been found to be effective with veterans, homeless clients, criminal justice populations, and across different types of addictions and traumas.

The emphasis of this program is skill development for coping with symptoms and managing safety in any setting. Although trauma-informed, it does not require work in the specific details of a traumatic memory or experience. Seeking Safety includes 25 topics that each offer a different safe coping skill. Training is available but not required.

The program is based on 5 key principles:

1. Safety as the overall goal
2. Integrated treatment that addresses trauma and substance use at the same time
3. Focus on re-establishing ideals
4. Content areas: cognitive, behavioral, interpersonal, case-management
5. Attention to clinicians' own emotional responses and self-care.

Clinicians working with MVP members who might have trauma or substance use histories are encouraged to consider utilizing some or all of the approaches offered by the Seeking Safety program. Additional tools to assist providers with educating their patients on behavioral health conditions are available on the MVP Health Care website by following the link below.

[Quality Programs and Initiatives | MVP Health Care](#)

In conjunction with these guidelines, MVP Health Care offers Case Management for members with behavioral health conditions. If you would like to refer your patients to the Case Management program, please call the MVP Case Management Department at **1-800-852-7826**.

This guideline is not intended to replace the role of clinical judgment by the physician in the management of this, or any other disease entity. It is an educational guideline to assist in the delivery of good medical care. All treatment decisions are ultimately up to the physician. Where medication recommendations are made, please refer to each health plan's formulary for coverage considerations.

MVP Health Care updates its clinical guidelines at least every two years. The review process is also initiated when new scientific evidence or national standards are published. Practitioners are alerted via the web site and by written notices from the plan via fax or newsletter. A hard copy of the clinical guideline can be requested by calling the MVP Quality Improvement Department at **(800) 777-4793 extension 1-2247**.

References

1. [Women's Treatment for Trauma and Substance Use Disorders | NIDA Archives \(drugabuse.gov\)](#)
2. Najavits, L. M., (2002) Seeking Safety A Treatment Manual for PTSD and Substance Abuse. New York: Guilford.
3. Seeking Safety Website: [training - Treatment Innovations \(treatment-innovations.org\)](#)
4. [Seeking Safety: A Model for Trauma and/or Substance Abuse | National Institute of Corrections \(nicic.gov\)](#)