Breakout 6 — Coping Skills (Development and Practice) — Skills Are Built by Reps

One sentence for the board: Coping is not a personality trait. It is a skill set — and skills are built by practice, in calm, so they hold under pressure.

Purpose	Teach a small, usable set of coping skills — noticing, breathing and grounding, reframing thoughts, riding out urges, and reaching out — and practice them in the room, every time, so clients leave with reps and not just information.
Who chooses this group	Curriculum groups meet separately for men and for women. Breakout groups are coed unless otherwise specified. Placement for participants who do not fit a men/women split follows the participant's stated preference, confirmed with staff for safety and privacy. Nothing about a participant's placement is disclosed to the group. Any participant. This group carries extra practice time by design: development and practice are the topic. The stated preference stands unless a stated safety reason requires a private conversation. Safety and privacy are the only criteria.
Length	60 minutes
Materials	Paper and pens for every client, whiteboard or flip chart and markers, and the topic resources named in this outline

Time	Segment	What happens
0–5 min	Welcome and settle	Ground rules, one slow-breathing minute to open — practice starts immediately.
5–28 min	Teaching	The five skills, taught one at a time, briefly.
28–48 min	Practice rotations	Guided practice of each skill in

		the room (see Practice). This is the heart of the session.
48–55 min	Discussion	Prompts below — what worked, what was hard, what each client will keep.
55–60 min	Close	Each client names their first-choice skill.

Teaching points

- Skill 1 — Notice. Name what is happening before reacting to it: body (tight, hot, restless), feeling (angry, ashamed, lonely), and thought ("I can't stand this"). Naming slows the moment down and creates the space where a choice can live.
- Skill 2 — Breathe and ground. Slow the body first: breathe in slowly, out more slowly, several rounds. Then ground in the senses: name five things you see, four you hear, three you can touch, two you smell, one you taste. A settled body gives the mind a chance to work.
- Skill 3 — Reframe. Catch the thought driving the surge and test it: Is it the whole truth? What would I say to a friend thinking this? What is true instead — including what is true about the facts of the situation and my own progress?
- Skill 4 — Ride the urge. Urges and emotional surges rise, peak, and fall like a wave. Set a timer, surf the minutes with a skill — walk, water, a call — and watch the peak pass. Every ridden-out wave is proof the next one can be ridden too.
- Skill 5 — Reach out. The strongest skill is a person. Call or go to a support person, staff member, or meeting before the moment becomes a decision. Reaching out early is strength, and this program treats it that way.
- Build a personal order of battle: which skill first, which second, who to call third. Write it down. Under pressure, people do not rise to a new plan — they fall back on a practiced one.

Practice rotations (20 minutes — guided, in the room)

1. Breathing round (3 minutes): lead slow breathing aloud, eyes open or closed by choice.
2. Grounding round (4 minutes): lead the five-senses grounding; clients name items silently or aloud by choice.
3. Reframe drill (5 minutes): give three common thoughts ("Everyone here judges me," "One slip erases everything," "I will feel like this forever"). In pairs, test each one and write a truer replacement.
4. Urge-surf rehearsal (4 minutes): clients recall a mild, recent urge — not their worst moment — and walk their skill sequence aloud in pairs.
5. Reach-out rep (4 minutes): each client writes the exact words they would use to open a help-seeking call or conversation. Volunteers read theirs aloud; the group affirms the ask, never the struggle.

Discussion prompts

- “Which skill came most naturally? Which felt foreign — and does foreign mean useless, or just unpracticed?”
- “When this week are you most likely to need your first-choice skill? What is your if–then plan for that moment?”

Facilitator boundaries — Coping Skills

- Teach skills at an education level. If a client is in acute distress, is dissociating, or discloses trauma material that needs clinical care, steady the room, stay with the client, and connect them to clinical staff the same day. Do not process trauma in this group. See the escalation box at the front of this packet and the Facilitator Guide crisis protocol.
- Never frame a client's medication, diagnosis, or treatment as a coping failure. Skills support care; they never replace it.
- **Warrior close:** Close with the rep principle: “You do not need these skills to be perfect. You need them practiced. One rep today, one tomorrow — warriors are built in training, not in wishing.”

Sources & Evidence

Clinical evidence: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services (TIP 57, 2014) and Anger Management for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Clients (SAMHSA) — grounding, self-regulation, and coping-skills education in behavioral health settings. Cognitive behavioral and dialectical behavior therapy skills literatures are the broader clinical background for reframing, grounding, and distress-tolerance skills; named generally here, with no specific outcome claimed for this group.

Recovery-support evidence: Written personal coping plans, in-session guided practice, and peer rehearsal — standard recovery-support practices. SAMHSA National Helpline, 1-800-662-4357, for referrals when a client needs support beyond this group.

Note: No outcome is promised for any group in this packet.