

Coping Mechanisms

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Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms

- Mood-altering experiences that lead to addiction
- Leaving without warning
- Fighting and negative comebacks
- Defensiveness
- Flight-mentally
- Sleeping away the problem
- Passive-aggressive behavior (ultimatums)
- Negative body language: crossed arms, rolled eyes, crossed and closed off legs and arms
- Not listening, but jumping in waiting to talk
- Avoiding eye contact
- Over-eating
- Under-eating
- Lack of sleep
- Letting go of reality
- Lack of proper hygiene
- Lack of communication

Healthy Coping Skills

Whether you've been dumped by your date or you've had a rough day at the office, having healthy coping skills can be key to getting through tough times. Coping skills help you tolerate, minimize, and deal with

stressful situations in life. Managing your stress well can help you feel better physically and psychologically and it can impact your ability to perform your best.

But not all coping skills are created equal. Sometimes, it's tempting to engage in strategies that will give quick relief but might create bigger problems for you down the road. It's important to establish healthy coping skills that will help you reduce your emotional distress or rid yourself of the stressful situations you face.

Problem-Based vs. Emotion-Based

There are two main types of coping skills: problem-based coping and emotion-based coping. Understanding how they differ can help you determine the best coping strategy for you.

Problem-based coping is helpful when you need to change your situation, perhaps by removing a stressful thing from your life. For example, if you're in an unhealthy relationship, your anxiety and sadness might be best resolved by ending the relationship (as opposed to soothing your emotions).

Emotion-based coping is helpful when you need to take care of your feelings when you either don't want to change your situation or when circumstances are out of your control. For example, if you are grieving the loss of a loved one, it'd be important to take care of your feelings in a healthy way (since you can't change the circumstance).

There isn't always one best way to proceed. Instead, it's up to you to decide which type of coping skill is likely to work best for you in your particular circumstance. The following are examples of stressful situations and how each approach could be used.

You open your email to find your annual performance review. The review states that you are below average in several areas and you're surprised by this because you thought you were performing well. You feel anxious and frustrated.

Problem-focused coping: You go to the boss and talk about what you can do to improve your performance. You develop a clear plan that will help you do better and you start to feel more confident about your ability to succeed.

Healthy Emotion-Focused Coping Skills

Whether you're feeling lonely, nervous, sad, or angry, emotion-focused coping skills can help you deal with your feelings in a healthy way. Healthy coping strategies may soothe you, temporarily distract you, or help you tolerate your distress.

Sometimes it's helpful to face your emotions head-on. For example, feeling sad after the death of a loved one can help you honor your loss.

So while it would be important to use coping skills to help relieve some of your distress, coping strategies shouldn't be about constantly distracting you from reality.

Other times, coping skills may help you change your mood. If you've had a bad day at work, playing with your kids or watching a funny movie might cheer you up. Or, if you're angry about something someone said, a healthy coping strategy might help you calm down before you say something you might regret. Here are some examples of healthy emotion-focused coping skills:

Care for yourself: Put on lotion that smells good, spend time in nature, take a bath, drink tea, or take care of your body in a way that makes you feel good such as painting your nails, doing your hair, putting on a face mask.

Engage in a hobby: Do something you enjoy such as coloring, drawing, or listening to music.

Exercise: Do yoga, go for a walk, take a hike, or engage in a recreational sport.

Focus on a task: Clean the house (or a closet, drawer, or area), cook a meal, garden, or read a book.

Practice mindfulness: List the things you feel grateful for, meditate, picture your "happy place," or look at pictures to remind you of the people, places, and things that bring joy.

Use relaxation strategies: Play with a pet, practice breathing exercises, squeeze a stress ball, use a relaxation app, enjoy some aromatherapy, try progressive muscle relaxation, or write in a journal.