

Coping Skills: Healthy and Unhealthy Means of Coping

What are Coping Skills?

Coping skills are **strategies** you can use to alleviate stress and/or to help manage any intense or difficult emotions. Coping skills can include personal values, belief systems, problem solving, social skills, healthy behaviors, and temporary distraction to help you adapt and overcome stress.

Some coping skills are healthy and promote positive growth, while others enable avoidance and can hinder progress. Below you will find examples that will help you distinguish between healthy and unhealthy coping skills.

Healthy Coping Skills*:

Diversions

- Art: write, draw, paint, photograph
- Play an instrument, sing, dance, act
- Take a shower or a bath
- Garden
- Take a walk, go for a drive
- Watch TV, show, or a movie
- Watch YouTube videos on something interesting to you
- new you want to learn
- Play a board or card game
- Go shopping
- Clean or organize your room/house
- Read: book, magazine
- Listen: podcasts, music

Social/ Interpersonal Coping

- Talk to trusted friends/ family
- Set boundaries and learn to say “no”
- Write a letter to someone about something you want to say
- Use humor, tell a joke
- Spend time with friends/family
- Help or talk to someone in need
- Talk to or play with your pet
- Role-play challenging situations with a friend or therapist
- Encourage or compliment others

Cognitive Coping

- Make a gratitude list
- Brainstorm solutions
- Consider lowering expectations of the situation
- Look for inspirational quotes and consider their meaning
- Write a list of goals
- Focus on class and reflect
- Intentionally act opposite of negative feelings
- Write a list of pros/cons for your decisions
- Reward or pamper yourself when you are successful
- Write a list of your strengths
- Accept challenges with a positive attitude and outlook

Tension Relievers

- Exercise or play sports
- Yell into a pillow or punch it
- Cry; laugh; scream

*Based on: Blake Flannery's (2016) master list of coping methods and skills

Physical

- Get enough sleep or take a nap
- Eat healthy foods
- Schedule a good routine
- Eat a piece of chocolate
- Limit your caffeine intake
- Practice deep and slow breathing
- Get a massage
- Practice relaxation techniques

Spiritual

- Pray or meditate
- Enjoy and see nature
- Get involved in a worthy cause

Limit-Setting

- Drop some involvement with extra Activities that may be draining you
- Prioritize important tasks by due date
- Use assertive communication when necessary
- Schedule in time for yourself: relaxation or fun activities

Unhealthy Coping Skills

- Using drugs
- Drinking alcohol excessively
- Engaging in self-mutilation/ cutting
- Ignoring or bottling up feelings
- Taking unprescribed sedatives
- Taking unprescribed stimulants
- Working too much
- Avoiding your problems
- Being in denial
- Overeating or undereating
- Negative self-talk
- Putting yourself in danger
- Being around others who are emotionally draining or put you in risky situations
- Overthinking
- Engaging too much on social media