

Coping with Stress

Optimal development involves becoming proficient in a wide range of skills for coping with adversity and "cautiously experimenting" to find which one(s) are most helpful for a particular situation. Research and clinical studies¹ have found the following skill areas to be prominent in effective coping.

Confronting: Direct efforts to change the situation. For example,

- *assertive expression of thoughts, feelings, ideas
- *negotiation, conflict resolution, mediation

Suppressing: Strategically avoiding distressing cues. For example,

- *identifying and avoiding high risk situations
- *thought stopping
- *distracting, distancing (minimizing impact of the stressor)
- *incompatible activities

Moderating: Regulating feelings and actions. For example,

- *cognitive restructuring (recognizing and altering thought processes such as filtering, polarization, overgeneralization, mind reading, helplessness, absolutism, dichotomizing)
- *relaxation, tension reduction procedures (e.g. progressive muscle relaxation, imagery, hypnosis, biofeedback)
- *distinguishing between acceptance/approval and validation/perpetuation of emotions
- *appropriate expression of emotions
- *sublimation (channeling unacceptable impulses into socially acceptable behavior)
- *self-observation (reflecting on one's own habits and implementing change strategies)

Support Seeking: Seeking informational, tangible, or emotional support. For example,

- *assertive requests and refusals (including discernment of which types of support are likely to be useful)
- *affiliation (turning to others for support, without trying to make them responsible or "giving away power" to them)
- *network building (finding people beyond family who provide *appropriate* support)
- *accessing formal helping resources for appropriate emotional support and skill enhancement

Problem Solving: Taking deliberate steps to deal with problems. For example,

- *creative problem-solving sequence (define problem, brainstorm, evaluate alternatives, plan, implement, revise as needed)
- *logical analysis (attempts to understand and prepare for stressor and consequences)
- *anticipation (estimating probable results of alternative courses of action)
- *acknowledging one's own role in the problem and attempting to self-correct
- *seeking alternative rewarding experiences (substitute activities, accomplishments, sources of satisfaction)

Positive Restructuring: Creating positive meaning by focusing on personal development. For example,

- *optimal reattribution of causes for events (in terms of pervasiveness, permanence, and personalization)
- *altering self-talk (avoiding "shoulds", catastrophizing, perfectionism, dire need for approval, effects of past events, blame/guilt, self-pity/anger, rumination)
- *humor (emphasizing amusing or ironic aspects of the situation)
- *positive outlook, affirming unconditional aspects of self-worth
- *restructuring/constructing problem in positive ways (while accepting the reality of the situation)
- *altruism (dedication to meeting the needs of others with vicarious satisfaction)

*spiritual/philosophical meaning-making (stable, consistent values that provide meaning in times of stress)

Activity: Engaging in health-promoting activities. For example,

*pleasant events and activities *healthy pleasures

*balanced ratio of "want" and "should" activities

*exercise, sleep, nutrition, appropriate use of professional health resources

¹For example, Folkman & Lazarus (1988), Hammer (1988), Lazarus (1989), Lewinsohn (1978), Marlatt (1985), Seligman, (1990), Rosenberg & Brian (1986), Vaillant (1993).

For more information or comments, please call (918) 631-2241.