

## Coping Styles

Coping styles are the thoughts and behaviours used by a person to manage stressful situations. These styles or strategies serve as an attempt to solve the problem or task at hand; and to reduce tension and negative emotions. Coping strategies fall into two broad categories: engagement strategies and disengagement strategies.

**Engagement** strategies actively approach and manage stressors. The use of engagement strategies is generally a good thing, however overuse with limited disengagement may sometimes become overwhelming.

**Disengagement** strategies actively or passively avoid dealing with stressors. The use of disengagement strategies generally prolongs the problem.

Depending on the situation and timing, the use of some coping strategies can be more beneficial than others. For example, engagement strategies are encouraged to address situations in a healthy way, but occasionally may not give certain issues enough space to allow effective resolution. On the other hand, although disengagement strategies are avoidance-based, appropriate use can provide short-term benefits, such as giving someone time until they are ready to deal with an issue.

In general, it is better to have stronger engagement strategies than disengagement to maintain good mental health, but too little disengagement can be tough too. Try to notice when you're relying too much on any strategy, and make a conscious effort to balance it out. This gets easier with practice, so keep on working at it!

## Different Types of Coping Strategies Engagement coping

- Problem solving - focusing on trying to address the cause of problems
  - E.g. Knowing that we all have room to grow, it can help to gather information about a problem and actively learn new skills to manage it.
- Cognitive reappraisal: thinking of challenges or stressful situations in different ways, focussing on the positive aspects of the experience,
  - E.g. Instead of being annoyed that you took a wrong turn to the party, you might enjoy the scenery on the long route
- Expressing emotions: finding constructive ways to release or regulate emotions instead of focussing on them
  - E.g. Acknowledging both positive and negative emotion and channelling them through any activity that works for you, such as conversation, exercise or art.

- Social support: spending time and seeking support with other people, which can include personal, professional and healthcare networks.
  - E.g. Engaging in social activities with others, such as sports, or community events. This can even include making and accepting invitations to lunches or after-work drinks.

### **Disengagement coping**

- Problem avoidance: withdrawing or detaching from situations, to minimise their significance,
  - E.g. Ignoring or making problems seem less important than they are
- Wishful thinking: hoping that the stressful situation will improve or disappear without taking action to resolve it
  - E.g. Daydreaming about problems being solved by winning the lottery, or other events which are unlikely to transpire without taking action.
- Self-criticism: blaming yourself and perceived faults to avoid directly managing the stressful situation
  - E.g. Focussing on perceived faults or shortcomings, and blaming oneself for poor outcomes instead of considering ways to address the problem
- Social withdrawal: avoiding contact with others, spending more time isolated,
  - E.g. Becoming less talkative and engaged at work or not accepting social invitations.

Over-reliance on disengagement coping strategies is linked to a higher risk of depression, anxiety and stress, whereas using engagement coping strategies lowers the risk of depression.re

### **DIY tips & Strategies**

- 1. Self-awareness.** When a problem arises, try to be self-aware in the way you think and act toward the situation or person. Attempt to think more about ways to actively solve the problem and remind yourself that things are often not as bad as they may seem.
- 2. Reflect.** Remember times when the way you handled a problem had a positive influence on the outcome for all individuals involved. Try to use these strategies again for similar situations in future.

**Reach out.** Using your social networks for support is a great way to practise healthy coping. It also reminds others that they can reciprocate and reach out to you. We are not expected to 'do it all ourselves'.

### **References and Resources;**

[National Institute of Mental Health, 5 Things You Should Know About Stress](#)