

Coping Skills

Coping skills are tools people use to help manage overwhelming thoughts, difficult emotions, or stressful situations. It can be hard to think clearly or know what to do in the moment when someone is in distress. Coping skills help give people simple actions they can do to calm their body, focus their mind, or get through a challenging moment.

The goal for coping skills is not to make difficult feelings disappear right away, but to make them more manageable and create enough space to get through the moment safely. Not every coping skill works for every person, and sometimes it takes trying a few different ones to see what helps.

When using coping skills, it can help to slow down and try one skill at a time for several minutes before moving on to the next one. It can be helpful to practice coping skills even when someone is not in crisis, so they feel more comfortable using them during stressful situations.

Here are some suggestions, for personal use or to help someone struggling with extreme emotions or stressful situations.

Physical

Exercise: walking, swimming, running, weights, biking, rowing, jumping jacks

Dance

Sing out loud; Play an instrument

Sit or stand outside for a while

Go for a hike

Garden

Mindfulness

Grounding Exercises –

- The 5-4-3-2-1 technique:
 - Name:
 - **5** things you can see
 - **4** things you can hear
 - **3** things you can feel
 - **2** things you can smell
 - **1** thing you can taste
- Box Breathing –
 - Slowly breathe in through your nose to the count of four
 - Hold your breath to the count of four
 - Exhale through your mouth to the count of four
 - Hold your breath to the count of four
 - Repeat as necessary

Meditation, Guided Imagery, Visualization, Body Scanning

Yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi

Allow yourself time to sit quietly in nature

Emotional Awareness

Journal

Write a letter to a friend or loved one

Let yourself cry; Allow yourself to feel

Rate intensity of your emotions before and after using coping skill(s)

Don't judge your emotions

Spiritual

Prayer

Make a gratitude list

Read affirmations aloud

Do something nice for someone else

Nature walks

Connect with friends and loved ones

Distractions

Listen to music, podcasts, or audiobook

Draw, Paint, Color

Knit, Crochet, Needle Point

Read a book, magazine, or journal article

Watch something uplifting, lighthearted, or funny

Puzzles, Crosswords, Board Games, Cards

Self-Care Activities

Aromatherapy: burn a scented candle, warm scented wax or diffuse scented oil(s)

Bubble Bath: use a calming scent such as lavender

Give yourself a manicure, pedicure, or facial

Take a nap

Drink chamomile or green tea

Sensory

Create a temperature change (hot/cold shower or ice on the back of neck)

Cold washcloth or compress on face

Bitter candy or lemon on the tongue

Rub a scented lotion on your hands

For more information or support for your mental health, call 988, or search our online database: www.helplinecenter.org/9-8-8

Sources:

- SAMHSA How to Cope: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/how-to-cope>
- MHA Building Your Coping Toolbox: [Building your coping toolbox | Mental Health America](https://www.mhanational.org/building-your-coping-toolbox)

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