

COPING WITH STRESS AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

PART 1: STRESS TRIGGERS

We all have stress. We all have lived with stress. The good news is that you are not powerless to lessen the effects of stress on you.

Stress is caused by how we react to our own experiences, our personalities, and unique characteristics that make us who we are. These characteristics influence how we cope and respond to stress. It can also explain why something that may not bother us may bother someone else.

So how do we start coping with stress at work and home? First you need to start identifying your stress triggers. Start documenting, for a few weeks, what situations, events, or people cause you to have a negative experience. To make this easier, answer these few questions:

- Where were you when this happened?
- Who was involved?
- What was your reaction?
- How did you feel?

Then begin to inventory your stress triggers. Was it the environment? Was it the way something was said? Where did it begin – at home or work? Were you in control of the situation? Was the situation clear or ambiguous?

Once you have inventoried your stress triggers, you can begin the work of resolving them. One of the best coping skills is to find a way to change the situation that cause you stress.

Changing Stress Triggers

Maybe you need to sharpen your time management skills. This is extremely important if you feel that you are overwhelmed or under pressure.

Keep your perspective. You can do this by getting other points of view. Ensure that you are taking a break during the day. Have an outlet during the day or week to spend time on activities that you enjoy.

Take care of yourself and your time off.

Finally, make boundaries for yourself. This is important to ensure that you are able to keep on task and to take time to balance your work and life.

PART 2: COPING SKILLS

Another way to keep a healthy balance between work and stress is to create healthy coping skills. Healthy coping skills will help prevent and lessen the effects of stress when they are present. There are two main types of coping skills: problem-based and emotional-based

- **Problem-focused coping skills** are those skills that are helpful if you need to change or remove a situation.
- **Emotional-focused coping skills** are those skills that help you control your emotions when you cannot change a situation or you have no control over it.

Either type of coping skill, if healthy, is a way of alleviating stress in your life. So what are some “healthy” coping skills?

Healthy Emotionally-Focused Coping Skills

Healthy emotional-focused skills are those that can be used temporarily to either distract you or soothe you during a rough patch - they should **not** be used constantly to distract you from reality. Here are some healthy emotionally-focused coping skills

- Take some time to care for yourself
- Engage in a hobby
- Exercise
- Focus on a Task
- Practice Mindfulness
- Use Relaxation Strategies

Healthy Problem-Focused Coping Skills

Healthy problem-focused skills require you to change something within yourself or your environment. These may be more drastic than emotionally-focused coping skills as they require a change in circumstances. Here are some problem-focused coping skills that you could try:

- Ask for help or support from others
- Create a to-do list
- Engage in problem solving skills
- Establish **HEALTHY** boundaries
- Walk away
- Manage your time better

Again these problem focused coping skills will depend on the situation and what it will require. What it does require is to be aware of “**unhealthy**” coping skills.

Unhealthy Coping Skills

Unhealthy coping skills may seem like they are helping in the short term but in reality, they can lead to bigger problems, more stress, and pain.

- Drinking alcohol or using drugs

- Overeating
- Sleeping too much
- Venting to others
- Overspending
- Avoiding (facing the issue)

Be proactive about your coping skills. Most times we are “reactive” and only try to use our coping mechanisms when we are in a situation where we need to use them. By planning out how we are going to respond will let you be effective in dealing with what is coming up. Of course this is not possible in every situation. But in those situations that you can preplan find what will work for you. There may be certain strategies that work best for a certain issue or emotion. Start small as you can always build on them and work through them.

Be kind you yourself. Start by being a friend to yourself in moments of stress. We are so quick to be loyal, trustworthy, give encouragement, love, and forgiveness to others but it seems that it takes so much work (or we forget) to give it to ourselves.

PART 3: BEING KIND TO OURSELVES

It is important that we have the same relationship we have with others with ourselves. That we are able to count on our own emotional needs; to be forgiving to ourselves; to be loving; and to give encouragement to ourselves, when needed. If we expect others to meet all of our emotional needs we will be in for disappointment, feel rejected, unloved, frustrated, and lonely. So how can you be a better friend to yourself?

- **Accept yourself unconditionally.** Notice your best qualities and **STOP** comparing yourself to others. You are a unique person and that is special.
- **Get to know yourself.** So how well do you really know you? Do you know who you really are? Your likes and dislikes? Do you have any goals for yourself? Or are you too attached to “something/one” that you do not know where the separation is? If you don’t know, try journaling for a few moments each day to see your interests, goals, and dreams, as well as, you likes and dislikes.
- **Do nice things for yourself.** Do not depend on others to meet your needs. Take time to pamper yourself or congratulate yourself for a job well done. One of the hardest things to do, is to stand in front of the mirror and compliment yourself. Try it each day until you truly believe it!
- **Set boundaries for yourself.** These can be a form of self-care. Getting to be kind to yourself starts in small steps but over time will build towards a more confident and loving self.

Finally, as you move towards learning how you cope with stressors, build healthy emotional- and problem-focused coping skills, and being kind to yourself, you will find you are building what is called resilience.

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(approximately an 8-minute read)