

Coping Skills Workshop

Student Workbook



Mississippi State University Student Counseling Services

<https://www.counseling.msstate.edu/>

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Unhealthy Coping Strategies Versus Healthy Coping Strategies

Examples of Unhealthy Coping Strategies	Examples of Healthy Coping Strategies
Drug/ Alcohol use	Exercise
Overeating	Talking about your problem
Procrastination	Healthy eating
Sleeping too much or too little	Seeking professional help
Social withdrawal	Relaxation techniques
Self-harm	Using social support
Aggression	Problem-solving techniques

Describe a problem you are currently dealing with: _____

My unhealthy coping skills include: _____

The consequences of unhealthy coping strategies are: _____

My current barriers to using coping strategies are:

Grounding

Mental Grounding

- Describe your environment in detail
 - Play a categories game with yourself
 - Describe an everyday activity in great detail
 - Write and/or say grounding statements
 - This situation won't last forever
 - This too shall pass
 - I can ride this out and not let it get me down
 - My anxiety/ fear/ sadness won't kill me; it just doesn't feel good right now
- These are just my feelings and eventually they'll go away

Physical Grounding

- Running cool or warm water over your hands and noticing the temperature
- Grabbing tightly onto your chair
- Dig your heels into the floor
- Carry a grounding object in your pocket
- Walk slowly, noticing each footstep
- Focus on your breathing
- Noticing the way your clothes feel on your body

Soothing Grounding

- Say kind statements as if you were talking to a small child
- Remember the words to an inspiring song, quotation, or poem
- Think of a safe place and focus on your senses in that place
- Think of things you are looking forward to in the next week

If it doesn't work:

- Practice even when you think you don't need it
- Try grounding for a longer time (20-30 minutes)
- Create your own methods of grounding
- Start grounding early in a negative mood cycle
- Create a coping card listing your best grounding methods
- Have others assist you in grounding
- Don't give up!

Mindfulness

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is “a process of paying attention with flexibility, openness, and curiosity.” This definition tells us 3 important things:

- 1) Mindfulness is an **awareness process**, not a thinking process — it involves paying attention to your experience as opposed to being “caught up” in your thoughts
- 2) Mindfulness involves a particular attitude of **openness and curiosity** — even if your experience in this moment is difficult, painful, or unpleasant, you can be open to it and curious about it instead of running from it or fighting with it.
- 3) Mindfulness involves **flexibility of attention** — the ability to consciously direct, broaden, or focus your attention on different aspects of your experience.

How can it help?

- **AWARENESS:** We can practice mindfulness to “wake up,” connect with ourselves, and appreciate the fullness of life.
- **SELF-KNOWLEDGE:** We can use it to improve our self-knowledge—to learn more about how we feel, think, and react.
- **CONNECTION:** We can use it to connect deeply and intimately with the people we care about, including ourselves.
- **LEARNING TO RESPOND VS. REACT:** We can use it to consciously influence our own behavior and increase our range of responses to the world we live in. Mindfulness can help us choose what happens next with intention, so that instead of merely reacting to the things that happen in life, we can choose a response that is in line with our values.

Russ Harris, ACT Made Simple

Basic Mindfulness of the Breath

Find a comfortable position that is upright, but not rigid, perhaps imagining your spine lengthening. If you feel your shoulders tensing, let them relax and drop. Let your hands be in your lap or at your sides. Notice your feet on the floor. Either allow your eyes to close if you are comfortable with that or focus on a spot on the floor in front of you.

(pause 10 seconds)

Notice that without any effort, you are already breathing. Allow yourself to continue breathing naturally. There is no special way to breathe. Just allow the breath to flow. Focus your attention on the process of breathing.

(pause 15 seconds)

As you pay attention to the breath, you are likely to notice some distracting thoughts, judgments, emotions, or body sensations. That's OK. Minds are designed to wander and think and judge. That's what they do. When that happens, just notice that your attention has left the breath and gently return to noticing the feel of the breath as it moves in and out.

(pause 15 seconds)

You may notice your mind wandering off once or twice. Or perhaps you notice your mind wandering off over and over. That's OK. The work is not in keeping your mind from wandering off. It is in noticing *that* your mind wandered off and returning to the breath. Now, as we end this exercise, return to your regular state of awareness. For the last few minutes, we focused on one part of your experience- the breath. Now, open your awareness to all of your experience in this moment. Perhaps open your eyes and take a look around you, check in with your hearing, your senses of touch, taste and smell.

Distress Tolerance

1). Radical acceptance: Involves fully acknowledging and embracing the present moment, including its difficulties and discomforts without trying to change or control it. It refers to realizing that fighting what is already happening just leads to more pain. Some ways to use radical acceptance is saying coping statements. You may use the ones listed or feel free to create your own.

Coping Statements

- The present moment is the only one I have control over
- Fighting my current emotions and thoughts only gives them more fuel to thrive
- I cannot change what has happened in the past
- I accept this moment as it is

2). TIPP: Skill that can help impulsive or harmful behaviors and is used as a first-line intervention during times of crisis or extreme distress. TIPP is an acronym that stands for four steps—temperature, intense exercise, paced breathing, progressive muscle relaxation.

TIPP

- Temperature: Cooler temperature decreases your heart rate (which is usually faster when we are emotionally overwhelmed) You can either splash your face with cold water, take a cold (but too cold) shower, or if the weather is chilly you can go outside for a walk, hold an ice cube in your hand or rub your face. Higher temperatures increase your heart rate (which is usually lower when you feel depressed or sad). You can take a hot (not too hot) bath nestle up in a blanket, go outside on a hot day, or drinking a warm tea. If you have a medical condition where this could be a problem, skip this step or consult your physician.
- Intense exercise: When you have built-up energy as a result of experiencing overwhelming emotions, it can be a good idea to spend this energy by doing a cardio work out. This could be going for a run, jumping jacks, or dancing. Do this for 10-15 minutes but don't overdo it.
- Paced breathing: In order to reduce the physical manifestation of the overwhelming emotions you feel, it helps to try to control your breathing so that its rate will eventually decrease. Try this: breathe in deeply through your nose for four seconds and then breathe out through your mouth for six seconds. Do this for 1-2 minutes.
- Progressive muscle relaxation: In order to relax the tense muscles in our body while we are experiencing extreme emotions, you can try progressive muscle relaxation. You can do this from a seated position. Start with the top of your body- become aware of the muscles and the upper back and deliberately tighten them for five seconds. Then let it go and continue with the rest of the body.

Plan for Barriers

Possible Situations	1. 2. 3.
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Old Coping Skills	1. 2. 3.
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New Coping Skills	1. 2. 3.
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Possible Barriers	1. 2. 3.
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How to Overcome Barriers	1. 2. 3.
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